Youth Homelessness: A Review by the Housing Select Committee

Members of the Select Committee
Councillor Ami Ibitson (Chair)
Councillor Eva Stamirowski (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Alan Hall
Councillor Darren Johnson
Councillor Sam Owolabi-Oluyole
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Cllr Ami Ibitson

To be inserted

Cllr Ami Ibitson
Chair of the Housing Select Committee
Our review considered the steps being taken by the Council to improve its performance in terms of tackling youth homelessness, to match the best services in London. In relation to this, we focussed on the development of the Council’s youth homelessness strategy.

The following terms of reference were agreed for the review:

1. To review the draft youth homelessness strategy including its implementation and expected impact, taking into account:
   - best practice from a London borough recognised as being a ‘centre of excellence’ in youth homelessness
   - the views of local organisations working with homeless young people.

2. To identify specific actions that might be taken by the council to further enhance the youth homelessness strategy and improve the services provided to homeless young people.
Executive summary

Key findings to be outlined.

Recommendations to be summarised.
The review was delivered in the following way.

We considered a scoping paper for the review in November 2008, followed by two evidence gathering sessions in January and February 2009. These sessions involved:

Assessment of documentation: Officers provided us with comprehensive written information on all aspects of the new youth homelessness strategy, including a copy of the draft strategy. We also considered two case studies and received written evidence from council officers on the outcomes of a focus groups involving young people, including the Young Mayor and his advisers.

Questioning of officers: Officers attended the first evidence session to discuss the new strategy and answer our questions.

Questioning of external witnesses: Representatives from the London Borough of Southwark, the Marsha Phoenix Trust¹ and St Christopher’s Fellowship² attended the second evidence session to provide their views on the best approaches to tackling youth homelessness and answer our questions.

Specifically, the following written and verbal evidence was considered at each session:

Evidence session one:

- Written and verbal evidence from the Housing Needs Service and representatives from various services in the Children & Young People Directorate on the key priorities and actions within the draft youth homelessness strategy and the expected outcomes. In particular, the committee considered the three main strands of the strategy: (a) developing early intervention strategies; (b) providing appropriate accommodation options for young people; and (c) providing holistic services to young people to ensure all their needs (including access to health, education, training and employment services) are met.

- Two case studies of young people who had previously approached the Housing Options Service for information and advice – to allow Members to consider how the experiences of these young people might differ once the new strategy is fully implemented.

Evidence Session two:

- Verbal evidence from the London Borough of Southwark, the Marsha Phoenix Trust and St Christopher’s Fellowship on the best approaches to tackling youth homelessness and their views on the Council’s new strategy.

- Written evidence from council officers on the outcomes of the focus group involving young people, including the Young Mayor and his advisers.

Minutes of the two evidence sessions can be found at Appendices B & C. The draft Youth Homelessness is attached at Appendix D.

¹ The Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust is a Supported Housing Project, based in Lewisham, for single homeless young women aged 16 to 25, with two hostels in Lewisham. The organisation also assists hostel residents in gaining the skills needed to function independently in society.

² St Christopher's Fellowship is a children's charity that is also a housing association, providing a unique combination of care, accommodation, housing, education, training and support to children, young people and vulnerable adults.
A: Background

1. Lewisham faces a number of challenges in tackling homelessness. Homelessness is a significant issue in the borough and a large number of households (including 16 and 17 year olds) are accepted as homeless every quarter. At the start of our review we heard that, during the third quarter of 2008 (July - September 2008), 230 households in Lewisham were accepted as being homeless and in priority need and out of these 230 households, 27 households were 16 or 17 years olds made unintentionally homeless.\(^3\)

2. However, the Council has expressed its determination to improve its performance in terms of tackling homelessness to match the best services in London. In order to do this, the Housing Needs Service has been undergoing major change to enable it to focus much more on homelessness prevention and reducing the number of people living in temporary accommodation, including 16 and 17 year olds. Tackling youth homelessness is an important focus for the Council and the following actions in particular have been designated as key priorities for the Housing Needs Service in 2008/09:

   - implementing a new youth homelessness strategy and ensuring that (a) there are no 16-17 year olds in B&B accommodation and (b) young people are placed in appropriate supported housing
   - Creating a jointly funded Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) Team to provide assistance and advice to young people about their housing options and support needs.

