

# **A guide to the Homelessness Strategy**

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Stoke-on-Trent City Council

## Introduction

### *What is a Strategy?*

A strategy is a document that sets the way an organisation will work in the long term. It shows how the organisation will make sure it is working as effectively as possible and that it uses its resources the best way it can. A strategy should make sure that the organisation is working the way its customers expect it to.

The Homelessness Strategy 2007 – 2010 looks at homelessness services in Stoke-on-Trent, and particularly the services that Stoke-on-Trent City Council run, or provide funding for.

The strategy is about:

- What do we want to achieve in homelessness services in the long-term?
- What areas of need do our homelessness services need to work in and what activities do we need to be involved in?
- How our can homelessness services improve, and how can we make sure they perform as well as the best services in other authorities?
- What resources (staff, money, relationships, and equipment) do we need in order to perform as well as we need to?
- What external factors (things that happen that aren't controlled by the Housing Solutions Service) may affect the way we work?
- What do our stakeholders (customers, agencies we work with, and other council departments) expect and value from our services?

The Homelessness Strategy is about how homelessness services and the Housing Solutions Service will work to prevent homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent. It sets out 'strategic decisions' (planned decisions that answer the listed questions above) about the choice of services, meeting the needs of our customers, performing as well as similar services in other authorities, and creating new services where necessary.

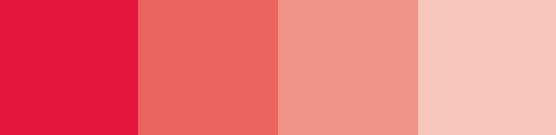
### *Why we have written this strategy*

We want this Homelessness Strategy to help give people more control over their housing situation and to help stop people becoming homeless.

Through the Homelessness Strategy, we aim to:

1. Prevent homelessness wherever possible
2. Make sure that support is available for people when they are vulnerable and may risk losing their home
3. Tackle the wider causes of homelessness
4. Make sure the number of people who sleep rough stays low, and that hostels are places where people can get the help and support they need to change the way they live and to prevent them sleeping rough or becoming homeless again
5. Make sure we can provide more safe, long term homes to people who need them
6. Work with other local authorities in our Region on how we tackle homelessness
7. Make sure we work to improve services and tackle homelessness in a planned way

To help us achieve the aims of the Strategy, we have written a list of activities that we need to do, and the results we expect from doing these activities. These activities and results are in the Action Plan that has been published with the Strategy document.



The Government gives all local authorities a budget, called the Homelessness Grant. We will use this grant to help deliver the services and activities set out in the Homelessness Strategy. The Homelessness Strategy will also help the council to make sure we fulfil our legal duties (set out in the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002).


The council will be responsible for delivering the Homelessness Strategy and the Housing Solutions Service will oversee the practical day to day responsibilities. We will work with Elected Members to review the strategy, as well as reviewing our progress against national targets set by Government to prevent homelessness.

We will introduce a series of forums and working groups to help introduce and implement the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. These groups will be:

- Stoke-on-Trent Homelessness Strategy Steering Group
- Stoke-on-Trent Homelessness Prevention Group
- Stoke-on-Trent Homelessness Forum

We have written the Homelessness Strategy to meet Government guidelines and in line with 'best practice' examples from other local authorities. By doing this, we hope to put our plans in place effectively. We want to make sure that we meet both national and local targets to prevent homelessness.

We look forward to working with everyone who helped to deliver the Strategy, and with other agencies and departments, as well as with homeless people themselves, to deliver long-term housing solutions that prevent homelessness.



## What is Happening in the Country, the Region, and in Stoke-on-Trent?

### *How we are working with the Government*

Since 2002, the Government has been working on new ways to deal with homelessness to try to make sure that:

- People do not need to sleep rough
- Fewer people need to use temporary or emergency accommodation
- People who become homeless and ask for help do not become homeless again in the future
- There are good quality housing services available to people, to try to make sure they do not become homeless

The Government has also told local authorities that they must make sure they do not use Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation as temporary accommodation for families with children or for 16 and 17 year olds. This is because B&Bs are not suitable for young people or children, so local authorities must make sure that they use more suitable temporary accommodation.

