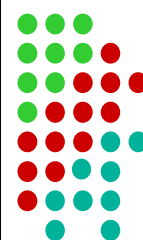


Homelessness & Housing Options in Wiltshire: September 2009 – May 2010

Social Policy report #001

Release date: 17/01/2011



WAP Wiltshire
Advice
PARTNERSHIP
joining up advice services

HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING OPTIONS IN WILTSHIRE

SEPTEMBER 2009 – MAY 2010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	3
1.1. Wiltshire Advice Partnership	3
1.2. Partner background.....	3
1.3. Focus, context and purpose	4
1.3.1. Focus	4
1.3.2. Context.....	4
1.3.3. Purpose.....	6
1.4. Methodology.....	6
1.4.1. Sources of data	6
1.4.2. Evidence forms	7
1.4.3. Housing Options monitoring survey	8
1.4.4. Parameters of the report	8
1.5. Structure.....	9
2. Homelessness prevention and Housing Options	11
2.1. Overview (1).....	11
2.2. Issues in detail (1)	13
2.2.1. Making a homelessness application.....	13
2.2.2. Quality of information and advice	16
3. Housing Options and 16 and 17 year olds.....	17
3.1. Overview (2).....	17
3.2. Issues in detail (2)	19
3.2.1. Assessing homelessness and 'child in need' status.....	19
3.2.2. Referrals to Children's Services	19
3.2.3. Suitability of accommodation and repeat homelessness.....	20
3.2.4. Quality of information and advice	20
4. Housing Options monitoring survey.....	22
4.1. Quality of customer care	22
4.2. Quality of advice.....	22
4.3. Homelessness applications.....	23
4.4. Summary of survey	23
5. Key findings	24
5.1. General: relevant to all applicants	24
5.2. 16 and 17 year olds.....	26
5.3. Conclusion	27
6. Key recommendations.....	29
7. Bibliography.....	31
8. List of appendices.....	32
1) Social Policy Evidence Form	
2) Bureau Evidence Form	
3) Housing Options Monitoring Questionnaire	
4) Housing Options Monitoring Questionnaire results	
5) Analysis of submitted social policy evidence forms	
9. Acknowledgements	32
10. Contact details.....	33

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Wiltshire Advice Partnership

The Wiltshire Advice Partnership (the Partnership/WAP) is one of a series of projects running across the UK that are funded by the Big Lottery Advice Plus programme. The Partnership has aims and objectives designed to develop, coordinate and improve existing advice services to the people of Wiltshire. It is a three year project which is funded until August 2012.

The subject areas covered by the project are: Housing, Welfare Benefits, Debt and Employment.

Its goals are to introduce a referral system between advice agencies; provide quality support and training to its members so as to embed good and consistent practice between them; and to identify any social policy issues affecting our clients and report those to the appropriate bodies and campaign to effect changes.

The members of the Partnership are:

- Wiltshire Citizens Advice (WCA incorporates the four former Bureaux in Wiltshire and is the lead Partner)
- Action for Blind People
- Age UK, Salisbury District
- Age UK, Wiltshire
- Alabaré Christian Care & Support
- Sarsen Housing Association
- Shearer & Company
- Sylvester Mackett
- Will Rolt Solicitors

1.2. Partner background

The Partnership have day to day experience of homelessness through contact with our clients. Indeed homelessness prevention is a key part of our work in the area of Housing and links into the associated areas of Debt, Employment and Welfare Benefits.

Three Partners (Will Rolt Solicitors, Shearer & Co. and Wiltshire Citizens Advice) have Legal Services Commission housing contracts to supply caseworkers for clients with housing difficulties. They have considerable experience both in dealing with clients who are homeless

and in preventing homelessness. All three have contributed data during the period covered by the report.

From this work we are very aware not only of the issues involved both legally and procedurally but also in terms of the damage which homelessness inflicts on every aspect of people's lives including their health, relationships and financial well being.

1.3. Focus, context and purpose

1.3.1. Focus

The focus of this report is how the Housing Options service operated by Wiltshire Council deals with clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days.

1.3.2. Context

In April 2009 the four former Wiltshire District Councils were merged to become the new unitary authority of Wiltshire Council. In terms of housing options services this involved the merging of four separate teams with offices in Chippenham, Devizes, Salisbury and Trowbridge.

The climate for dealing with homelessness in Wiltshire is challenging. In April 2010 there were 10,654 households on the housing register. In the previous year (1 April 2009-31 March 2010) 2052 homes were let to households on the register (Wiltshire Council (2010a), *Homelessness Strategy 2010-2015*, pp.26-27¹). If each year a similar number of households on the housing register obtained lets it would take over 5 years to be housed without taking into account any new households coming onto the register.

This issue is recognised by the Council, "There is a huge gap between the total number of lets compared to the total number of households on the register. From the information gleaned, it is evident that there is a long wait for households to be housed from the register, as demand far outstrips supply." They also pinpoint the causes, "There is a shortage of suitable, affordable accommodation for those in housing need. Owner occupation and renting in the private sector is beyond the means of a great number of households." And they go on to look to possible solutions, "Homelessness can only be prevented if suitable affordable accommodation is made available. ... It would be impossible for us to meet all the need for housing through building new affordable homes, therefore in response to this high demand

¹ Where a publication or document is referenced in the text, on first occurrence the title will be provided in full, thereafter only the publisher, the year and the page number will be listed. For all sources and complete references please see the Bibliography (section 7 below).

we are required to look at alternatives, and because of the high percentage of private rented accommodation in Wiltshire this was considered a priority.” (Wiltshire Council (2010a), pp.27-28).

There is clearly a dichotomy between what is needed and what can be delivered in terms of housing for homeless households but, it would seem, that the hope of the private rented sector being able to provide a solution is “beyond the means of a great number of households.”

Since the introduction of the *Homelessness Act 2002*, successive governments have encouraged a prevention focused approach to homelessness.

“In its broadest terms, ‘homelessness prevention’ is where a local authority takes positive action to provide housing assistance to someone who considers him or herself to be at risk of homelessness in the near future, and as a result the person is able to either remain in his or her existing accommodation or obtain alternative accommodation, providing a solution for at least the next six months.” (DCLG (2009b), *P1E Guidance: Homelessness Prevention and Relief*, p.4).

In recent years this prevention centred approach has been followed by the four separate District Councils’ housing teams and now has been carried on by the new unified Housing Options Service as part of their homelessness strategy. This policy has seen a significant reduction in homelessness acceptances along with a corresponding reduction in the numbers of people in temporary accommodation in recent years.