3. Given the Council focus on improving homelessness services and the importance of tackling youth homelessness in particular, we decided to carry out a review into youth homelessness, focussing on the implementation and expected impact of the new youth homelessness strategy. Our aim was to identify specific actions that might be taken by the Council to enhance the strategy and further improve the services provided to young homeless people. We felt that the issue merited an in-depth review as the issue was:

   - **An issue of national importance** – the Government is committed to ending the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010; improving access to homelessness mediation across the country; and creating a national supported lodgings development scheme.

   - **A strategic or corporate priority for the Council and its partners** – addressing homelessness is an important strand of Lewisham’s Sustainable Community Strategy and a corporate priority; and a number of indicators in the Local Area Agreement relate to youth homelessness.

   - **Quality of service or performance issue** – this is a priority area for service improvement.

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\(^3\) Data source: Lewisham’s P1E return to DCLG
4. At the start of our review in November 2008, we noted that significant improvements had been achieved during 2008 and that levels of youth homelessness in the borough had been dropping overall since April 2004. We also noted that there were currently no young people in B&B accommodation, compared to 28 at the start of 2008 and 4 at the end of June 2008. However, although the numbers of 16 and 17 year olds accepted as homeless were dropping and were below the national average,\(^4\) we felt that the numbers were still high enough to be of concern. We were also mindful that (a) the numbers of young people coming to the Council for advice and assistance on housing issues remained high, with 16 and 17 year olds comprising over 50% of all enquiries from single households; and (b) the Council was keen to build on the successes achieved so far and accelerate the pace of change. Indeed, challenging targets had been set for reducing the levels of youth homelessness\(^5\). We therefore felt that a review into the action being taken to further improve the way in which youth homelessness was being tackled in the borough would be worthwhile.

5. We noted that the two key priorities for the Housing Needs Service for 2008/09, relating to youth homelessness, had been completed: drafting a youth homelessness strategy; and creating a jointly funded Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) Team, in order to address the challenges around homelessness and, in particular, youth homelessness. We were informed that the major focus of the youth homelessness strategy would be early intervention and that the newly created SHIP Team would play a very important role in the strategy, providing assistance and advice to young people about their housing options and support needs. Specialist Young People Assessment Officers (jointly funded by Children’s Social Care and Housing Needs) would work collaboratively with a number of other teams and services (Education, Youth Offending, Probation, Lewisham PCT, Teenage Pregnancy and Drug Action) in order to deliver tailored support to young people.

6. 16 and 17 year olds and young people aged between 18 and 20 who have formerly been in care have a priority need for accommodation under homelessness legislation (Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996). This means they must be secured suitable accommodation if they become homeless through no fault of their own. A relatively high number of young people are accepted by local authorities as being owed a main homelessness duty and many are placed in bed and breakfast accommodation\(^6\). Although the high numbers may reflect the fact that more young people are getting the help they need, the Government would like to see the number of young people accepted as homeless reduced.

7. The Government’s homelessness strategy *Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives*\(^7\) was published in March 2005 and as part of this strategy, the

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\(^4\) The national acceptance rate for young people (16/17 year olds and 18-20 year old care leavers combined) is 4,880 or 8% of acceptances for 2007-08. Lewisham’s acceptance rate for those two groups for 2007-08 was 7.2%. Data Source: CLG P1E statistical release 2007-08.

\(^5\) For example, the target for young people acceptances is 4 per month (9 were accepted in September 2008).

\(^6\) A total of 1140 young people were accepted as homeless in England in the second quarter of 2008 (April to June). See: [http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/xls/963636.xls](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/xls/963636.xls)

\(^7\) See: [http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/sustainablecommunitiessettled](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/sustainablecommunitiessettled)
Government, via the Department for Communities and Local Government, is working with local authorities and voluntary sector partners to:

- prevent vulnerable young people becoming homelessness, through early identification and intervention
- support homeless young people and those living in temporary accommodation to ensure their housing and wider support needs are met
- manage the transition of young people between temporary and settled accommodation to ensure continued access to the services they need.

8. In November 2006 the Government announced a specific package of measures to tackle youth homelessness. These included:

- a commitment to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by local housing authorities in discharging their homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds, by 2010
- improved access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation for young people), so that there is a general expectation of such services
- the creation of a new national supported lodgings development scheme providing accommodation, advice and mediation services for young people who can no longer stay in the family home.