In 2005, the Government published a Homelessness Strategy called: "Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives". This strategy set out the Government's plans on how to deal with homelessness. It also set out a new target to halve the number of people using temporary accommodation by 2010. In order to do this, the Government and local authorities need to work in a new way. We are doing this by working hard to prevent homelessness, so that people do not need to use temporary accommodation.

To help us to do this, the Government has given Stoke-on-Trent City Council £2million in grant money since 2002. This money has been used to pay for new schemes to deal with and to prevent homelessness.

As well as this, Stoke-on-Trent City Council has been given extra funding through some special projects set out by the Government:

- Hostel Capital Improvement Programme: This is a scheme for improving temporary accommodation to make sure it is suitable and safe, and helps the people who stay there to rebuild their lives. We worked with YMCA (Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffs) and we were given £970,000 to spend on modernising Edinburgh House.
- Homelessness Innovation Fund: The Government set up this scheme so they could give some extra grant funding to local authorities to pay for new schemes to deal with homelessness. We were given £70,000 to bring empty properties back into use. This project means that we can make sure that houses that were empty can be renovated and used for people who need a new home.

The Government gives us advice documents, funding schemes and best practice guides that we use to influence how we work and how we develop our services.

In 2006, the Government introduced new ideas and ways to help young people and prevent them becoming homeless. So that we can make sure that we are doing the best we can, Stoke-on-Trent City Council paid for specialists to carry out research in the City so we know what problems young people face and how we can tackle these.



## *How we are working in the region*

The councils in the West Midlands are working together to deal with homelessness in our region. Together, we have published the “West Midlands Homelessness Strategy”. The vision of the Strategy is ‘*to support the emergence of a World Class Region and improve the quality of life by preventing homelessness, improving support services and access to decent secure housing*’. This means that all the councils in the West Midlands will work to try to stop people becoming homeless, to help them deal with their housing problems, and to make sure that everyone has a decent, safe home.

The Strategy sets out our aim to make sure that less people become homeless, this is called primary prevention. We also aim to make sure that those that do become homeless are helped to develop and keep settled homes and lifestyles and do not become homeless again, this is called secondary prevention.

To make sure that we can deliver the aims of the Strategy, an Implementation group has been formed and several events have been held across the region to share ideas, and to make sure that the authorities and agencies who work to deal with homelessness know about the strategy and are helping to deliver these aims.


## *How we are working in Stoke-on-Trent*

Like every council in the UK, Stoke-on-Trent City Council has a number of plans and strategies to cover the wide and varied work we do across the City. The Homelessness Strategy will contribute to this work and help to achieve the aims and objectives set out in other Stoke-on-Trent City Council plans and Strategies. In the same way, some of these plans will help us to achieve the aims of the Homelessness Strategy.

These plans include:

- Local Area Agreement (March 2006)
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council Corporate Plan (2007 to 2010)
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council Performance Plan (2007 to 2010)
- Stoke-on-Trent Housing Strategy (2007 to 2010)
- Stoke-on-Trent Supporting People Strategy (2005 to 2010)
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council Housing Revenue Account Business Plan (2005 to 2008)
- Stoke-on-Trent BME (Black & Minority Ethnic) Housing Strategy (2005 to 2008)

There are also other local and regional programmes and schemes that will be supported by the Homelessness Strategy and that will help us to achieve the aims of the Strategy. These include:

- Stoke-on-Trent Children and Young People’s Plan
  - Stoke-on-Trent Community Safety and Drugs Strategy
  - Stoke-on-Trent Youth Justice Plan
  - North Staffordshire Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder
  - Stoke-on-Trent Local Public Service Agreement (April 2005 to March 2009)
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## Improving our Services

### *The review of homelessness services in Stoke-on-Trent*

In order to improve our services, we carried out a series of reviews in 2005. These were:

- Homelessness Review
- Review of Homeless Specific Housing Related Support Services
- Review of the Council's Allocations Policy and Services

#### **Homelessness Review**

We brought in consultants to help us review the way we dealt with homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent. To do this research, the consultants spoke to over 200 homeless people and people who had been recently homeless. This was done by face-to-face interviews, questionnaires, surveys and organising focus groups. To consult with young people we also organised face-to-face interviews led by other young people. As well as this, we set up workshop sessions and telephone interviews with council staff and with other agencies and service providers.

