

Homelessness Prevention Strategy

December 2008



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Ensuring that homelessness is only an event in someone's life and not a way of life.

The Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) took ownership of the 80,000 homes formerly owned by Glasgow City Council in March 2003. Around 65,000 properties are currently tenanted and managed by 62 Local Housing Organisations (LHOs).

Glasgow Housing Association has a legal duty to assist the local authority to discharge its responsibilities under the homelessness legislation. We take our statutory responsibilities very seriously.

Our vision is to ensure that homelessness is only an event in someone's life and not a way of life. As the biggest Registered Social Landlord in Scotland, Glasgow Housing Association accepts that we have a responsibility to ensure that the process for customers who are homeless is seamless and that the outcome for those who have to take this route is positive.

- GHA will work to prevent homelessness, embedding this in our policies and processes.
- We will assist the Council to minimise the impact of homelessness where it does occur.
- We aim to ensure that prevention of homelessness is central to our service delivery.
- We will make a significant contribution to ensure that Glasgow City Council achieves its 2012 target to provide a home for every homeless household.
- Preventing homelessness and, in particular repeat homelessness, will be key to meeting the 2012 target.

There is no statutory requirement for us to produce a Homelessness Prevention Strategy. However we have chosen to do so, recognising that organisations with a clear strategy have closer links with a wider range of agencies than those with no strategy. In addition, we view our Homelessness Prevention Strategy as a pivotal document, which will set out key actions to prevent the incidence and trauma of homelessness in our city and assist the local authority to positively discharge its duty.

We work with other agencies to meet community and social needs. Increasingly services are being delivered in partnership with other agencies. We work closely with Glasgow City Council, the NHS Glasgow and Clyde Health Board, the Community Planning Partnership and Community Health and Social Care Partnerships, other RSLs and voluntary agencies to ensure that services are co-ordinated and complementary.

This strategy sets out how GHA will contribute to meeting the homelessness objectives of its partners within our available resources. GHA has a number of related strategies, plans, policies and statements of best practice. This homelessness prevention strategy will make the links between these and set out how we will make a difference to the lives of people who experience homelessness and how we will prevent homelessness by assisting people to remain in the home they rent from us. Actions arising from this strategy will be embedded in the culture of the organisation and in every day service delivery.

2. STRATEGY IN CONTEXT

2.1 Criteria for eligibility

Local authorities accept households as homeless when they meet the statutory criteria of being eligible for assistance; unintentionally homeless and falling within a priority need group. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 strengthens the rights of homeless households. The Scottish Government has set a national objective for Councils in Scotland of ensuring that all unintentionally homeless households will be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012.

The 2003 Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act also gives Scottish Ministers powers to alter, reverse or suspend the local connection test. In addition, local authorities will be required to offer a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy for a minimum of 12 months where a household has been assessed as intentionally homeless and in priority need. Glasgow City Council aims to provide a home for every homeless household by 2012.

Glasgow currently receives nearly a third of Scotland's homelessness applications. Clearly this is significant since 12% of Scotland's population lives in Glasgow. Homelessness is linked to high levels of poverty, unemployment, problematic drug and alcohol use and family breakdown and this is clearly reflected in the profile of applicants to Glasgow City Council. A significant number of homeless people are, therefore, vulnerable with complex needs beyond housing.

There is also clear evidence that homelessness in itself can impact on health and family cohesion due to lack of appropriate temporary accommodation and difficulties in accessing mainstream universal services such as health and education.

The homeless population tend to have a higher incidence of the following than the population as a whole:

- Physical and/or mental health problems
- Substance misuse
- Unemployment
- Basic skills needs
- Dyslexia and other learning difficulties
- Experience of sexual or physical abuse
- Have spent time in care
- Have spent time in the armed forces
- Experience of the criminal justice system
- Relationship breakdown
- Problems accessing welfare benefits.

Without effective support, (e.g. secure tenancies, access to the right support and medical services), this can lead to:

- Loss of self esteem
- Becoming institutionalised
- Deterioration of mental and physical health
- Increase in substance misuse
- Loss of ability and will to care for oneself
- Increased danger of abuse and violence
- Increased chance of entering the criminal justice system
- Development of behavioural problems
- Repeat homelessness

Glasgow Housing Association has been instrumental in assisting Glasgow Homelessness Partnership to improve outcomes for customers and our programme of change is having an impact across the city through improved quality of our homes and targeted support. We have jointly reviewed Homelessness process to improve the outcomes for homeless customers. While there are areas where work needs to continue to expand around prevention and sustainability, the direction is extremely positive.

Over the past five years, the Glasgow Homelessness Partnership Strategy has been focused on closing the large scale council hostels by providing alternative supported accommodation; to ensure support for service users is available to live more independently; to provide access to more appropriate accommodation, care and support; and to prevent homelessness by providing information, advice and support.

Over the next three years, the Council intends to shift its focus to tackling homelessness in the round. We will continue to support Glasgow City Council with this programme of work to tackle homelessness.

2.2 Trends in homelessness

Although homelessness applications have fallen in Glasgow in recent years, they still remain significantly higher than in the rest of Scotland. According to the Council's latest figures 9,904 applications were made in 2007/08, a reduction of 5.4% from the previous year. The number repeat applications have also dropped significantly. The Council acknowledges that the reduction in presentations may be due in part to improvements in prevention measures.