9. Tackling youth homelessness is therefore a key priority for the Government.

**B: Youth Homelessness Strategy Priority One – Developing Early Intervention Strategies**

10. At our first evidence session in January 2009 we considered the first priority of the draft youth homelessness strategy: developing early intervention strategies. Tackling youth homelessness is not solely about providing appropriate accommodation for young people but working jointly with other services to prevent youth homelessness by intervening at an early stage. We noted that, in order to achieve this, the strategy recommended that the following actions were undertaken:

- Working with Social Care, Youth Services and the Youth Offending Services to develop and jointly commission early intervention services aimed at young people aged 12-16 years at risk of homelessness. (Studies have demonstrated that young people who have previously had involvement with services such as social care pre 16 years are more likely to become homeless).
- Consolidating existing funding for mediation services into one accessible service, jointly commissioned by housing, social care and the youth service.
- Developing and implementing joint protocols for referring families in temporary accommodation to children’s centres to ensure families are getting the support they need to feel secure.
• Development of a parenting support service for parents struggling to maintain their children at home.

• Development of a schools education programme to be delivered in schools in Lewisham to promote independent living skills and provide information on realities in moving out of home. (We noted that funding for this had already been obtained for 2009/10 to develop a peer education programme through South East London boroughs from the Department for Communities and Local Government).

• Training all frontline housing advice staff in Lewisham Information and Sharing Assessment (LISA) and Common Assessment Framework to promote more effective and earlier identification of needs.

• Improving access to information and advice for young people on their housing options. (We noted that this included developing a Lewisham Council leaflet regarding the housing options for young people in the borough and developing information on the Lewisham Council website).

• Producing a poster campaign in 2009 to raise awareness of youth homelessness in the borough.

• Implementing new IT systems at the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention Service and Housing Advice to improve qualitative and quantitative data on youth homelessness.

11. We considered the actions advocated by the strategy including the aspiration to develop a new mediation service, jointly commissioned by housing, children’s social care and the youth service, with the aim of preventing relationship breakdown between young people and their relatives. At our second evidence session in February we heard from Rebecca Long in relation to this proposal and noted her view that a robust mediation service was essential in order to prevent youth homelessness. We also heard that Southwark already ran a successful mediation scheme, although officers felt that there were still improvements to be made to this (outsourced) service and were looking at training existing prevention staff to undertake this role. In addition, we heard that the mediation service in Greenwich was also proving successful and could help in a number of unexpected ways (e.g. the service always did an income check on the family of the client presenting to make sure that the family is in receipt of all the benefits they are entitled to). However, we noted that funding for this initiative had yet to be identified.

12. The second proposal that we considered in detail, was the schools education programme, which would be rolled out in Lewisham in April 2009 (with the first sessions being delivered in September 2009). We noted that the scheme would be voluntary and would link into the citizenship element of the curriculum. The programme would be delivered by ‘peer educators’ - young people with current or recent experience of homelessness, who had undertaken a course to enable them to deliver sessions in schools. We also noted that information would be provided to teachers as well as pupils as they were often the first port of call for young people facing homelessness. Donna Kerr suggested that it was important to monitor where young homeless people came from (e.g. if particular schools were over-represented) as this would allow the programme to be targeted where it was needed most. However, we were informed that Lewisham had tracked homeless approaches last year and no specific trends regarding schools had been found. Nonetheless, specific schools would be targeted according to perceived
need. We noted with concern that the programme only had funding for one year. We also heard that more input from education officers in relation to the Schools Programme steering group would be beneficial and we hoped that this would be achieved.

13. We considered a suggestion by Rebecca Long that did not currently feature in the draft strategy – that it would be beneficial to offer young people ‘time out’ – a period of time away from home before a managed return. This suggestion was also endorsed by Donna Kerr.

14. It is our view that… Insert findings in relation to priority one.

**Recommendations:**

Insert recommendations in relation to priority one.

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C: Youth Homelessness Strategy Priority Two – Enabling young people to access appropriate accommodation and support to meet their needs

15. In relation to the strategy’s second priority, we considered the importance of ensuring that young people who present as homeless and who, unfortunately, are unable to return home are not accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation. We noted that it was essential to have access to appropriate supported housing to accommodate young people with varying degrees of support need. In order to ensure that the council had access to appropriate accommodation options and was in a position to provide appropriate support to homeless young people, we noted that the strategy proposed that the following actions should be taken:

- Further development of the Single Homeless Intervention & Prevention service as a one stop shop for advice and assessment of young people in housing need, including expanding the service to include the provision of employment surgeries for young people and access to training and educational advice.