We knew from the figures we collect about homelessness that the number of people who were homeless in Stoke-on-Trent had almost doubled between 2003 and 2005.

The consultants' research looked at what made people become homeless – the main reasons and causes of homelessness in the City. We found that the reasons people became homeless included:

- Being in difficult and sometimes violent family relationships
- Being in poverty and debt
- Being addicted to alcohol or drugs, which meant they were evicted or were told to leave home by their parents
- Having mental health problems
- Having some health problems
- Finding it difficult to cope with living independently
- For people in prison, not having help and advice about housing or where to go after they were released
- Generally, not having enough help and advice early enough to prevent crisis and homelessness

The consultants used the standards that the Audit Commission use when they inspect councils and they carried out a mock inspection of our homelessness services. The result was that the council was a "no star service: with uncertain prospects for improvement". This means that we did not provide enough services and the services we did provide were not able to give enough help and support to the people who needed it.

In order to improve our services, the consultants recommended that we should take the following actions:

- Develop a Housing Options Team; to provide help, advice and support to help prevent people becoming homeless
- Develop a service that gives housing advice, works to prevent homelessness, and carries out homeless assessments
- Work with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to make sure that there are enough social rented houses for people who need them
- Produce a full set of information leaflets about the service and make sure that people have access to these. Make sure that the leaflets are available in different languages and different formats (like large print) so that everyone who needs to can read and understand them
- Talk to our customers and staff and agree a set of service standards. Monitor and review our service against these performance commitments

- Work with other council departments like Health, Probation, Children's Services and Adult Social Care Services to develop support services for people in temporary accommodation to help them move on to settled housing. Develop 'resettlement' services to help people move into and be able to manage their new home
- Develop ways for customers to give us feedback and make sure that we review our services according to this feedback, and make changes when we need to

The review also compared Stoke-on-Trent City Council homelessness services with services in other local authorities. By doing this, the review found that:

- We spend much less on homelessness (per unit) than other authorities, showing that we need to invest more money in services
- We have more homeless people than other authorities of the same size
- We have more cases that are assessed as 'intentionally homeless' than other authorities, and we should investigate the reasons for this
- We are in the top 25% of authorities in the country at assessing cases in time – as 100% of homeless cases are assessed within the 33 day national target

As part of the homeless review done by the consultants we looked at our homelessness strategy, which had been published in 2003. We decided that we needed a completely new strategy, based on the findings of the review. We needed to approach homelessness in a different way.

Like other local authorities in the country, Stoke-on-Trent City Council receives a grant from the Government (Homelessness & Housing Support Directorate) to spend on services to prevent homelessness. The homelessness review found that we needed to spend our grant more effectively and concentrate more on services that aim to prevent homelessness.

It is important that the way we spend this grant money is linked to achieving the targets the Government sets for us. The Council needs to make sure that any schemes that do not meet these aims and targets are paid for in a different way.

Part of the homelessness review also looked at how other councils and agencies work to tackle homelessness. We looked at what methods, schemes and plans work best in other authorities so that we could build our own services on these ideas. From this work we learnt that:

- There was no real prevention work happening and we needed to make this our main priority
- We needed to change our services to reflect the 'housing options model': giving help and advice to everyone in housing need and providing a range of options to people to help them
- We needed to make sure that services are available early enough for people who are in danger of losing their home, so that we can help prevent them becoming homeless
- We needed to be careful about how we changed services, and needed to do this in a planned way. The new Homelessness Strategy will be the document that sets out how we will change, and the Action Plan shows the actions we will take and when we will do these
- We needed to make sure that we work with the other advice and support agencies in the City when we change our services, to make sure that we are all working together in a planned and structured way to prevent homelessness

The Government's Strategy on homelessness shows us that the most important thing is to work to prevent homelessness happening in the first place, and we need to make sure that services are available to people early enough so that we can help and resolve issues that could lead to someone becoming homeless. Our review included an assessment of the homelessness services in Stoke-on-Trent that were already in place. We found that very few services in Stoke-on-Trent actively prevent homelessness. The main services that helped to prevent homelessness were the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the tenancy support services paid for by the Supporting People fund. The review showed us that we needed to put more activities in place to prevent homelessness, and that we needed to make sure that there were links between activities and services to make sure that we can deal with the key causes of homelessness.