In some cases, homelessness problems are resolved before or during assessment by the Council's community casework service. In 2007/08 around 26% of homelessness assessments in Glasgow resulted in a referral to a housing association. The majority of these were made to GHA and in 2007/08 GHA let over 1,300 properties to homeless households referred by GCC. This represented 23% of our lets. We are awaiting confirmation from the Homeless Partnership of the total number of lets and referrals to other RSLs for 2007/08. However, in 2006/07 GHA had 61% of the social rented stock in Glasgow and housed two-thirds (65%) of all Section 5 referrals.

The Council estimates that the number of lets for homeless households should increase to just under a third of all social lets overall, with GHA's share increasing to some 1,700 lets per year. GHA has agreed to let up to 40% of lets to households experiencing homelessness for 2008/09 in order to clear the backlog of cases in temporary accommodation and to increase lets to statutory homeless households to 33% by 2012. The recently published GHA City-wide Letting Plan sets out our letting projection until 2012.

The number of people re-housed from clearance and other managed lets stays fairly constant through the next five years at 20 percent, to meet statutory commitments and the needs of the regeneration programme.

We expect the number and proportion of lets to housing needs cases, including people with medical needs, overcrowding and unsatisfactory housing conditions to be 20 percent per year. The proportion of lets to general list cases has a target of 20 percent in 2008/09. This will increase to 30 percent in 2009/10 and then decline slightly. (See Table 1)

Table 1: Letting projection by GHA homechoice category

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Cat A - GCC referrals	40	30	32	33
Cat B - Housing need	20	20	20	20
Cat C - General list	20	30	28	27
Clearance/ managed lets	20	20	20	20
Sheltered	2	2	2	2
	100	100	100	100

Source: GHA City-wide Letting Plan

The importance of our work on prevention and addressing inequalities in communities are key priorities in our future work plan and will build on The Community Health and Care Partnerships. This strategy sets out a clear vision of helping to eradicate homelessness in the city, placing much greater emphasis on taking effective measures to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place.

GHA have reviewed our end to end process for Homelessness, eliminating waste to ensure that the process for our customers is seamless.

GHA have reviewed our rent policy and procedure to ensure that we give our customers quality information and advice. The Statements of Best Practice on prevention of Homelessness and Joint Working will assist with this aim.

The Homelessness (Scotland) etc Act 2003 places a duty on Landlords and requires all landlords, other than local authorities and creditors to notify the relevant local authority when they raise repossession proceedings or serve other notices. This is intended to alert local authorities to households at risk of homelessness and to enable them to respond

to prevent homelessness either on an individual basis or by reassessing their strategic approach.

To date, Section 11 has not been implemented, but the Scottish Government issued a consultation paper towards the end of 2006 on this section of the Act. A statutory instrument was laid before the Scottish Parliament in October 2008 with a view to implementing Section 11 from 1 April 2009.

Prevention is the key to this strategy; we are aiming to avert sending our customers through the homelessness route if we can suit a customer to a home at the first point of contact. This will stop our customers being stigmatised with the label of “homeless”. There are real social and economic costs to sending customers through the Homeless route and we aim to limit these wherever possible.

This strategy also seeks to establish a more effective approach to helping people who do become homeless viewing this from the customer’s perspective of the service and learning from their experience. Focussing on addressing the underlying problems that caused their homelessness will be essential.

2.3 Tenancy sustainment

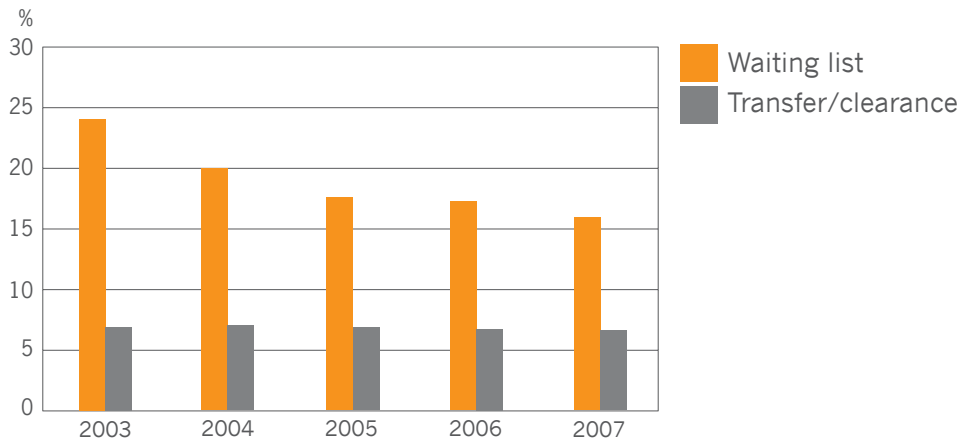
One of the issues of concern to both GHA and GCC is the high rate of tenancies that are terminated within a year of let. High rates of early termination are also problematic for the tenants concerned and for the communities affected. In addition, early terminations cause additional cost for GHA in terms of rent loss and repairs. Every tenancy termination costs GHA an average of £1,328, as well as the staff costs associated with reletting. Many early terminations cause work for other agencies, such as GCC, as such households are likely to present as homeless.

To assess the under-lying problems, GHA and GCC jointly commissioned research by Herriot Watt University to assess the reasons for ‘early tenancy termination’. In 2003, a quarter of lets to homeless and waiting list applicants broke down within a year. Many tenants simply abandoned their tenancies or handed in the keys without giving a reason. The research found that single people and those with community care needs were most at risk of tenancy breakdown. Other risk factors included lack of furniture, debt problems and lack of social support.