In 2003 central government invited local authorities to commit to a suggested target that the number of homelessness acceptances be reduced each year (ODPM (2003b), *Achieving Positive Outcomes on Homelessness*, pp.3, 8-10); DCLG (2007), *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention*, p.20, 1.9); Wiltshire Council (2010a), p.5). This was followed up in 2005 with an obligatory target to halve (from the level recorded in December 2004) the number of households placed in temporary accommodation by December 2010 (ODPM (2005), *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All*, p.57, 7.3).

In 2005-2006 in the whole of Wiltshire there were 882 applications for homelessness assessments with 619 accepted as homeless; by 2009-2010 the level of applications had fallen to 377 with acceptances falling to 271 (Wiltshire Council (2009), *Key Trend [sic] in Homelessness*, p.2; and Wiltshire Council (2010a), p.34). In percentage terms this is a

reduction of 57% in applications and 56% in acceptances. During the same period (2005-2010) the number of households in temporary accommodation has fallen from 383 to 150 a drop of almost 61% (Wiltshire Council (2010a), p.12). (Please note percentages are calculated by WAP.)

In addition to the 377 households who were assessed for homelessness in 2009-2010, 1685 households who considered themselves as homeless or threatened with homelessness had their homelessness prevented through actions by the Housing Options team. Amongst other categories this includes 195 who were placed in supported accommodation, 378 who were helped to find accommodation in the private sector through the Wilts Let rent deposit guarantee scheme, and 518 who had their homelessness prevented through the provision of advice and assistance (Wiltshire Council (2010a), p.14).

Despite the real achievements that are shown by these statistics in recent months members of the Partnership have seen a number of clients who appear to have been disadvantaged by the current procedures and practices being followed by the Housing Options team. Thus, we have become concerned that the above falls in homelessness applications and the corresponding fall of those in temporary accommodation may in part have been achieved at the expense of properly assessing the housing needs of some people who were homeless or threatened with homelessness.

1.3.3. Purpose

In order to try and get a clearer picture of the situation this report uses information from clients and client cases to highlight issues with current practices on service provision. It looks at various aspects of the service including the prevention of homelessness, the treatment of applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, the working practices for 16 and 17 year olds presenting to the Housing Options team and the consistency and quality of customer care and advice.

Its purpose is to present the findings from our data collection exercises and make a series of recommendations with the aim of improving services to the residents of Wiltshire.

1.4. Methodology

1.4.1. Sources of data

The report is based on two main sources of data. First, social policy 'evidence forms' submitted by WAP Partners and second a small sample survey using a client follow up questionnaire, which we refer to as the 'Housing Options monitoring survey'.

In total 35 pieces of data were collected through evidence forms and the Housing Options monitoring survey which represents just over 2% of the total of 1685 homelessness preventions and almost 10% of the number of homelessness applications recorded by the council in 2009-2010.

1.4.2. Evidence forms

Social policy evidence forms detail individual clients' encounters with the service and the issues of policy, procedure or practice experienced by them during these encounters (see Appendices 1 and 2 for examples of the forms used). The forms were filled out by trained Partner advisors and co-ordinators and submitted between 01/09/2009 and 14/05/2010. During this time 23 relevant forms were submitted by five Partners: North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Salisbury & District CAB, Shearer & Co., West Wiltshire Wide CAB and Will Rolt Solicitors and cover the council's housing offices in Chippenham, Devizes, Salisbury and Trowbridge.

The forms do not carry any details that would help identify the clients involved and, when used as a case study in the report, the details are further edited to remove any characteristic particulars to ensure client anonymity and confidentiality. We therefore cannot identify any of the clients.

1.4.2.1 Limitations of evidence form data

The content of the evidence forms have been taken largely at face value. We rely on the knowledge and skills of Partners' trained advisors to give us an accurate account. WAP verifies that the client exists, that different evidence forms do not duplicate the same client and that case notes for each client are up to date.

It is important to note that the evidence forms submitted have a bias toward those who were not satisfied with their outcome and/or the service they received and therefore sought further help from Partners. In addition, advisors usually only submit evidence forms with examples of poor practice.

The evidence forms can show broadly how things are going wrong but cannot shed light on how frequent or widespread these problems are.

1.4.2.2 Analysis of evidence form data

In order to establish the issues which the report details, the content of the evidence forms is analysed by counting the number of times a particular type of incident occurred. It is, therefore, a number of cases of similar incidents that reveal and verify that there is a real issue of concern to be addressed. The issues related, therefore, do not come from isolated incidents but only where one case is corroborated by at least one other similar case. (See Appendix 7 for an analysis of the evidence forms received.)

1.4.2.3 Use of case studies

The report selects case studies from the submitted evidence forms which highlight and identify the particular procedures and practices causing clients difficulties and that demonstrate the effects of these practices on clients. These are not intended to be used as case reviews because, as previously stated, we cannot identify clients.

The forms collected demonstrate multiple concerns for each client's homelessness issue. Thus, the cases cited are provided as illustrations of a main issue and also demonstrate a range of other problems encountered. (See Appendix 7 for an analysis of the evidence forms received.)

Any client's case that is given as an exemplar is used only once.

1.4.3. Housing Options monitoring survey

The Housing Options monitoring survey was administered by the former West Wiltshire Wide and North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureaux (see Appendices 3 and 4 for a copy of the questionnaire and results respectively). The questionnaire asked about clients' experiences of the Housing Options service looking at the quality of customer care, advice and homelessness applications. Advisors followed up Bureaux clients who had approached the Housing Options Service between 01/09/2009 and 29/01/2010. A total of 12 responses were collected from the clients of these two Partners.

The survey results should not be subject to the same degree of bias as the evidence forms because all clients who were likely to have had contact with the Housing Options team were contacted for feedback regardless of their experiences.

1.4.4. Parameters of the report

The results of the questionnaire and the evidence forms are not intended to provide either a comprehensive review of the entire Housing Options service or a representative sample of

the people who have approached the Council for homelessness advice and assistance. Instead the report provides a summary of issues that have been encountered by WAP Partner clients who have had dealings with the service.

In analysing the data overall, we are looking at what it can tell us about the broad strengths and weaknesses of the services being provided rather than the specific details of particular cases.

Each issue described can be used to infer the possible impact of the same policies, procedures and practices on the wider group of people using those services that have not been captured either because their cases were not reported by an advisor or because they did not make contact with a WAP Partner.