### *Review of homelessness specific housing related support services*

At the same time that we carried out our homelessness review, Stoke-on-Trent Supporting People reviewed the services that they fund that aim to deal with homelessness in the city. This review found that there were several issues with the way homelessness was being dealt with. These issues meant that the Supporting People Programme was not meeting its main aims.


In response to the findings of the review, Stoke-on-Trent Supporting People agreed to introduce an improvement plan to meet the recommendations made in the review report. The main aim of this plan is to re-structure the way services work. This will mean that services that need to will be changed in order to meet the recommendations. As part of this work, all contracts by 2010 will be based on how the service performs. Performance will be measured against set outcomes and payment for services will be linked to how well services perform against these outcomes.

### *Review of the Council's Allocations Policy and services*

Because the homelessness review mentioned that there were also some issues with the Allocations Policy (the document that sets out how the council allocate houses to people), the council brought in independent consultants to review the Allocations Policy and services.

This review had some important findings. The most important of these were that we needed to change our banding system (the way we organise the waiting list) to manage housing allocations. As well as this, we decided that we needed to change the way we work, work in closer partnership with RSLs and supported housing services, and improve the feedback we give to customers.

As a result of the review we developed a new Allocations Policy. We asked Councillors and other agencies that we work with to give us feedback on the draft policy, and we launched the new policy document, as well as a new Choice Based Letting's (CBL) computer system, "Locata", in spring 2008.



## Making Changes to How we Deal with Homelessness

### *What we have already done*

The 3 reviews in 2005 showed us that we needed to make some major changes to the way we worked and the way we dealt with homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent.

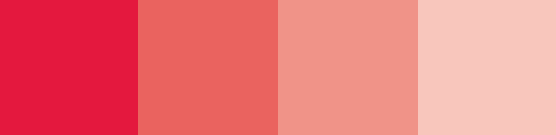
Some of the ways we will do this are set out in this Strategy, in the “What we will do next” section. We have already done a lot of work, some of the things we have already done include:

- Set up a new Housing Advice Centre that is easy to get to and accessible to people from all over the city and for people with disabilities
- Published fact sheets and information leaflets about homelessness and the services we offer to help people, and made sure that these are available to members of the public
- Introduced new projects and ways of working to help prevent people becoming homeless
- Developed a new “Housing Options Team” to provide help and support to people who are at risk of losing their home or who need advice on housing issues
- Put in place and published clear service standards for our customers
- Developed and launched the new Allocations Policy
- Employed an “Empty Homes Officer”, paid for by a special Government grant, to develop a strategy and action plan to reduce the number of empty homes in the City, and to make sure that we can bring empty homes back into use for people who urgently need a home
- Worked with the YMCA to improve Edinburgh House, which provides temporary and emergency accommodation for young people who are homeless
- Worked with other departments in Stoke-on-Trent City Council to make sure that we make best use of Discretionary Housing Payments for people that need them
- Researched the ways that other agencies and local authorities provide mediation services for young people who are at risk of becoming homeless, and used this to develop mediation services in Stoke-on-Trent
- Looked at ways we can work with private landlords so that we can use private rented housing to help prevent homelessness

The work we have done has meant that many people have benefited from our advice. As a result of this, less people have needed to ask for help because they are homeless. This means that the number of homeless households in the City has fallen. The table below shows the number of homeless households in the City from 2002 – 2007, and how much the Council spent each year to help people who are homeless.