Both GHA and GCC have put considerable emphasis on staff training and joint working to increase staff awareness of the support needs of vulnerable tenants. Some LHOs have made concerted efforts to improve tenancy sustainment rates through changes in housing management practice. We have now reviewed all housing management processes from the customer’s perspective but with tenancy sustainment at the heart of our business these include new letting guidelines, and rents and a review of the Statements of Best Practice on Joint Training and local liaison arrangements.

Overall, this has resulted in a slow but steady improvement in early termination rates since 2003. Early termination rates among waiting list and homeless referrals have been steadily reducing from 24 per cent of lets in 2003 to 17 per cent of new tenancies in 2007.

Figure 1 – Early termination rates by applicant type 2003-2007



Early termination rates of people rehoused through the transfer list or through clearance remained fairly constant at around 7 per of lets between 2003 and 2007. (See figure 1)

There has been downward trend in early terminations in all household types, with the most significant reductions in households with two or more adults and families with children. However, there has been only a slight reduction in early termination rates among young single people and young single parent households. We therefore need to focus specific attention on these two groups of households. Our Statements of Best Practice on Young People Leaving Care, Domestic Abuse, Child protection, Homelessness Protocol, and Prevention of Homelessness capture the issues around this client group and ensure outcomes are realistic and positive.

2.4 Eviction

Within GHA, eviction is only a minor reason for tenancy termination, accounting for less than 6% of tenancy terminations. As a result of recent work, in taking a common systems common sense approach to eviction the number of possession actions that we raise, and evictions actually carried out has been falling. We aim to use repossession actions only as a last resort and to keep evictions to a minimum, using all alternative measures available, including welfare benefits advice, rent payment campaigns and working closer with our colleagues in housing benefit to address the issue of a section 5 referred household requiring only to complete a change of circumstance form and to work with GCC to limit arrears when a customer leaves a temporary furnished flat and moves into a permanent tenancy with rent arrears accruing. The Statements of Best Practice on sharing of information and prevention of homelessness and our new homelessness process

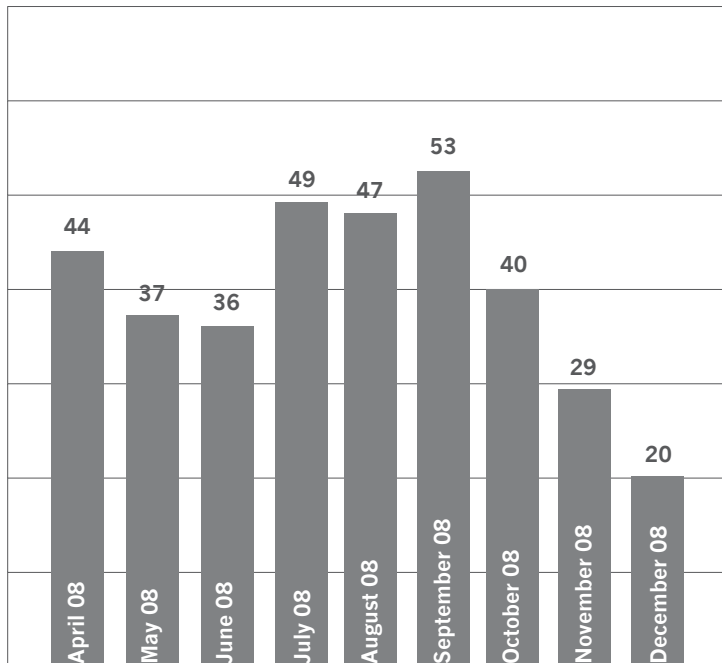
addresses these issues. Our Service Level Agreement with GCC on Housing Benefit also seeks to prevent homelessness.

Figure 2 – Number of tenancies ended by eviction April 2007 to Oct 2008

2.5 Achievements

GHA's commitment to working in partnership with the Council and other agencies can be demonstrated by a number of initiatives already taken or currently in place which are critical in helping to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness:

- The GHA contract with the Council to supply 1,600 flats for use as temporary furnished flats for homeless people.
- A further contract to supply 1450 flats for asylum seekers and up to 400 flats for people granted leave to remain.
- Over 2,500 GHA tenants benefit from the Furnished Let Service;



- Publication of a suite of homelessness policies.
- Joint training with homelessness case workers;
- Development and review of the Homelessness Duty Protocol, which sets out the joint working arrangements between GCC and GHA. This protocol has now been extended to include all RSLs in the city.
- Review of a series of Statements of Best Practice covering a range of related issues including young people, domestic abuse and preventing homelessness.
- Development and implementation of a Joint Statement of Best Practice on care leavers to ensure that they receive appropriate accommodation and support
- Inclusion of preventative measures in the GHA Allocation Policy, such the possibility of management transfers for people suffering domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour and

harassment.

- Production of an Information and Advice Pack for refugees, with GCC and other Development of the GHA Resource Directory, providing details of support and advice agencies as a tool for staff and tenants
- Piloting of pre tenancy training schemes
- Support for local initiatives, through the GHA Wider Action team including projects such as FabPad and Starter Packs

The above achievements can be demonstrated by our joint working in developing 13 Statements of Best Practice, our wider action initiatives and strategies on.

2.6 Links to other strategies

National

Preventing and tackling homelessness is central to the Scottish Executive's strategy for providing routes out of poverty and disadvantage and promoting economic inclusion. This strategy reflects the Scottish Government Code of Guidance on legislation, policies and practices to prevent and resolve homelessness (2005).