- Completion of the review of young people’s supported housing service by March 2009.

- Development of 14 assessment beds for young people at St. Christopher’s Fellowship in order to provide emergency accommodation for young 16 and 17 year olds.

- Ensuring all young people have a children in need and housing support assessment.
• Exploring the option of developing supported lodgings as alternative to remand for young offenders and as an alternative to B&B.

• Increasing the support for young people to enter the private rented sector by potentially extending the remit of the current floating support service, Lewisham Reach.

• Ensuring all pregnant young people or any young people in B&B or other unsupported temporary accommodation are referred to floating support services.

• Commissioning research into the needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual & Transgender young people in borough and commissioning of services as appropriate.

• Working with the Leaving Care Team to ensure young people leaving care are given appropriate accommodation and support to lead independent lives.

16. At the first evidence session held in January 2009, we considered the role that would be played by the new, jointly funded Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) Team in supporting young people and helping them access appropriate accommodation. We noted that the team had been specifically created to provide assistance and advice to young people about their housing options and support needs and involved specialist Young People Assessment Officers (jointly funded by Children’s Social Care and Housing Needs) working collaboratively with a number of other teams and services (Education, Youth Offending, Probation, Lewisham PCT, Teenage Pregnancy and Drug Action) in order to deliver tailored support to young people. We welcomed this development. At the second evidence session in February 2009, we considered Richard Michael’s suggestion that a key factor in reducing homelessness was managing expectations and that, in relation to this, it was crucial that all professionals coming into contact with the young person ‘sang from the same song sheet’. We felt that the collaborative working in the SHIP team would help ensure this. We also noted Donna Kerr’s suggestion that it was crucial to make it clear to clients, when explaining housing options, that they would not be guaranteed housing and also try to get them to question whether social housing was something to aspire to. Donna had observed that many young homeless people had very high expectations and wanted, for example, to turn down flats without gardens. Again, the SHIP team would have a key role in ensuring that clients were realistic about their options.

17. We heard that the proposal to ensure that all young people presenting as homeless to the SHIP team had a ‘child in need assessment’ was already in place; and that this meant that the most vulnerable young people were identified, appropriate support services arranged and that either a return to family, or towards independence if rehabilitation was not possible, was facilitated. We welcomed this development. We also welcomed the news that there were currently 280 supported housing places funded by Supporting People in the borough and that, since July 2008, there had been no young people in bed and breakfast accommodation at the end of each month. We heard that this progress had been due to a number of initiatives including:

• The joint funding of 3.5 Youth Assessment Officer posts, funded by the Housing Needs Service and Children’s Social Care based at the SHIP Service. (The purpose of these posts was to focus on the early intervention and assessment of 16 and 17
year olds threatened with homelessness and the identification of suitable supported housing for them if they are unable to return home).

- Improved referral arrangements for emergency placements of young people at Farnborough House. (Farnborough House provides 14 emergency places for young people aged 16 and 17 years).

- Developing a protocol with InTouch Floating Support service to assess the needs of young people who are placed in B&B. (InTouch will provide support to the young person whilst they are in B&B and ultimately help move them on to more appropriate accommodation.)

18. We also heard that, since April 2008, the Housing Options Centre had had 32 presentations from 16/17 years old that were pregnant or had children. Twenty-three were provided with bed and breakfast accommodation and three of these households had two children or more. Whilst there were 54 supported accommodation places for teenage parents funded by Supporting People in the borough, there was significant demand for these units of accommodation. In order to ensure that these supported housing units were allocated to those most in need, we noted that all young people aged 16-21 years old who were pregnant or had children who presented to the authority as homeless also had a support needs assessment. We acknowledged that if these units were not available the Council had to accommodate the applicants in B&B. We noted that there were particular difficulties where teenage parents with more than one child were concerned, as all the supported accommodation options available in Lewisham only offered mother and baby units and therefore could not accommodate larger households. Therefore, if there were two children involved, the client would be accepted under the statutory duty and re-housed. However, we heard that the Supporting People team would be reviewing the provision of supported housing for young people and would explore ways in which the needs of young people could best be met, particularly in relation to the need for larger accommodation. We noted that Southwark’s provision had been reviewed by Supporting People and it had been confirmed that it had no high-support projects and that provision for people with high support needs needed to be improved. As a result a high needs support project was developed.