It should also be remembered that, because of the sample size, the findings of this report cannot be definitive. At best they give a provisional indication of issues occurring in the service. Further research will need to be conducted in order to create a more detailed picture of what is happening on the ground, establish when and where these issues occur, how widespread and frequent they are, and whether any changes made to the service have had a beneficial effect on clients. (See recommendation 12, p.30 below).

Even considering the limitations mentioned above, patterns are apparent in the data that allow clear conclusions to be drawn and firm recommendations to be made.

1.5. Structure

The report is divided into six main sections:

- This section, the 'Introduction' (section 1), which outlines the focus, context and purpose of the report as well as the methodology and structure.
- The research is presented in three sections,
 - 'Homelessness prevention and Housing Options' (section 2), gives an overview of the relevant legal framework, guidelines and best practice for adult homelessness and then looks at the evidence forms submitted on how the Housing Options team is dealing with those clients presenting as homeless or at risk of becoming homeless;
 - 'Housing Options and 16 & 17 year olds' (section 3), gives an overview of the relevant legal framework, recent cases and guidelines and then looks at the evidence forms submitted on how the Housing Options team is dealing with 16 and 17 year olds;
 - The 'Housing Options monitoring survey' (section 4), summarises the findings of the client follow up questionnaire.

- 'Key findings' (section 5), summarises the issues raised by the research overall and draws conclusions.
- 'Key recommendations' (section 6), outlines WAP's main recommendations.

Other sections contain a bibliography (7), a list of appendices (8), acknowledgements (9), and contact details (10).

2. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND HOUSING OPTIONS

2.1. Overview (1)

In *Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice* (DCLG (2006a)), the authors outline the essential principles that a housing options approach should include:

- “Providing an improved service for all customers with less distinction in the service provided to applicants in relation to their probable ‘priority need’ status – asking ‘how can we help?’ rather than ‘who can we help?’
- examining all possible accommodation solutions both in relation to retaining any existing tenancy or residency and in respect of accessing a new tenancy
- exploring the pros and cons of any available and appropriate options to help applicants themselves make informed decisions or choices
- adopting no prior assumptions as to whether a social rented tenancy might prove to be an applicant’s most appropriate rehousing solution
- making full use of information about an interviewee’s current housing circumstances to assess whether there is ‘reason to believe’ the applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness – and therefore eligible for a formal homelessness assessment
- processes with sufficient flexibility so that – where applicable – a full homelessness assessment can be conducted without delay.” (DCLG (2006a), p.17, 2.12)

Housing Options interviews are also described as being “a crucial element of the new approach to homelessness prevention. It is, therefore, important that this process improves outcomes and does not unduly delay a statutory homelessness assessment if this is necessary. It is also important that it is inspired by a desire to improve the help on offer, and not by a ‘gatekeeping’ mentality – i.e. where the process is seen primarily as a device to prevent or discourage people from seeking housing assistance. The housing options approach should never replace or delay a statutory homelessness assessment where the authority have reason to believe that someone is homeless or threatened with homelessness.” (DCLG (2006a), p.17, 2.11)

Part 7 of the *1996 Housing Act (1996 Act)* defines when a person is homeless or threatened with homelessness and imposes duties on local housing authorities when an officer has ‘reason to believe’ that a person presenting themselves to the authority is homeless or threatened with homelessness. The first duty is to make “such inquiries as are necessary to satisfy themselves (a) whether he is eligible for assistance and (b) if so, whether any duty, and if so what duty, is owed to him” (Section 184 (1)).

These inquiries should look at five criteria pertaining to the applicant:

1. Are they eligible for assistance?
 - Under Section 183 (2), certain categories of people from abroad and asylum seekers and their dependents are excluded from the local authority's homeless duties
2. Is the household homeless or threatened with homelessness?
 - As defined in Section 175 (1, 2 & 3), an applicant is homeless if there is no accommodation they are entitled to occupy or that is reasonable for them to continue to occupy, or they cannot secure entry to it, or it consists of a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel and there is no place they are permitted to both place it and reside in it.
 - "A person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that he will become homeless within 28 days." (Section 175 (4))
3. Is the applicant in priority need?
 - Section 189 (1) of *the 1996 Act* and *Statutory Instrument 2002/2051 The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order* between them provide that 11 categories of applicant have a priority need for accommodation, these include: pregnant women; people with dependent children; people vulnerable due to old age, mental illness, physical or mental disability "or other special reason"; 16 and 17 year olds; care leavers under the age of 21; people vulnerable as a result of: having been a member of the armed forces, having been in prison, ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence or threats of violence.
4. Is the applicant intentionally homeless?
 - "A person becomes homeless intentionally if he deliberately does or fails to do anything in consequence of which he ceases to occupy accommodation which is available for his occupation and which it would have been reasonable for him to continue to occupy." (Section 191 (1))
5. Does the applicant have a local connection?
 - Under Section 199 (1) an applicant is counted as having a local connection with the district of a local housing authority because they are or were normally resident there, or they are employed there, or because of family associations, or because of "special circumstances."

Furthermore, "On completing their inquiries the authority shall notify the applicant of their decision and, so far as any issue is decided against his interests, inform him of the reasons for their decision" (Section 184 (3)). Moreover, under Section 184 (5) and (6), this notice should be given in writing and inform the person of their right to request a review of the decision.

The *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* (DCLG (2006b)) provides a comprehensive summary of the legislation and its implications for local authorities for follow.

In addition to the legislative framework and the published guidelines, the performance of the service is measured using the Audit Commission's *Housing Inspectorate Key Lines of Enquiry for Local Authority Strategic Involvement: Homelessness & Housing Advice* (October 2007). These assess the service delivered against a pre-determined set of criteria regarding what would constitute an excellent and a fair service (see Appendix 6 for complete KLOE's).

2.2. Issues in detail (1)

2.2.1. Making a homelessness application

2.2.1.1 Responses to requests for assessments

Despite the duty of the Council to make inquiries under Section 184 of the *1996 Act* when they have reason to believe someone is homeless or threatened with homelessness, data submitted indicates that there are occasions where the onus to trigger a homelessness assessment seemed to be placed on the client and/or external agencies requesting one.

A) A client with a history of depression was threatened with eviction within 28 days. He approached the Council for advice and assistance and showed a copy of the eviction warrant but was asked to come back when the bailiffs had attended the property. When a WAP Partner contacted the Housing office on the client's behalf the request for an assessment was accepted. In the interim, the client had found the pressure of the possession proceedings and the fear of being 'street homeless' very worrying and stressful.