City-wide

The Homelessness Prevention Strategy needs to link closely with the Council's overall objectives and other strategies, which aim to reduce vulnerability and improve people's lives. This Homelessness Preventions Strategy does not sit in isolation. It supports and feeds into to other key GHA documents as detailed below: These include:

- Glasgow Homelessness Partnership Strategy for Preventing and Alleviating Homelessness in Glasgow
- Joint Community Care Plan/Extended Local Partnership Agreement 2004/2007
- Local Housing Strategy 2005-2008 and Local Housing Strategy Investment Priorities update 06/07.

GHA strategies:

- **Housing and Community Care Strategy:** The GHA Board approved a Housing and Community Care Strategy in 2006, which was produced in partnership with Glasgow City Council, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Board and voluntary agencies.
- **Customer Service Strategy:** The GHA Customer Service Strategy aims to deliver excellence by putting our customers, teams and people at the heart of everything we do. We will provide a consistently high quality, responsive service that is accessible. We will work to achieve this through our front line services and in partnership with other agencies across Glasgow.
- **Equality and Diversity Strategy:** The GHA Equality and Diversity Strategy sets out our legal and moral responsibilities in ensuring equality of opportunity, equal access and a high standard of service provision for all our customers. All of these principles apply to every GHA function.
- **Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy:** Our Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy sets out how we will work with our partners strategically and local to tackle tenancy sustainment and sustainable communities.

- **Neighbour Relations Strategy:** The Neighbour Relations Strategy sets out how we will deal with anti-social behaviour, including preventing people from becoming homeless by supporting the victims of anti-social behaviour and preventing anti-social behaviour.
- **Housing Support Strategy:** Our Housing Support Strategy sets out the needs of vulnerable groups, tenancy sustainment issues and the aims of the Housing Support Service.
- **Rent Payment and Debt Strategy:** This Rent Payment and Debt Strategy aim to be comprehensive and holistic in its approach. We aim to prevent homelessness and use legal action as a last resort, where all other options have been exhausted.

3. OUR VISION, AIMS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

3.1 Our vision

Our vision is to ensure that being homeless is an event in someone's life and not a way of life. As the biggest Registered Social Landlord in Scotland, Glasgow Housing Association accepts that we have a moral responsibility to ensure that the homeless process for customers is seamless and that the outcome for our customers who have to take this route is positive.

GHA will work to prevent homelessness, embedding this in our processes and will assist the Council to minimise the impact of homelessness where it does occur.

- We aim to ensure that prevention of homelessness is central to our service delivery.
- We will make a significant contribution to ensure that Glasgow City Council achieves its 2012 target to provide a home for every homeless household.
- Preventing homelessness and, in particular repeat homelessness, will be key to meeting the 2012 target.

This is supplemented with the development of the Homelessness protocol.

3.2 Our aims

In achieving this vision we require to understand the needs of those who become homeless as well as those who may be at risk of homelessness. It requires us to work together in partnership and share responsibility to co-ordinate the delivery of services that are needed. It requires housing professionals to be listened to and valued by Care and Support providers. Care and Support providers must understand that rent payment is not an option.

A key focus is to work with all our partners to improve peoples understanding of homelessness and of their housing options, rights and responsibilities.

We aim to demonstrate in practice our commitment to helping homeless households:

- GHA will proactively assist any customer who is having difficulty keeping their home to have access to the services and support that can help them to avoid becoming homeless.
- All customers affected by homelessness will be treated at all times with respect, dignity and compassion
- Anyone who needs a home can get help to secure one that meets their needs and choices
- The needs of vulnerable households for care and support are met in ways that prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness. Our statement of best practice on housing with support outlines how we aim to do this.
- GHA will continue to work in Partnership with Glasgow City Council to ensure customers get access to temporary accommodation when they need it.
- GHA will work with the Homelessness Partnership to extend opportunities for

personal, social and economic inclusion to all affected by homelessness.

- GHA will ensure that our policy and planning decisions are open and transparent and can be influenced by customers affected by homelessness.
- GHA will embed the prevention of homelessness in all our operational processes, in particular in relation to child protection.
- GHA will work to improve the health of homeless customers and deliver effective high quality services while doing everything we can to reduce health inequalities.
- GHA will work to promote and assist Homeless customers through our wider action initiatives, connecting customers to services and advice which provides opportunities for education, training and employment needs to be met.

3.3 Strategic Objectives

Our strategic objectives are to:

- Prevent individuals and families from experiencing homelessness
 - Work with the Glasgow Homelessness Partnership to give quality service provision for those that are homeless, addressing the wider causes of homelessness and impact on individuals and households
 - Ensure equal access to services and housing, irrespective of race, gender, disability, age or sexual orientation
 - Ensure that appropriate accommodation and support is timely and sustained and is based on need.
1. Promote independence, life chances and opportunities, living independently and preventative measures for homelessness.

4. WHAT MATTERS TO OUR CUSTOMERS?

4.1 Customer Views

We aim to ensure that we seek the views of all our customers, in developing policies and strategies that affect them. This includes people who are risk of homelessness or have used our homelessness services. Our research on Tenancy Sustainment, which included interviews with tenants, informs this strategy. Customers told us that we needed to work more closely with partners to prevent people from ‘falling through the gaps’. They said that we could provide better advice and information and simple forms of support, such as help with completing forms, provision of basic furniture and early visits. Tenants in arrears need early personal contact and positive advice on how to manage budgets. They stressed the importance of looking at individual needs and access to appropriate support and services. WE have taken these views on board.

4.2 Prevent individuals and families from experiencing homelessness

- GHA will work jointly with the Council and other RSLs to prevent homelessness occurring where this is possible and reasonable.
- GHA and RSLs will work with GCC to raise awareness of best practice in homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment.