Year	Number of people who were homeless and needed help *	Estimated cost for the council to provide help to people assessed as homeless
April 2002 to March 2003	444 (34% of all people who were assessed)	£888,800
April 2003 to March 2004	766 (36% of all people who were assessed)	£1,532,000 (£643,200 more than 2002 to 2003)
April 2004 to March 2005	855 (41% of all people who were assessed)	£1,710,000 (£178,000 more than 2003 to 2004)
April 2005 to March 2006	548 (48% of all people who were assessed)	£1,096,000 (£614,000 less than 2004 to 2005)
April 2006 to March 2007	469 (66% of all people who were assessed)	£938,000 (£158,000 less than 2005 to 2006)

\* *People who were assessed as homeless and found to be owed a duty under homelessness law*



This table shows that now, thanks to the work we have done, the number of people who need help because they are homeless is now nearly as low as it was in 2002. As well as this, the table shows that in 2002, only one third of people who were assessed as homeless were owed a duty under the law. In 2006 to 2007, this had doubled to two thirds of people who asked for help. This means that we are now working more effectively to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place.

Because of the changes we have introduced since 2005, Stoke-on-Trent City Council homelessness services are now performing well against the 6 performance targets that the Government sets each year.

As well as the work the council has done to improve homelessness services, other agencies in the City that work with people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless have worked hard to improve their services. One of the most important things we have achieved is making sure that there are less people sleeping rough in the City. The Government set a target for all local authorities to reduce the number of people sleeping rough by two thirds by 2001. The way that this is measured is by carrying out a 'count' each year of the number of people sleeping on the streets on a set night. When this was done in 1998 there were 1850 people found sleeping rough in England. There were 31 people sleeping rough in Stoke-on-Trent. In the latest count, which was in 2006, there were 502 people found sleeping rough in England, and only 3 in Stoke-on-Trent.

In 2002, we developed the 'Rough Sleepers Team' to make sure that we reduce the number of people who sleep rough in the City. This team is paid for by the council and works with people who are or have been sleeping rough. The work this team has done means that now, half of the people who do sleep rough only do so for less than 6 months and only 10% of people sleeping rough do so for more than 5 years.


The work that the Rough Sleepers Team do is supported by a group called the Hostels Co-operative. This group is made up of people who manage the hostels for homeless people in the City, and is also attended by people from Stoke-on-Trent Housing Solutions Service and the Supporting People Team. The aims of the group are:

- To make sure that hostels are places where people can change their lifestyles and make sure they don't need to go back to sleeping rough
- To make sure that all the hostels in Stoke-on-Trent work to the same standards set out by the Government in the "Hostels Standards Toolkit"
- To help hostels, Supporting People and the Housing Solutions Service work effectively together so that people get the help they need
- To make sure that there are extra bed spaces available during very bad weather

### *The Housing Solutions Service*

So that we can work in the best way possible to help people with their housing needs and issues, the Council has set up a new staffing structure and brought together the teams that deal with homelessness and allocations and lettings, as well as those that deal with developing new projects, strategies and policies. This department is the Housing Solutions Service, which is based in the Housing Advice Centre on South Wolfe Street.

The Housing Solutions Services is responsible for:

- Housing Advice and Homeless Prevention services
  - Homelessness services
  - Temporary accommodation
  - Lettings services
  - The Allocations Policy
  - The Homelessness Strategy
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There are 5 teams that make up the Housing Solutions service, these are:

- Housing Options
- Homelessness
- Lettings
- Development
- Support

The Housing Options team provide advice and support to people who are at risk of becoming homeless in the near future. They manage a range of projects to help people to find a new home or stay in their own home so that they don't need to become homeless.


The Homelessness team provide help and support to people who are homeless or who are at risk of becoming homeless very soon (usually in the next few days) and who need emergency help. The Homelessness team are responsible for carrying out homelessness assessments and giving advice to people in a housing emergency. They may also be able to help someone who is homeless to find temporary accommodation.

Both the Housing Options and Homelessness teams also provide help and support to people to find safe, suitable, permanent accommodation. This could be private rented housing, a Housing Association home or a council house.