19. We considered other vulnerable client groups and noted that St Christopher’s could cater for people with high disability needs and also worked with young fathers. Donna Kerr reported that an examination of the exit forms completed when young people left supported accommodation suggested that Lewisham had clients with lower needs than neighbouring boroughs (e.g. Lambeth and Southwark). However, this could be because Lewisham was turning away some high needs clients because it was unable to accommodate them. In particular, as well as more provision for higher need clients in general, Donna felt that there needed to be more supported accommodation for vulnerable 18-21 year olds. We were therefore pleased that the Supporting People review would be considering provision for clients with high needs. We also noted that the new assessment centres at Farnborough House and Belmont Place would help ensure that clients’ needs were more accurately assessed and that clients would be more appropriately placed than they had been previously.

20. We also considered supported lodgings (where families let a room in their house to a young homeless person with support from the Council) and noted that this could be very beneficial and that supported lodgings had worked well in Southwark for people with lower needs. We noted that Lewisham currently offered this for care leavers and that
once the Supporting People young person’s review had taken place, the Council would consider extending this to young homeless people.

21. At the second evidence session in February, Rebecca Long reported that when 16/17 year olds were accepted as statutory homeless by Lewisham they could bid for housing even though, arguably, they were too young to be re-housed. They were also, sometimes, housed before 19/20 year olds who had been on the housing list for longer, due to their status and banding, which Rebecca felt was unfair. We noted the officer response that the Council’s new allocations scheme would help to address this issue. In addition, the new emphasis on prevention would see far fewer young homeless people accepted under the statutory duty, as another route would be taken, meaning that they were more likely to be placed in supported accommodation and offered their own flat at a much later stage as a ‘move on’ option. We also noted that, if the young person’s support worker felt that they were not ready for their own flat, they would not be offered one; and once in their own flat they would have access to a floating support package if required. In other words, an assessment approach would be followed (rather than a complete embargo on re-housing 16 and 17 year olds) and young people would only be housed once they had been assessed as being ready. Rebecca also suggested that there should be a mandatory course on resettlement/independent living (covering topics such as budgeting) before young homeless people were provided with their own flat.

22. We noted that Southwark was robust in terms of managing expectations in relation to social housing and made it clear to young people that private accommodation was the most likely option following their time in supported accommodation. We noted that this often meant that young people were placed in shared private accommodation with appropriate support (the single room rent provision which applies to under 25s means that young people cannot afford to rent their own flat but can only afford to move into a room in shared accommodation). We also noted that they were often housed in groups so that appropriate support could be offered. However, we recognised that shared accommodation was not always suitable and noted that Lewisham was not considering this option currently, as officers did not have the capacity to look at shared accommodation at present, although it might be considered in future. Although a proposal in the strategy was increasing the support for young people to enter the private rented sector, officers were also aware that the Council had taken the view that Lewisham might be open to legal challenge if it avoided taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty and then denied them the opportunity of social housing. This made the championing of private accommodation difficult.

23. It is our view that… Insert findings in relation to priority two.

Recommendations:

Insert recommendations in relation to priority two

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8 Prior to the establishment of the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) Service, a large number of homeless applications from 16/17 year olds were accepted, the use of B&B accommodation was widespread and social housing was often provided.
D: Youth Homelessness Strategy Priority Three – Co-ordinating services and tackling the wider causes of homelessness

24. It is well documented that once a young person is homeless it is difficult to access health services and maintain education or employment. We were therefore pleased that the draft youth homelessness strategy sought to address these issues and that the homelessness service would be looking to establish links with employment services to enable young people to access work and/or training and ensure that they could access health services to meet their physical and emotional needs. We noted that, in order to achieve this outcome, the following actions would be taken as part of the strategy:

- Continuing to work with its partners Connexions, Lewisham College and other schools to develop initiatives so young people feel engaged and can reach their full potential by removing the barriers to learning.

- Playing a role in strengthening the strong interaction between health, housing, social care and education, particularly in Sure Start areas and supporting new initiatives such as Family Learning and the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot project which is linked to Jobcentre Plus and New Deal initiatives.

- Developing employment surgeries for young people through the SHIP service as part of the wider objective to co-locate and integrate housing services with access to training, employment and benefit advice.