Local authorities have a duty to ensure that there are information and advice services to prevent homelessness. GHA is assisting the Council by developing information and advice services through training and accreditation to the National Housing Information and Advice Standards (Homepoint). We have started this process in the north east of the city and will roll-out across the city over the next two years. GHA have also signed up to the Statement of Best practice on joint training.

Where GHA becomes aware that a tenancy may fail, every effort will be made to obtain appropriate support to prevent homelessness occurring. This must be the right support at the right time and identifying risks and protective factors to prevent homelessness. We will aim to have a range of workable solutions for individuals and households based on best practice, including our Statement of Best Practice on Housing with support and our productive working relationships with the Community Health and Care Partnerships to develop these roles and deliver real individual solutions for households threatened with homelessness.

We aim to maximise customers’ income to ensure all are in receipt of their correct benefits. Financial inclusion will lead to customers having options to address their housing needs. We will ensure that customers threatened with homelessness have access to Welfare Benefits advice and assistance and ensure that advice services are promoted to all potentially homeless customers. We will work with our partners in GCC Revenues & Benefit Centres through our Service Level Agreement to ensure Housing Benefit is claimed where this is appropriate.

We have reviewed and streamlined our processes for rent arrears and debt to prevent possible homelessness by establishing early contact and identification of the causes of difficulties. We have a corporate approach to tackling rent arrears and debt to avoid homelessness where possible. GHA will only raise proceedings for recovery of possession where the tenant has persistently failed to respond to correspondence, keep to financial

arrangements or engage with LHO staff. Our staff will adhere to the Joint Statement of Best Practice on Sustaining Tenancies and Preventing Homelessness. We expect our partners to do the same. They will make formal contact with Community Health and Care Partnerships (CHCPs) to request a joint discussion of the case. The purpose of the discussion is to explain to the tenant the seriousness of the problem, explore the causes and develop a plan of action to prevent eviction. The joint discussion will also assess the impact of eviction on children and other vulnerable family members.

We will promote practical and effective partnerships to share and build upon combating problems of debt, isolation and promote social and financial inclusion. Better understanding of roles and responsibilities for customers and agencies.

We will also improve recording of reasons that tenancies end or fail and through this identify the needs of customers and what gaps there are in service delivery. We will work with other agencies to plug these gaps.

4.3 Work with Glasgow Homelessness Partnership to give quality service provision for those that are homeless, addressing the wider causes of homelessness and its impact on individuals and households.

Ensuring homeless customers have stable and suitable homes is a critical factor in addressing the wider issues. Over the years it has been documented that housing is key and vital for people to gain employment, engage with health services, for children to maintain consistent attendance at school and to benefit from wider opportunities in communities.

We will aim to ensure that all our customers threatened with homelessness receive timely interventions will aim to house households without the stigma of homelessness that will reduce the stress and trauma of homelessness. We will do this by ensuring our service delivery is effective and available at the right time and in the right place for all customers. We will work with Glasgow Homelessness Partnership to ensure that our customers to have a seamless, bureaucracy free positive experience from the initial point of contact until and beyond suitable accommodation is found. An example of this is our new Homelessness process that was developed jointly with the Glasgow Homelessness partnership.

GHA is committed to working towards meeting the interim target and the 2012 target of ensuring that all households who are homeless have access to settled accommodation. Glasgow's Homelessness Partnership greatest challenge in this area is the access to permanent accommodation in the social rented sector.

GHA has agreed an increased target of 40% of new lets to households experiencing homelessness in 2008/09, to clear the backlog of cases in temporary accommodation and to increase the proportion of lets to Section 5 to 33% by 2012. This reflects GHA's commitment to work more closely with the Council in meeting its strategic objective. This also includes changing the way Section 5 referrals are managed within GHA so that this is managed by a central team.

We will aim to provide customers with suitable and safe accommodation that meets their requirement. We will use SMART technology to assist with this, in particular for customers fleeing violence, harassment or anti-social behaviour. Budget provision is in place for 2009/10 to develop this new programme.

We aim to promote workforce development to ensure the right people are in the right posts with the right skills to meet the demands of the wide range of customers who may experience difficulties with their housing and to ensure that customers receive the best possible assistance from a professional service.

We are committed to having a trained and professional workforce that understands the issues around homelessness and security of tenure. GHA has recently commenced a programme to train staff to the Homepoint National Standards for Housing Information. We are also working with the Chartered Institute of Housing to help staff attain the Certificate in Professional Practice.

4.4 Ensure equal access to services and housing, irrespective of race, gender, disability, age or sexual orientation

A key objective in Glasgow's Local Housing Strategy is the need to ensure that availability of housing is based on assessed need, that there is equal access to housing for different groups relative to needs, and allocation policies are efficient, effective, fair and user friendly and achieve the best possible match between needs and available housing. We have carried out an equality impact assessment of our services to homeless people.

4.4.1 Ethnic origin

One of the aims of GCC is to increase capacity and awareness of both services and information and advice resources about homelessness, housing, money, debt and legal advice for BME communities in the City. GHA will support and assist GCC to establish how individuals within the BME community prefer to access services. We have identified issues relating to Homelessness and rent payment with this customer group. GHA is involved in the development of the Scottish Government funded 'Happy to Translate' initiative. We have developed and implemented a telephone interpreting service and also produced our tenancy agreement in a number of community languages. Other key documents will be made available in other languages and formats on request. Our new letting guide should assist customers to understand the responsibilities of taking on a tenancy and good information and advice will be given to intervene and help at an early stage before problems spiral out of control.