In the above case the Housing office belatedly accepted the Partner's referral after an initial delay; however, on other occasions referrals for homelessness assessments were refused as illustrated below.

B) A client with two young children presented herself to the Council but the Housing office would not help her because it was thought that she was intentionally homeless. (No formal assessment was made and no Section 184 decision notice was issued). A WAP Partner advised the client to make an application to be assessed for homelessness and gave her a referral letter as she met the criteria for priority need. The Housing office refused to accept the application. At last contact the client was moving between different family members' accommodation none of which was large enough for the family.

Because of this situation the school age child was not attending school and the client and her children were very stressed and unsettled.

Client A was clearly about to become homeless and may have been in priority need due to his mental illness and therefore should have received an assessment at first contact. If the Partner had not intervened the client's assessment would have been delayed even further. Client B was actually homeless and was in priority need due to having dependent children (Section 189 (1)). As such, even if she was found intentionally homeless, the Council should have made suitable temporary housing available whilst she was given "a reasonable opportunity of securing accommodation" for herself (Section 188 (1)), and further should also have provided "advice and such assistance as they consider appropriate in the circumstances" (Section 190 (2)). The Housing Service's refusal to accept the referral for client B ties in with the results of the Housing Options monitoring survey which suggest there is under recording of clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness (see section 4 below). The approach taken by the Housing office also increased the stress and worry felt by both clients.

2.2.1.2 Quality of assessments: Availability of accommodation

The outcome of some homelessness assessments appears to have been driven by officers making the client aware of the lack of suitable interim and temporary accommodation.

- C) A pregnant client was told that if she were accepted as homeless the only suitable temporary accommodation was in another area of the county. This would have taken her away from her family, support network and maternity care and so the client was discouraged from continuing with the application. A WAP Partner advised her to re-visit the Council and try to make an application for a homelessness decision again. She returned shortly after having been told by the Housing office that there was no form to make a homelessness application, and that she had already made one anyway. The Partner provided the client with a referral letter as she was in priority need due to her pregnancy (Section 189 (1)) and subsequently was contacted by the Housing office. They accepted they had a duty to the client, but advised that a full homeless assessment and decision had not been made because the client had stated she would not accept accommodation outside the locality.
- D) A client with a history of drug problems presented himself to the Council for advice and assistance with his accommodation. He was told that if accepted as homeless he would be offered accommodation in another area of the county, or in a hostel. He could not

move out of the area because he had elderly relatives there who he helped look after and did not want to accept hostel accommodation as it might bring him into contact with drug takers when he was trying to stay 'clean'. The WAP Partner contacted the Housing office to be told officers had not proceeded with the homelessness assessment as they could only offer accommodation out of the locality.

The cases above appear to demonstrate that formal homelessness assessments had been started but were not completed when the client was made aware of the lack of availability of suitable accommodation in their locality and as a result was discouraged from continuing. (For a similar occurrence see client H (p.16 below)). In addition "Housing authorities should ..., wherever possible, secure accommodation that is as close as possible to where they were previously living, so they can retain established links with schools, doctors, social workers and other key services and support essential to the well-being of the household." (DCLG, (2006b), p.142, 17.41). Furthermore, there is a contradiction between client C being told that she had already made a homeless application and the Partner adviser being told that a full homelessness assessment had not been made.

2.2.1.3 Quality of assessments: Intentionality and Priority need

In addition, to the issue of accommodation, a number of cases (including client B (p.13 above)) demonstrate what appears to be an over-willingness on the part of officers to assume clients are intentionally homeless whilst also appearing to be reluctant to recognise their priority needs.

E) Clients with children below 16 became homeless because they were fleeing threats of violence which were reported to the Police. They approached the Council for advice and assistance. They were told that they were intentionally homeless and, because of this, could not be given any help. (No formal assessment was made and no Section 184 decision notice was issued). They were sent away without any further advice. This resulted in the family having to sleep in the living room of a relative's small flat which has caused them to feel unsettled, worried and stressed.

The decision regarding the clients' intentionality could have been challenged if a Section 184 decision had been issued. Furthermore, according to Section 189 (1) of the *1996 Act* and *Statutory Instrument 2002/2051*, the clients could have been classed as being in priority need under two criteria, first, that there were dependent children residing with the adults and second, that they were fleeing threats of violence and therefore, under Section 188 (1), the Council may have had an interim duty to accommodate the family whilst it made its inquiries.

2.2.2. Quality of information and advice

Some clients appear to be put off making homelessness applications by officers providing them with information that was inaccurate, misleading, inconsistent or confusing.

- F) A client who had recently left prison and was returning to the area approached the Council. She had been sofa surfing with friends and family but had nowhere permanent to stay. She was seen by someone on the front desk and was told that if she found private rented accommodation the Council would pay the deposit. Following this advice the client went to a housing agency, found a property, completed the paperwork and obtained a draft tenancy agreement. She returned to the housing office with the paperwork but was told that her deposit would not be paid as she was not in priority need. (No formal assessment was made and no Section 184 decision notice was issued). The client did not have the money and so lost the property.

- G) Another client had received a County Court Possession Order and was under threat of eviction within 28 days. The Housing office advised him to go to a WAP Partner and ask for them to apply to delay the Possession Order for 42 days. This was an unrealistic expectation given the client's situation and although the application for an extension was made by the Partner it failed (as expected) and the property was re-possessed. With advice from the Partner the client was able to find a privately rented room in a house.

- H) A client who had had her home re-possessed, was advised to go to a credit union for a loan to pay the deposit on a private rental property even though she was not a member of the union and a qualifying period would be necessary before any loan could be given. She had previously been told that if she were housed under the homelessness duty the housing would be "miles away".

In each of these cases the clients were advised to take a course of action that did not solve their respective problems but created further difficulties and pressures at a time of intense stress. Client F may have been vulnerable due to having been in prison and, therefore, in priority need. Both clients G and H could have been assessed for homelessness.

3. HOUSING OPTIONS AND 16 AND 17 YEAR OLDS

3.1. Overview (2)

In terms of homelessness, the treatment of 16 and 17 year old people is also governed by the same legislation, guidelines and measures as adults. Added to these a local authority has additional duties that arise in relation to “children in need”. Children in need are statutorily defined in the *Children Act 1989* (1989 Act):

- “... a child shall be taken to be in need if—
 - (a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority ...;
 - (b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or
 - (c) he is disabled”(Section 17 (10))

Furthermore, Section 20 (1) states that:

- “Every local authority shall provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who appears to them to require accommodation as a result of—
 - (a) there being no person who has parental responsibility for him;
 - (b) his being lost or having been abandoned; or
 - (c) the person who has been caring for him being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing him with suitable accommodation or care.”