- Exploring whether there is funding available to develop a foyer in the borough. Since launching in 1992, the UK Foyer network has grown to over 130 local Foyers supporting more than 10,000 homeless 16 to 25 year-olds each year. (Foyers can provide a stable and secure community in which young people can support one another and achieve independence; help with finding appropriate employment, training or education to make this possible; training in basic skills and independent living skills; and help with finding permanent accommodation and ongoing support when the young person has left the Foyer).

- Developing referral protocols with Primary Care Trust for young people in supported housing or homeless accommodation to ensure access to health services.

- Ensuring health promotion activities are delivered in hostels and supported housing.

- Developing referral protocols and identify gaps in services for young people experiencing mental distress to improve emotional well being.

- Developing move on options for young people into social housing as part of allocations policy review.

- Working with young people and the housing management providers to design individual ‘life plans’ encompassing the attainment of life skills, tenancy management, training and employment to raise aspirations and maximise opportunities.

- Exploring the possibility of developing agreements with young homeless people seeking accommodation to commit to certain standards of behaviour, including staying out of
trouble, observing curfews, or starting and remaining in employment, training or education.

25. We felt that these actions were positive, as we recognised that homelessness could compound a number of problems faced by young people, as it often had a negative effect on their mental health and could contribute to the onset or exacerbation of existing substance misuse problems. There is also strong evidence to suggest that homelessness impedes young people’s participation in employment, education or training. It is therefore important that a holistic approach is taken in relation to youth homelessness.

26. In terms of the proposal to develop agreements with young homeless people seeking accommodation to commit to certain standards of behaviour, including staying out of trouble, observing curfews, or starting and remaining in employment, training or education; we were interested to note Rebecca Long’s assertion that the experience of being homeless needs to be tougher with stringent rules and boundaries. She felt that this was essential for prevention purposes – making yourself homeless should not be seen as an easy option and a fast track to a new flat. We therefore welcomed this proposal and noted that the schools education programme (referred to in Section B of the report) would also be beneficial in this respect as peer educators could spell out the realities of being homeless with authority and make the family home seem more attractive.

27. It is our view that… insert findings in relation to priority three

Recommendations:

Insert recommendations in relation to priority three

E: Youth Homelessness Strategy – comparative information

28. We considered the approach to youth homelessness taken by Southwark Council and heard that a restructure had taken place in order to ensure that a more holistic and seamless service was provided. The Special Needs Unit and the Homeless Persons Unit had been merged to become the HASS (Housing Assessment and Support Service) which was an appointment only service comprising of two Homeless Assessment Teams, two Resettlement teams, a Vulnerable Adults Team, a Sustain Team and a Youth Homeless team. At the same time a new Housing Options Centre had been set up as a separate business unit to provide an off street approach point, run a number of schemes and deal with Housing Register issues. We noted that any client with identified support needs (including under 18s) was signposted by the Housing Options Service to one of the support services in HASS with a view to preventing homelessness by getting the client into supported accommodation. The Youth Homeless Team was made up of a Team Leader, YOT (Youth Offending Team) Resettlement officer, Youth Resettlement Officer, Homeless Preventions Officer (who managed to prevent 50% of homelessness at visit stage), Teen Parents Resettlement Officer, Connexions Worker and a Social Worker.
29. In relation to the Homeless Preventions Officer, we noted that she achieved her target of preventing 50% of homelessness approaches by methods such as visiting the family home to try to address any underlying issues such as overcrowding (in which case she would provide assistance in relation to the housing allocations system etc.). She also collected statistics on the schools of young people presenting as homeless to ensure that these schools are then targeted, with sessions being delivered in citizenship classes.

30. We noted that Lewisham’s draft youth homelessness strategy was broadly in line with Southwark’s in that the main emphasis was on prevention. We also noted that, as was now the case at Lewisham, Southwark very rarely took homeless applications from under 18 clients as they were normally able to find suitable supported accommodation for that person. However, we noted that (a) officers at Southwark still had access to, and offered if appropriate, B&B accommodation and; (b) social housing was rarely offered to young homeless people – the expectation was that, following a period in supported accommodation, the client would move into private accommodation. Thus, whilst both Lewisham and Southwark would avoid taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty, Lewisham would still offer social housing to the client once they were 18 if officers felt that the young person would be disadvantaged by it not being offered. The view taken by the Council was that Lewisham might be open to legal challenge if it avoided taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty and then denied them the opportunity of social housing (because if the young person had been accepted under the statutory duty they would have been offered social housing).