An increasing number of migrant workers are applying to GHA for housing and GHA has offered a more secure and affordable option for migrant workers and is playing a key role in encouraging longer-term settlement. GHA will continue to support GCC in discharging legal responsibilities to A8/A2 nationals presenting as homeless. GHA will do what is required within the legislation to support A8/A2 Nationals who experience housing issues in conjunction with our partners.

Asylum seekers and refugees are recognised as a group who may have a range of community care needs. The arrival of asylum seekers is linked to ethnic and religious strife, civil war, political repression and human rights abuse elsewhere in the world. Asylum seekers may have suffered mental trauma and face language and cultural barriers. There are approximately 5,800 asylum seekers in Glasgow living in Glasgow Asylum Seeker Support Project accommodation, from around 30 different nationalities.

The NASS (National Asylum Seekers Service now part of the UK Borders Agency) contract has been extended for a further three years. GHA has a contractual responsibility to supply housing to GCC for asylum seekers for 1,450 units. In addition, up to 400 flats are required for use as temporary furnished accommodation by people with 'leave to remain'

status. The Joint Statement of Best Practice with the Council on Asylum Seekers and Refugees is being reviewed, along with the GHA policy.

In September 2007 the Home Office began a review of the historic backlog of asylum cases dating to before the Asylum and Immigration Act, 2004. There are some 450,000 cases throughout the UK, approximately 900 of which are in Glasgow. Currently approximately 80% of these cases are now being granted refugee status and their financial support, via the Home Office, is being terminated. The majority of these cases are living in houses provided by GHA under the contract to provide accommodation to GCC for asylum seekers.

GHA has worked closely with the Council to ensure that families are supported through this process to minimise the stress and anxiety of the change and ensure that the households receive a Scottish Secure Tenancy where this is what they wish. It is anticipated that there will be a further review of legacy cases by the Home Office – however no formal notification of this has been received as yet. It is anticipated that these cases will be managed in a similar way and GHA will continue to support the integration of refugees into the community. We will develop further partnerships with key agencies e.g. Scottish Refugee Council.

4.4.2 Gender

Women are more likely to earn less than men and experience poverty and multiple disadvantages. Women and children are more likely to suffer domestic abuse and child protection is also a critical issue. GHA and GCC have developed a robust Statement of Best Practice on Domestic Abuse and Child Protection to ensure that cases are managed appropriately. Our allocation and homelessness policies also stress homelessness prevention, but also dealing sensitively with customers who are experiencing violence, domestic abuse or harassment. During 2008/09, we will roll out training on these issues to all front-line staff and will also produce leaflets and posters advising customers of our approach.

GCC has agreed to implement a gender sensitive integrated model of accommodation and support for women in Glasgow with multiple and complex needs. It will involve reconfiguring the accommodation and assessment services for women who are homeless. The work will include redeveloping the women's hostel at Inglefield Street to provide emergency accommodation and an assessment centre. GHA will provide a number of properties which will provide more long-term resettlement accommodation for women. GHA will provide permanent housing for women affected by these issues through our section 5 referral process.

4.4.3 Age

GHA will, where possible, work with our partners to ensure older people have access to appropriate housing advice and health services in order that they avoid housing crisis and homelessness.

GHA is aware of issues around alcohol dependency and alcohol-related brain damage and older homeless people. We will continue to work with GCC Homelessness Partnership to assist with accommodation that will allow customers to continue to remain in their own home with the correct support or assist with customers moving on to more appropriate accommodation when they get older and more frail.

4.4.4 Services for young homeless people

GHA support the view of the Homelessness Partnership that the needs of young people

affected by homelessness are distinct from those of the rest of the adult homeless population. GCC will assist the Partnership to develop joint working arrangements with colleagues within the Children and Families Service in order to ensure robust service pathways for young people who previously have been looked after by the local authority and young people affected by homelessness.

GHA has worked with the Homelessness Partnership and other agencies to develop a Statement of Best Practice for Young People Leaving Care, which seeks to ensure care leavers, are appropriately supported to sustain new tenancies thus preventing drift into homeless.

GHA will work with partners to develop employment initiatives that will offer young people in transition access to mainstream tenancies and pre apprenticeship work experience through its in-house repairs team or contractors.

4.4.5 Sexual Orientation

Around one in ten people in Glasgow identify themselves as gay or lesbian. However, there is still a high level of intolerance in society and many lesbian and gay people face harassment and hate crime. GHA seeks to ensure that all its policies take account of gay and lesbian needs. In addition, we have developed guidance on hate crime and discriminatory harassment to ensure that cases are dealt with quickly and sensitively. Gays and lesbian relationships may also suffer domestic abuse and we have worked with partners to ensure that our Statement of Good Practice on domestic abuse is inclusive of all types of relationships.

4.4.6 Disability

Many of GHA's tenants have a disability or long-term illness. We recognise that disabled people face many barriers to every-day living including buildings, transport, information, education, and housing and job opportunities. There is shortage of adapted and purpose build accommodation in Glasgow for people with a disability and this also affects disabled people who become homeless. GHA has an adaptations programme which responds to identified need and will also ensure that all its ground floor new build properties meet Housing for Varying Needs standards, including some provision for wheelchair accessible housing.

GCC report that the demand for an occupational therapy service continues to be high and demonstrates the need for ongoing resource to meet the demands of the Homelessness Partnership. In developing our services, GHA are intending to employ two occupational therapist posts in the financial year 2009/10 to deal with more complex adaptations. This service will also be available for homeless people who are being allocated a GHA tenancy.