The Lettings team are responsible for managing the council's waiting list for housing, and for helping people choose and secure a suitable home through the Choice Based Lettings system. For more information on the way we allocate council housing, please see the Homeline Service User Guide.

The Development team works with the 3 operational teams (Housing Options, Homelessness and Lettings), as well as the other Council departments and agencies that provide help and support to people who have housing needs throughout the City. The Development team are responsible for carrying out and helping with research to give us more information about the housing needs of people in the City, and to help us develop new services. The team is also responsible for developing new policies and strategies (including the Allocations Policy and Homelessness Strategy) and for making sure that services work together to make sure people are able to get the help they need.

Along with the Allocations Policy, the Homelessness Strategy will help us to manage the way the Housing Solutions Service works, and to make sure our services work well.



## What we will do next

We have used the findings of the 3 reviews in 2005, as well as talking to service users and agencies working in the City, to develop the Homelessness Strategy.

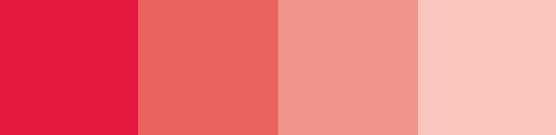
As part of this work we held several consultation groups and sent out questionnaires to agencies, council staff and service users so that we could make sure that the strategy reflects the needs of people in housing need across the City.

By talking to agencies and to people across the City we were able to find out some of the reasons why people become homeless. The consultation also helped us to identify some ways we can deal with these problems. These are shown in the table below.

<b>Problems</b>	<b>Suggested answers</b>
Being in difficult and sometimes violent family relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure that we work with the Children's and Young Peoples Partnership Board</li> <li>• Develop closer links with the Children's Social Care Division to make sure we work effectively together, carry out our duties towards young people and make sure that we protect young people from risk, abuse and neglect</li> </ul>
Being in poverty and debt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make it easier for people to access help and the benefits they are entitled to by working more closely with other agencies and making sure we can give people helpful advice</li> <li>• Provide a full list of services that are available to help people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless</li> <li>• Help people to develop the skills they need so that they can look after their home when we give them a new tenancy. This is especially important for young people</li> <li>• Work closely with other agencies to make sure that we improve our knowledge of the services each agency provides</li> <li>• Make sure that people have access to Housing Options services early enough to help prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Create a special fund called the 'Prevention Pot' to use and use Discretionary Housing Payments to help people from becoming homeless</li> </ul>
Being addicted to drugs or alcohol, leading to being evicted or young people being asked to leave home by their parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more accommodation with support to help people to rebuild their lives</li> <li>• Make it easy for people to get access to 'floating support' services: these are support services available to people wherever they live</li> <li>• Provide more information and give clearer information about where people can get the help they need</li> <li>• Improve the way we work to make sure that people who are ready to move into their own home are able to do so, and so that they do not take up spaces in supported accommodation when they no longer need support</li> <li>• Reduce 'exclusion' rules so that people with drug or alcohol problems can get access to the support they need</li> </ul>

<p>Having mental health problems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve information on the services that are available</li> <li>• Improve communication and close working between agencies that can help to make sure that people can get the help they need, and that agencies are able to refer people to other agencies that can help</li> <li>• Provide more support and more supported housing</li> <li>• Improve the way the homelessness team assess vulnerability, and make sure the team have access to medical professionals when they make these assessments</li> </ul>
<p>Having difficulty living independently</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide advice and support to people early enough so that they can get the right help when they need it most</li> <li>• Make sure that all agencies have enough information so that people can be told what help is available and how to get it the first time they ask for help</li> <li>• Provide a good quality housing advice centre that is easy for people to get to, where people can come for help and advice (and where staff are trained to help people in any housing difficulty and not just those people who are homeless and in urgent need)</li> </ul>
<p>Offenders not having help and advice about what to do about their housing situation when they are released</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree ways of working with prisons and probation so that we know who may need help and are able to help them before they are released from prison</li> <li>• Provide housing help and advice to people while they are still in prison, including housing options interviews with inmates</li> <li>• Make sure that there is more information about housing options and more advice available on our website</li> <li>• Work with RSLs to review their exclusion rules and make sure that we can still work together to prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Make sure that the Homelessness team and Housing Options team are able to link the work that they do to other work that is already done with offenders to improve the information available to them before they are released</li> </ul>
<p>Not assessing people's needs early enough to prevent a housing crisis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure that services are well publicised and easy for people to access</li> <li>• Make sure that we ask customers for feedback on our services so that we can make improvements</li> <li>• Continue to review and improve the information available to customers, and review and increase the number of places that customers can access information</li> <li>• Monitor our homeless prevention services and keep information on how many people we manage to prevent becoming homeless and how we do this. Make sure we share this information with customers and partners through groups like the Homelessness Forum</li> </ul>