In recent years judgments have been handed down by the House of Lords in cases concerning the interrelationship between the duty under section 20 of the *1989 Act* and duties under Part 7 of the *1996 Act* in the case of young people aged 16 or 17 who require accommodation. The most recent of these cases has been *R (G) v Southwark [2009] UKHL 26*.

In response to these judgements, the Secretaries of State for the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and for the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued updated guidance in April of this year entitled *Provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or threatened with homelessness (April 2010 guidelines)* (DCSF et al (2010)).

“These judgments have restated and clarified the established legal position that the duty under section 20 of the *1989 Act* takes precedence over the duties in the *1996 Act* in providing for children in need who require accommodation, and that the specific duty owed under section 20 of the *1989 Act* takes precedence over the general duty owed to children in need and their families under section 17 of the *1989 Act*.” (DCSF et al (2010), p.2, Section 1.1)

“Where the initial approach or referral for housing assistance is made to housing services, the authority should treat the approach/referral as an application for assistance under Part 7 of the 1996 Act. The authority will therefore need to decide whether there is reason to believe the young person may be homeless or likely to become homeless within 28 days (section 184 of the 1996 Act) and, if so, the authority will need to make inquiries to determine whether any duty is owed under Part 7 of the 1996 Act.” - “If there is reason to believe the young person may be eligible for assistance, may be homeless and may be 16 or 17 years of age, the authority will have an immediate duty to secure interim accommodation (section 188(1) of the 1996 Act) pending a decision whether any substantive duty is owed under Part 7. Such accommodation must be suitable for a 16 & 17 year old and, in considering suitability, authorities should bear in mind that 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless and estranged from their family will be particularly vulnerable and in need of support. The Secretary of State considers that Bed and Breakfast accommodation is unsuitable for 16 and 17 year olds.” – “If the young person may be homeless or may be likely to become homeless within 28 days, housing services should make an immediate referral to children’s services for an assessment. This applies to all 16 and 17 year old applicants without exception” (DCSF (2010), p.4, Sections 2.9, 2.10, 2.11)

The policy document issued by the Head of Housing Options for Wiltshire Council on 12 April 2010 regarding the treatment of 16 and 17 year olds, indicates the Council recognises the need for:

1. Agreeing a joint protocol between Housing and Children’s Services including a clear pathway and referral procedure.
2. Researching best practice at other local authorities where Children’s and Housing Services are working together in order to develop good practices and procedures.”
3. Ensuring all staff and managers are fully aware of the Southwark ruling and its implications for fulfilling the local authority’s statutory duties.
4. Ensuring all front line staff and managers have an understanding of the duties under Part 3 of the *Children Act 1989* and Part 7 of the *Housing Act 1996*.

5. Working strategically with registered social landlords; supported accommodation providers; supporting people and other partners to secure a range of accommodation options.

3.2. Issues in detail (2)

3.2.1. Assessing homelessness and 'child in need' status

It appears that some clients who should have been assessed and given temporary accommodation were incorrectly turned away without help.

- I) A 17 year old client with learning difficulties approached the Housing Service for advice and assistance. He had been evicted from shared accommodation and had spent the previous three months sleeping rough and sofa surfing. At the time he presented he had nowhere to stay. Having taken advice from a WAP Partner he attempted to make an application for assessment under the homelessness legislation but was told that it was not possible to do so, and that all that could be done was to increase his banding on the choice based letting system. As he had nowhere to stay he had to sleep rough where he was physically attacked by a passerby whilst bedded down. The client had exceptional difficulties and had problems expressing himself. The WAP Partner requested a Community Care Assessment (CCA) which has taken place. A written assessment is awaited.

Despite appearing to be both homeless and "a child in need", the Housing office did not consider providing interim accommodation pending the outcome of its inquiries and as a result the client was put in danger and suffered significant personal trauma and anxiety. It was only after the Partner's intervention that a CCA was arranged. There was also an apparent failure to provide ongoing assistance to the client until his issue of homelessness was resolved (see Audit Commission (2007), p.5).

3.2.2. Referrals to Children's Services

Clients who may be 'children in need' must be referred to Children's Services for assessment as required by the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* (DCLG (2006b), p.103, 12.6) and the *April 2010 guidelines* (DCSF et al (2010), p.4).

- J) A 16 year old client presented himself to the Council as homeless. No referral to Children's Services was made. The client was put in B&B accommodation and subsequently moved to a hostel with limited support, where he attempted suicide. He was again offered accommodation with limited support but was evicted due to allegations of

anti-social behaviour. He subsequently attempted to make another homelessness application but was told that he was too young.

The client should have been referred and a CCA should have been undertaken when this client first presented and then again when he was evicted from the hostel. He was also told that he was too young to make a homelessness application which was incorrect.

3.2.3. Suitability of accommodation and repeat homelessness

Limited options in terms of temporary and supported accommodation seem to lead to certain members of this group (including client J (p.19 above)) being placed in accommodation that may not be suitable for them and where they have little or no support. Additionally, other sorts of help such as fostering do not appear to be an option.

K) The client presented himself as homeless to the Council at 16. He had a history of violent outbursts which had led to him leaving the family home. He had had a history of contact with local social services. No referral to Children's Services was made. He was offered shared accommodation in a house but the landlord evicted all the occupants. The client was then offered and took up accommodation that had limited support available. He was there for 3 days but was again evicted due to allegations of anti social behaviour against him. He was placed in a hotel as temporary accommodation. He approached a WAP Partner member as he wished to make a homelessness application. The Partner was told that Social Services had accepted a duty toward him and were helping and assisting him. However, at last contact, the client was in B&B accommodation. He could not get his prescription medication as he was too far away from his GP and did not have any money or transport.

According to the *April 2010 guidelines* (DCSF et al (2010), p.4) B&B accommodation is not suitable for 16 and 17 year olds. This was also a case of repeat homelessness which the Housing Service should have a strategy to avoid according to the Audit Commission's KLOE's (Audit Commission (2007), p.5).

3.2.4. Quality of information and advice

In a similar way to adult cases of homelessness, clients appear to be discouraged from making homelessness applications by officers giving them inaccurate information such as being told that they are too young to make an application for homelessness.