4.5 Ensuring appropriate accommodation and support is timely and sustained and is based on need.

We aim to work with the Homelessness Partnership to provide customers with choice in addressing their homeless needs. GHA aim to do this by maximising the use of Homechoice, our new Choice Based letting system. We will be adopting a new letting standard with the launch in January 09 that should help with the quality and increase the standard of home that a customer receives.

We aim to address neighbourhood disputes and community issues swiftly by encouraging all tenants to report anti-social behaviour problems and harassment and ensure that

staff are trained to provide advice and effective support. GHA has a specialist Neighbour Relations Team and a suite of policies and procedures to support LHOs to deal with more complex cases.

We will strive to assist GCC to maximise the use of supported housing and respond in a timely manner to customers' desires to live independently. We will work with GCC and agencies to help customers make the transition to permanent accommodation through participation in move-on strategies. We will use our SMART technology to assist with this.

GHA are working with our partner agencies including CHCPs, to establish systematic procedures for establishing the support needs of existing tenants and prospective tenants coming through the homeless route. We believe that early identification and intervention will ensure that the correct resources are targeted more effectively at those most at risk. We believe that customers who are most at risk should receive appropriate support, which is joined up with other agencies. This should result in improvements in tenancy sustainment.

We aim to give homeless people advice on how to access primary healthcare service when they take on a GHA home. Evidence shows that there is a high level of health needs amongst homeless people. GCC now have homelessness health services managed within the Homelessness Partnership following the restructuring of Health and Social Work Services in 2006.

GHA will work with agencies to ensure that the transition for our homeless customer is seamless and that they can access health services in the locality of their new home. We will expand our Resource Directory and encourage LHOs to develop local resource directories to help customers to access services and will implement robust monitoring arrangements to evaluate prevention and success of support.

GHA have been working in partnership with GCC and CHCPs to improve their work around child protection, and high- risk offenders. A Statement of Best Practice has been adopted in this area to ensure cases are managed through the social work system in an agreed best practice model. GHA has also participated in the development of the MAPPA protocol to house sex-offenders leaving custodial sentences appropriately.

Supporting tenants when they get a tenancy is an issue that has been raised by local housing staff; problems include not enough support or support withdrawn too early resulting in problems with the tenancy. This is mainly, but not exclusively, linked to addiction problems.

The Homelessness Addiction Team works closely with Community Addiction Teams to facilitate quicker movement of cases back into mainstream services. The range of supports offered by Community Addiction Teams to individuals who are homeless will range from information, support and advice through to support with physical health, prescribing and child care issues.

4.5.1 Housing options

Meeting housing need requires a comprehensive understanding of where demand is coming from; demand for housing varies according to demographic, economic and spatial factors. Affordable housing is intended to assist households who may otherwise be

struggling to have a home that meets their needs at a price within their means. GHA has a new build programme to assist with re-provisioning following the demolition programme. This programme seeks to ensure that the new build programme meets the needs of the community, in particular larger family homes and homes that are wheelchair adapted and accessible.

High house prices, increasing mortgage costs, the credit crunch and a growing demand for housing means many more households will experience problems in paying for their homes or finding a new home that better suits their needs. GHA is developing a range of housing options including shared equity, mortgage to rent and mid-market rental to meet a wider range of needs and demands.

4.5.2 Personal housing plans

To assist customers to choose which housing options will suit their needs, GHA is developing its Housing Information and Advice Service and achieve the Homepoint Standard over the next two years, all front-line staff will receive Homepoint training on housing options such as social housing providers, private landlords, different types of mortgage, mobility schemes and special needs housing. Staff will also be able to advise customers on housing benefit, debt, homelessness and harassment consistently across all service contact points. A future development in this area will be becoming a partner in the Single Shared Assessment process.

4.6 Promoting independence, life chances and opportunities, living independently and preventing homelessness.

4.6.1 Independence

It has been recognised that a number of homeless applicants and waiting list applicants fail in the early months of their tenancy. These have consistently been reported around financial and budgeting difficulties, social isolation and lack of basic skills for independent living. It is vital that high quality support is provided where necessary to ensure those households have the extra help in their home to live independently.

We will work with the GCC Homeless Partnership over the next year to develop and participate in the city wide Prevention of Homelessness Action Plan. This will include enhancing the service responses to vulnerable tenants and ensuring that joint working with colleagues across social work services, Community Health and Care Partnerships, Addiction Services, other RSLs and support agencies at a local level is well connected and delivering sustainable tenancies.

GHA already support a number of wider action activities that could assist homeless and vulnerable people. We will promote these projects to the homelessness partnership and to our own staff to facilitate an increase in uptake.

We will continue to expand our Furnished Let Scheme, making its terms more attractive and flexible. By offering varied furniture packages to customers we will be meeting customers' needs and aspirations and ensure that the cost of a package does not act as a disincentive to employment. GHA also supports furniture recycling schemes in the city and aims to signpost customers towards such services where a furnished let is not appropriate.

4.6.2 Employment

The Scottish Government action plan on social exclusion sets out a range of steps to tackle the causes of entrenched disadvantage. Its priority is to reach 1 million people at risk of social exclusion, who have not yet benefited from opportunities that the majority of people can take for granted.

Research undertaken by Shelter in 2007, indicates that there is some evidence linking unemployment and homelessness particularly around the issues of rent arrears and job loss. We believe that a sustainable home can lead to sustainable employment.