<p>Parents, families and friends who are not willing or not able to have people living with or continue living with them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure more people have access to mediation services to help when relationships become difficult and that could prevent someone having to leave home</li> <li>• Promote different housing options for people who are coming to us for help (like private rented housing)</li> <li>• Use 'best practice' ideas from other local authorities to develop a system of home visits</li> <li>• Make sure that people applying for housing understand that the housing register is the only way to get access to social housing in Stoke-on-Trent and make sure that the Housing Options team work with people to get this message across. (For more information on the housing register and social housing in Stoke-on-Trent, please see the Allocations Policy user guide)</li> </ul>
<p>Relationship breakdown</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure that mediation services are available to help the people involved and to make sure that the situation does not become threatening</li> <li>• Make sure that Housing Solutions staff are able to give advice to people and refer them to specialist legal services to help people stay in their own home if they want to</li> </ul>
<p>Experiencing violence, harassment, intimidation or threats</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote a range of services for people who are facing violence or threats of violence and make sure that help and advice is easily available</li> <li>• Publicise information about help and support services in a range of posters and leaflets available in various places across the City</li> <li>• Introduce a 'Sanctuary Scheme' for people who have experienced domestic abuse. This is a special housing scheme to add security to a persons home so that they are more protected and feel safe</li> <li>• Make sure that all staff, especially those who work at contact points like telephone and reception, are trained so that they can give basic advice and help people find legal services and support services</li> </ul>
<p>Losing a rented home (because the tenancy has ended, or for other reasons)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue working with private landlords through the 'Landlord Accreditation Scheme' to help raise standards in private rented housing in Stoke-on-Trent</li> <li>• Support landlords who are dealing with housing management issues through the 'Landlord's Forum'</li> <li>• Give landlords incentives to encourage them to take part in council run schemes (like the Rent Deposit Scheme) and to offer housing to people who are on housing benefit</li> <li>• Help tenants who are in danger of being evicted because of rent arrears</li> <li>• Make sure we refer people to support services (like debt counselling services and other help or support services) as soon as possible</li> <li>• Improve tenancy support services and make sure people have access to these services if they need them</li> </ul>
<p>General issues that can cause someone to become homeless</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the way we work together with other agencies and the way that services link together</li> <li>• Improve support services that aim to prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Make sure that all services aim to try to prevent homelessness</li> </ul>



We have used the possible causes for homelessness (listed as 'problems' in the table above) to influence the Homelessness Strategy. We have taken the suggested actions shown in the table and used them to develop an Action Plan for the Strategy. The Action Plan is the plan we will use to make sure that we deliver the aims of the Homelessness Strategy. This Action Plan will be reviewed and updated every year.

We collected, reviewed and used the information from this feedback in developing the final version of this Homelessness Strategy. We gave final copies of the strategy to chief officers and asked for their comments and approval. When we had included these comments, we took the Strategy to the Elected Members and asked them to approve the document. Elected Members approved the Homelessness Strategy in September 2007.

The full Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan is available by email or on CD from the Housing Solutions Service. If you would like a copy, please email [housingadvice@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:housingadvice@stoke.gov.uk) or telephone 01782 233696. If you would like a printed copy of the Strategy and Action Plan, or need them in a different language or different format (like large print), please call or email, using the contacts given above, or write to Housing Advice Centre, South Wolfe Street, Stoke, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 4AB.