L) A 17 year old client, who had a history of being sexually abused, was fleeing actual violence and threats of violence. She presented herself to the Council as homeless, but was sent away because of her age. She was not offered any advice. The client contacted a WAP Partner who was then instrumental in setting up a multi-agency meeting between Children and Families, Housing Services, and a stakeholder support worker and as a result the client was offered accommodation at a supported housing unit. The client felt that she had been let down by the system. She had experienced a terrible trauma and then the local authority had refused to help her.

Although the client was eventually housed she was let down at the first contact with Housing Services. As with client J (p.19 above), she was incorrectly refused assistance due to her age and was not offered advice as required by Section 179 of *the 1996 Act*. As a result, no homelessness assessment was done, no Section 184 decision issued, no referral made to Children's Services and thus, no interim accommodation was made available pending the outcome of inquiries.

4. HOUSING OPTIONS MONITORING SURVEY

The results of the Housing Options monitoring survey (referred to in section 1.4 Methodology above) show both positive and negative client experiences of the Housing Options service. These indicate that whilst there are significant areas of good service, overall it may not yet be fully achieving all the essential principles outlined in *Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice* (DCLG (2006a) (see p.11 above).

The survey questionnaire looked at 3 areas of client experience 1) Quality of customer care, 2) Quality of advice and 3) Homelessness applications.

4.1. Quality of customer care

In terms of Quality of customer care the Housing Options team performed well:

- 8 of the 12 clients surveyed reported they had received helpful initial advice or information or had been given an appointment to see an advisor within the following seven days. Only 1 client reported getting “no help at all”.
- 9 of the 12 clients reported being seen immediately or promptly within 30 mins.
- 8 reported being able to talk about their situation in reasonable privacy.
- 8 clients reported being “Very happy” or “Fairly happy” with the time taken to discuss their problem, whilst 7 reported that the advisor had understood their problem “Very well” or “Good enough”.
- 7 reported that they were told to come back for more help if they needed it.

However, this picture of a good standard of customer care is complicated by other responses to some of the above questions. When asked “How well did you feel the adviser understood you and your problem?” although 7 said “Very well” or “Good enough”, 5 said “Not really” or “Not at all”. On the time taken to discuss their problem 4 reported being ‘Unhappy’ or ‘Very unhappy’ about this. Furthermore, in response to the survey question: “Overall, how would you describe the service you received at Housing Options?” 6 clients said it was “Excellent”, “Good” or “OK” but equally 6 said it was either “Poor” or “Very poor”. These results somewhat contradict the generally positive response of clients as regards the quality of customer care they received.

4.2. Quality of advice

In terms of Section 2, Quality of advice, the picture is mixed.

- When asked “Overall, how useful was the advice you received?” 4 said “Very useful” or “Fairly useful” but 7 said “Not very useful” or not at all useful.

- When asked “Was the information or advice you were given easy to understand?” although 6 replied “Yes” there were 3 clients who indicated they had some difficulties understanding.
- When asked “What Housing Options were suggested to you?” 3 clients said “No help was offered” and a further client wasn’t sure or couldn’t remember what advice, if any, had been given.
- Additionally, there are 12 possible responses to this question which acknowledge both the range of options available and that each client may have more than one option to choose or pursue at a time. On analysing responses to this question an average of 2 different possibilities was given to each client. Knowing about the different options available is essential, but if these are not well understood by the client they may well lead to further confusion.
- Furthermore, 6 of the 12 were not given anything in writing about the advice they received or decisions that were taken about them.

Although, because of the limited number of respondents, the picture is not clear, when the answers above are taken together, they may indicate that some clients are confused by the advice they have received. If this is so, the fact that some clients were not given a written record of the advice may have exacerbated the situation.

4.3. Homelessness applications

In terms of applications to be assessed for homelessness (dealt with by Section 3 of the survey), WAP Partner advisors judged that 10 of the 12 respondents may have been statutorily homeless or at risk of becoming homeless at the time of their contact with the Housing Services team, of these 10 only 3 got the opportunity to make a homelessness application. 5 did not get any homelessness assessment whilst the remaining 2 either didn’t know or were not sure if they had made an application or not. If this result accurately reflects the processing of clients who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness across the whole client base it would suggest that the levels of homelessness in Wiltshire may be being under recorded.

4.4. Summary of survey

Even though the results of this survey are tentative, they do seem to indicate that, whilst the Housing Options service can often be very good in terms of customer care, there may be a lack of consistency especially in certain key areas around quality of advice and homelessness applications.

5. KEY FINDINGS

The findings below are concerned with the apparent issues of procedure and practice found within the Housing Options team that appear to have led to the outcomes and observations related in the body of the report.

5.1. General: relevant to all applicants

The results from the Housing Options monitoring survey suggest that the Housing Options team performs well on measures of customer care. There are significant areas of good practice with clients reporting being seen promptly, being treated well and being given helpful initial advice and information. (See section 4.1 Quality of customer of care, p.22 above)

However, the quality of housing options and homelessness advice does not seem to be consistent. Moreover, clients often appear to be confused as to what their housing situation is, what advice they have received and what processes or assessments they have been through. Written summaries of interviews were not provided routinely and in at least one case a client was seen and assessed by “someone on the front desk”. (See section 4.2 Quality of advice, p.22 above)

In addition, the number of clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness may be being under recorded. (See section 4.3, Homelessness applications, p.23 above)

One of the common themes reported in evidence forms is that many clients who approach the Council seem to have undergone a somewhat restricted exploration of their current housing/homelessness situation and/or their future housing options.

Officers do not appear to be taking into account the low threshold of the ‘reason to believe’ criterion when considering whether a client is homeless or threatened with homelessness which would guide them to begin a formal assessment leading to a decision under Section 184 of the 1996 Act (DCLG (2007) p.35, 2.38). Instead clients appear to have experienced an informal and incomplete assessment of their homelessness status where no formal decisions or notices are recorded or given to the client. (See section 2.2.1.1 Responses to requests for assessments, p.13 above)

Many of these informal and incomplete assessments appear to be accompanied by interpretations of the intentionality and priority need criteria that could be open to question. However since these were not accompanied by a formal Section 184 decision notice it was not possible to request a review or appeal the decisions. Others appear to be terminated

when the lack of availability of suitable interim or temporary accommodation in their locality was drawn to clients' attention by the officers conducting the assessment. (See sections 2.2.1.3 Quality of assessments: Intentionality and Priority need, p.15 and 2.2.1.2 Quality of assessments: Availability of accommodation, p.14 respectively)

The above items appear to demonstrate that some officers may not fully understand their legal duties under Part 7 of the *1996 Act*.