We will work with GCC Homelessness Partnership and support agencies to help customers' access opportunities for training, education, employment and volunteering when they first contact a service. We aim to positively change their life so that they feel secure, in control, have a sense of purpose, and become involved in a network of social relationships and work to achieve aspirations.

We wish to improve access to employment, training and volunteering opportunities as appropriate. We will aim to assist in this process with our wider action activities and work in partnership with agencies and current services to support or build upon services available across the city.

We will aim to refer customers to existing wider action activities; including Fab Pad, Peer Mentoring Programme, Happy Dayz advice project and other projects currently being piloted in specific areas of the city.

We want to lead and deliver on an enhanced housing options service. This service will provide more joined –up advice about all housing options and other areas such as training, employment and childcare. The theme here is to provide access to the right advice and support to help people get back into work and significantly improve lives. This moves away from the one-size fits all approach.

We will have more joined up working to target resources more effectively, achieving value-for money and best practice. With our partners we will identify good practice examples in helping homeless people find employment training and undertake work trials. This will lead to better outcomes for customers and prevent homelessness occurring in the future.

4.6.3 Structures to Deliver

GHA seeks to ensure that it has a co-ordinated and consistent assessment process to identify customer needs both at the stage leading up to allocating a new home and in relation to changing life circumstances. GHA needs to ensure that it:

- Centres activity around vulnerable people and their needs
- Supports people and their families to sustain tenancies successfully
- Supports people to move on appropriately
- Provides an advocacy and referral role within GHA so that people can access appropriate support
- Deals with “vulnerable” customers of Homechoice
- Strengthens linkages with specialist service providers such as Turning Point, Simon Community and Scottish Association for Mental Health

- Ensures co-ordinated activities with the Neighbour Relations Team and Wider Action projects
- Works with employability agencies to help people to return to employment, where this is possible
- Develops the use of smart technology solutions, supporting people to sustain independent living
- Provides value for money and business efficient professional services that people need and want.

In order to provide a more joined up approach, GHA is establishing a Housing Support Unit which would provide assistance to front-line housing staff and customers. This would integrate the Sheltered Housing Service with Furnished lets, Disabled Adaptations, Housing Alarms, and support to vulnerable applicants seeking housing through Homechoice. The unit would provide support to a range of tenants including homeless people, elderly people, and young vulnerable tenants, people with mental health problems and learning difficulties and ethnic minorities.

5. IMPROVING SERVICES FOR ALL

5.1 Moral responsibility

We aim to work together to ensure that being homeless is an event in someone's life and not a way of life. Glasgow Housing Association, as the biggest Registered Social Landlord in Scotland, accepts that we have a moral responsibility to ensure that the homeless process for customers is seamless and that the outcome for our customers having to take this route is positive.

We will work closely with GCC to assist in the prevention of homelessness, establishing best work practices and solutions for customers. We will monitor the implementation and success of these practices. We will help GCC discharge their homeless duty by assisting in preventing homelessness but also to ensure that we meet our targets for housing homeless households.

GHA welcomes GCC's commitment to shift the balance of care. The main focus of their commissioning strategy is towards provision of a broader range of homelessness issues that require appropriate purchased services. Emerging commissioning priorities, which require further development, include:

- Services for households with children
- Services for women
- Services for people who take illicit drugs and have no wish to stop using, but have significant support needs
- Services for young people with complex needs that prevent, divert and resettle people from homelessness
- Services for ex-offenders leaving custodial sentences.

5.2 Next Steps

There are a number of elements of this strategy to be undertaken to achieve our vision. These will need to be delivered as part of a phased programme and in partnership with GCC to ensure that gaps in provision are plugged through a variety of ways. Delivering the strategy will require us to base our actions on customers' requirements.

We will develop an action plan to meet the strategy in partnership with GCC and other Agencies, encompassing robust monitoring arrangements and effectiveness measures.

Actions to implement the strategy include:

- Ensuring that we let up to 40% of allocations to homeless people in 2008/09 in a variety of house types in a variety of areas to meet customer needs and choices
- Thereafter, to increase let to Section 5 referrals to 33% of lets by 2012
- Ensuring that all front-line housing staff can provide high quality information and advice through National Housing Information and Advice Standards (Homepoint) and CIH Professional Practice certification
- Roll out training for staff on child protection and domestic abuse

- Review our Furnished Let provision and in partnership with GCC explore the possibility of offering differing grades and costs of packages to meet customer needs and choices
- Early intervention for existing GHA customers experiencing problems; this can cover a range of services including; management transfers, welfare benefit and debt advice
- Developing the use of SMART technology for domestic abuse, harassment and anti-social behaviour
- Supporting tenants to get a house and employment, training and education, especially young people leaving care
- Putting into action the MAPPa protocol to house ex-offenders leaving custodial sentences appropriately
- Improving assessment of need and appropriate allocations
- Increased support and interventions to customers experiencing crisis
- Share with GCC better information on regeneration including demolitions, new build and wheelchair adapted stock and larger family homes
- Monitor the implementation of all Service Level Agreements, protocols, and SOBP to ensure compliance
- Regular Review of the Homelessness Protocol
- Regular Review of the Joint Statements of Best Practice related to Homeless issues including; Young People leaving Care and Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- Improving recording of the reasons for tenancy termination in order to identify customer needs
- Development of personal housing plans.

5.3 Monitoring and evaluation of the strategy

The strategy will be reviewed on a regular basis involving managers from all services. There will also be regular reports to the GHA Board to demonstrate the effectiveness of our approach.

Better homes, better lives

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