Other data suggests that there may be delays in making homelessness assessments until the client actually becomes homeless. (See section 2.2.1.1 Responses to requests for assessments, p.13 above)

Some clients appear to be being diverted from making homelessness applications due to receiving incorrect, inconsistent or confusing information or advice from officers. (See section 2.2.2 Quality of information and advice, p.16 above)

Officers sometimes appear to be relying on clients or VCS organisations to make direct requests to be assessed for homelessness. Paradoxically, there are also examples that at other times direct requests and referrals are being rejected. Furthermore, clients who were thought to be homeless or threatened with homelessness by experienced WAP Partner advisors were not given any formal homelessness assessment. (See section 2.2.1.1 Responses to requests for assessments, p.13 above)

In combination these practices will have a significant effect on client outcomes and appear to have led directly to clients being disadvantaged in various ways:

- When no formal assessment of a relevant clients' homelessness status is made there is equally no assessment of what duties, if any, are owed to that client.
- When no formal Section 184 decision notice is issued, officers' decisions cannot be reviewed or appealed by clients.
- If clients have not been fully and formally assessed for homelessness they cannot be assigned to the highest (Platinum) housing band or have access to the WiltsLet rent deposit guarantee scheme.
- Where there is no formal assessment and decision cases will not be included within the Council statistics for statutory homelessness in the county and thus those statistics will not reflect the true level of homelessness. As a result, the particular pattern of homelessness in Wiltshire and the diversity of issues facing clients who are homeless in the county cannot be known. This will have an impact when putting together or reviewing

the homelessness strategy as it could lead to the mistaken impression that the level of homelessness is lower than it actually is resulting in little or no action being taken to address it or action being taken that is poorly targeted.

- Incorrect and poor advice, information and assistance will lead clients to make decisions that are not well informed and may not be in their best interests and/or may make their situations worse.
- Poor practices, communication and customer service all have an impact on service quality, and client outcomes can be seriously affected as a result. They have an exaggerated adverse effect on those who are already vulnerable and suffering the extreme pressures of homelessness by increasing the stress that individuals and families are under. (DCLG (2007) pp.176-177, A4.9-A4.12)

5.2. 16 and 17 year olds

The majority of the cases reported point to significant problems, with this age group encountering multiple issues when they approach the Council's Housing Services.

Often clients do not appear to be getting an assessment either for homelessness under Part 7 of the *1996 Act* or for 'child in need' status under Section 20 of the *1989 Act*. (See section 3.2.1 Assessing homelessness and 'child in need' status, p.19 above)

There appears to be poor inter-departmental communication and co-ordination when dealing with these clients: referrals to Children's' Services are not immediate and routine with WAP Partners having to request multi-agency involvement and Community Care Assessments (CCA). (See section 3.2.2 Referrals to Children's Services, p.19 above)

The accommodation that is available for this age group often appears to be not suitable for their needs with clients being placed in adult hostels, in places where there is limited or no support and with the continued use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation. Additionally, the use of foster care does not seem to be considered as a possible option for these clients. (See section 3.2.3 Suitability of accommodation and repeat homelessness, p.20 above)

There are cases of repeat homelessness that appear not to have been dealt with effectively as specified by the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE): an organisation delivering an excellent service would provide "... an effective approach to tackling and reducing cases of repeat homelessness." In addition, there appears to be little provision made for ongoing assistance to the client until their "issue of homelessness was resolved"

(Audit Commission 2007, p.5). (See section 3.2.3 Suitability of accommodation and repeat homelessness, p.20 above)

In addition, officers do not seem to always recognise the additional duties they have toward 16 and 17 year old clients as 'children in need', or the vulnerability of this group. (See 3.2.1 Assessing homelessness and 'child in need' status, and 3.2.2 Referrals to Children's Services, p.19 above)

Many impacts are similar to those of adult clients, and are outlined above. But other outcomes are more relevant to this particular age group:

- Lack of supported accommodation is likely to lead to cases of failed tenancies and repeat homelessness which will result in clients needing to rely more on Social and Housing Services with the attendant costs to the Council and associated services that that implies, not to mention the personal consequences for the client. (DCLG (2007), Annex 4, 'Assessing the cost-effectiveness of homelessness prevention', pp.175-182)
- Clients that are not followed-through until their homelessness issue is resolved fall through the legal safety net and as a result have faced greater difficulties and dangers.
- Clients who are not assessed by Children's Services will not have their needs established.

5.3. Conclusion

Despite the areas of good practice, the concerns of the Partnership outlined above (1.3.2 Context, p.7) are born out by the data collected in that there are some clients of the Housing Options Service, both adults and young people, who appear to have been denied the statutory duties owed to them and/or were not offered good quality and timely housing advice.

It appears that this is happening for four main reasons:

- (i) Officers are not always considering the low threshold of the 'reason to believe' criterion and,
- (ii) they are conducting informal assessments as part of housing options interviews where the client is told that they do not meet one or more of the five homelessness criteria.
- (iii) Clients are discouraged from pursuing a homelessness application because they have been told about the lack of temporary accommodation in their locality.
- (iv) Clients are denied the chance to make an application because they are given inaccurate, incorrect and inconsistent advice and information by officers.

These four practices make it appear that the statutory duty to make a homelessness assessment has become overly intertwined with the housing options process and the prevention strategy. This leads officers to deal with these clients solely through homelessness prevention measures when they should also be making homelessness inquiries as required by statute as a parallel but separate process. (DCLG (2006a) p.16, 2.8; p.17, 2.11 & 2.12; DCLG (2009b) p.6, Reason to believe; DCLG (2009c) p.4.)

The effect of these practices will be to reduce the number of homelessness assessments carried out and, therefore, the numbers of decisions made which will, in its turn, reduce the overall number of acceptances and therefore the numbers in temporary accommodation.

6. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that best practice informs a set of standard procedures across the Council's Housing advice outlets and that this practice is recognised and disseminated to ensure a consistently high level of customer care and service.
2. Ensure that a written statement is given to all clients interviewed by the Housing Options service, regardless of whether a formal homelessness application was made. The statement should outline (i) the information gained from the client, (ii) the advice given, (iii) the options discussed and (iv) the referrals made. It should also include (v) a specific item that indicates whether or not the officer 'has reason to believe' the client may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless within 28 days.
3. Ensure that robust guidance and training is given to Housing officers on (i) the low threshold of the 'has reason to believe' criterion of the *1996 Act*, (ii) the five criteria for a homelessness assessment especially on interpreting 'intentionality' and 'priority need', and (iii) in how Housing Options interviews should be conducted in order to avoid clients being discouraged by factors beyond their control such as the lack of availability of temporary accommodation in their locality, the shortage of social housing in general or being given other information that otherwise dissuades them from continuing with their application. Also, provide training on an ongoing basis for Housing Options staff on homelessness legislation and ensure staff are regularly updated by attending training courses.
4. Ensure that when an officer does have reason to believe that a client may be homeless or threatened with homelessness that a homelessness assessment is immediately started. And where any decision is taken by an officer that the client does not meet any of the five criteria a written notice is given to the client stating the reasons for that decision which should also be placed on the client's permanent record. This written notice should be given even if their homelessness situation has been prevented or relieved through actions taken by the council or any other organisation.
5. Wherever possible accommodate people in interim and temporary accommodation that is in the same immediate locality as their existing support networks as required by Section 17.41 of the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* (DCLG (2006b), p.142) and, if this is not possible right away and accommodation outside their immediate locality has to be used, to rectify the situation as quickly as possible.

6. Put in place a formal escalation procedure culminating in a single senior point of contact for VCS organisations to call regarding cases where advisors consider clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness have not been correctly processed or assessed and for other homelessness procedures.
7. Ensure that when a 16 or 17 year old approaches the Council as homeless, Housing Service officers immediately notify the Children's Services in order that:
 - a) a Community Care Assessment can be undertaken;
 - b) an assessment of what duty (if any) is owed to the client can be made quickly;
 - c) Housing Services and Children and Families work together as a team to support minors who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
8. Put in place a formal escalation procedure culminating in a single senior point of contact for VCS advisors to call regarding services specifically for 16 and 17 year olds.
9. Ensure additional guidance and training is provided to officers regarding the specific needs of 16 & 17 year olds.
10. Ensure appropriate support is provided for 16 & 17 year olds as part of any placement or tenancy in order to avoid cases of repeat homelessness.
11. Review the role of the Housing Liaison Group to ensure it becomes a forum for VCS feedback and problem solving regarding issues of concern about homelessness and proposed or planned changes to the service and "to co-ordinate the activities of all the key players, across all sectors, who are contributing to meeting the aims of the homelessness strategy" (DCLG (2006b), p.173). Alternatively, set up a separate homelessness forum to fulfil this role.
12. Further research needs to be conducted, with input from the Council and other relevant stakeholders in order to create a clearer picture of client encounters with the service and to monitor the effects of the implementation of these recommendations on the outcomes for clients.

We look forward to discussing this report and its recommendations with Councillors and key Housing Service Officers.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Key

DCSF = Department for Children, Schools and Families

DCLG = Department for Communities and Local Government

ODPM = Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Guidelines, Reports and Measures

- Audit Commission (1998) *Home Alone*; London: Audit Commission
- Audit Commission (2006) *Compendium of inspection policy and practice*; London: Audit Commission
- Audit Commission (2007) *Housing Inspectorate Key Lines of Enquiry: Local Authority Strategic Involvement: Homelessness & Housing Advice*; London: Audit Commission
- Crisis UK (2009) *No One's Priority: The treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services*; London: Crisis
- DCSF, DCLG (2010) *Provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation*; available at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/homelessseventeen>
- DCLG (2006a) *Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice*; London: DCLG
- DCLG (2006b) *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities*; London: DCLG
- DCLG (2007) *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention*; London: DCLG; available at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/preventhomelessness>
- DCLG (2009a) *Homelessness prevention and relief: England 2008/9 experimental statistics*; London: DCLG
- DCLG (2009b) *P1E Guidance: Homelessness Prevention and Relief*; London: DCLG
- DCLG (2009c) *Recording Homelessness Prevention and Relief at E10 of the P1E Quarterly Return*; London: DCLG
- DCLG (2009d) *Fair and flexible: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England*; London: DCLG
- ODPM (2003a) *Prevention of homelessness policy briefing #4*; available at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/137773.pdf>
- ODPM (2003b) *Achieving Positive Outcomes on Homelessness*; available at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/archived/publications/housing/achievingpositiveoutcomes>
- ODPM (2004), *Local Authorities' Homelessness Strategies: Evaluation and Good Practice*; available at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/137869.pdf>
- ODPM (2005), *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All*; available at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/homes-for-all.pdf>

- Wiltshire Council (2009), *Wiltshire Council Key Trend [sic] in Homelessness*; available from Wiltshire Council
- Wiltshire Council (2010a), *Homelessness Strategy 2010-2015*; available from Wiltshire Council
- Wiltshire Council (2010b) [*untitled*] guidance issued by Head of Housing, April 12; Wiltshire Council; available from Wiltshire Council
- Wiltshire Council (2010c) [*untitled*] spreadsheet figures provided by Wiltshire Council to Housing Liaison Group; available from Wiltshire Council

Primary and secondary legislation

- *National Assistance Act 1948 (Section 21)*
- *Children Act 1989 (Section 20)*
- *Housing Act 1996 (Part 7)*
- *Homelessness Act 2002*
- *Statutory Instrument 2002/2051 The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order*

8. LIST OF APPENDICES

- 1) WAP Social Policy Evidence Form
- 2) Bureau Evidence Form
- 3) Housing Options Monitoring Questionnaire
- 4) Housing Options Monitoring Questionnaire results
- 5) Analysis of submitted social policy evidence forms

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Legal and background research:

- Robert Bruce (Wiltshire Citizens Advice - East)
- Melanie Jane Goode (BA Hons, PGCert, Graduate Diploma in Law) (Wiltshire Citizens Advice – West)

Also many thanks to:

- All the volunteers and advisors who have made time in their busy schedules to conduct the Housing Options monitoring survey, fill in and submit evidence forms to the Partnership and follow up clients when requested.
- All those who gave their time to read various drafts of this report, giving valuable comments on all aspects of its makeup.

- The Big Lottery Advice Plus for their financial support.
- And finally, to Wiltshire Citizens Advice for hosting Partnership project workers.

10. CONTACT DETAILS

The Author of this report is Dominic Cassidy, Social Policy Officer for the Wiltshire Advice Partnership. Email: dc.wilts-spo@kennetcab.cabnet.org.uk Tel: 01225 717 908