F: Youth Homelessness Strategy – Expected outcomes and other issues

31. We heard that to date, service users had not been consulted on the new strategy, but we welcomed the fact that this would be addressed.

32. We noted that the key aim of the strategy was to prevent youth homelessness wherever possible and that the following indicators would help establish whether or not the council had successfully achieved this outcome:

- No young people 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation
- A reduction in the number of young people presenting as homeless to the local authority by 25% by 2013
- An increase in the number of young people accessing supported housing and a reduction in the number of void units in young peoples supported housing projects from 10% in 2007/08 to 4% in 2008/09
- 90-100 young people successfully moving from supported housing into independent accommodation each year
- 60-70% young people in supported housing (excluding assessment beds) to be in education/training or employment
• An increase in awareness amongst young people of housing options in the borough. This will be measured from feedback questionnaires from young people in schools who take part in the peer education programme.

33. In relation to these indicators we noted that…

34. It is our view that… Insert findings

**Recommendations:**

Insert recommendations
Our recommendations are set out below. We have also outlined how we intend to measure whether they have been implemented, should they be approved at Mayor & Cabinet.

We expect our recommendations to be taken on board as part of the implementation of the new youth homelessness strategy.

Recommendations
20

Legislation and Definition of Terms

Legislation

1. Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 places statutory duties on local housing authorities to provide assistance to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Authorities must consider all applications from people seeking accommodation or assistance in obtaining accommodation. A main homelessness duty (see next paragraph) is owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a priority need group.

2. Where a main duty is owed, the authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and his or her household until a settled home becomes available for them. Where households are found to be intentionally homeless or not in priority need, the authority must make an assessment of their housing needs, provide advice and assistance to help them find accommodation for themselves. Where the applicant is found to be intentionally homeless but falls in a priority need category the authority must also ensure that accommodation is available for long enough to give the applicant a reasonable opportunity to find a home.

3. Priority need groups: this include households with dependent children; pregnant women; people who are vulnerable because of mental illness or physical disability; applicants aged 16 or 17; applicants aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care; applicants vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in HM Forces; and applicants vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence or the threat of violence.

Supporting People

4. The Supporting People programme was launched in 2003 with the aim of providing a better quality of life for vulnerable people, helping them to live more independently and maintain their tenancies. The programme is funded by Government grant and is delivered by local authorities. It provides housing related support to help prevent any problems that might lead
to hospitalisation, institutional care or homelessness. It can also help smooth the transition to independent living for those leaving an institutionalised environment.
Appendices

Appendix A: Acknowledgments

The Committee would like to thank the following for their contributions to the review:

External witnesses:

- Rebecca Long, Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust
- Donna Kerr, St Christopher’s Fellowship
- Richard Michael, London Borough of Southwark

Council officers:

- Amanda Downie – Housing Needs Manager
- Fiona Kirkman – Supporting People Manager
- Alistair Pettigrew – Head of Children’s Social Care
- Judith Ramsden – Joint Commissioning Manager (CYP)
Appendix B: Minutes of the evidences session held on 14 January 2009

Review into Youth Homelessness: Evidence Session One

4.1 Councillor Ron Stockbridge joined the Committee for this item onwards, because he had a prejudicial interest in relation to the previous item (Phoenix Community Housing) as he was the Council appointed Member of Phoenix Housing Board.

4.2 Amanda Downie, Housing Needs Manager, introduced the report which outlined the key priorities and actions contained in the draft Youth Homelessness Strategy; provided some information on the expected impact of the strategy; addressed the Committee’s key lines of enquiry; and provided some case studies of young people who had previously approached the Housing Options Service for information and advice, explaining how the experiences of these young people might differ once the new strategy was fully implemented.

4.3 Members considered oral evidence from the following Council officers in addition to Amanda Downie, who outlined the contributions that their teams would be making to the implementation of the strategy:

- Fiona Kirkman – Supporting People Manager
- Ian Smith – Referral & Assessment Service Unit Manager
- Judith Ramsden – Joint Commissioning Manager (CYP)
- Geeta Subramaniam – Head of Crime Reduction

4.4 In particular, the committee considered the three main strands of the strategy: (a) developing early intervention strategies; (b) providing appropriate accommodation options for young people; and (c) providing holistic services to young people to ensure all their needs (including access to health, education, training and employment services) are met. The following key points were noted:

- **Early intervention strategies** - it was hoped that various services would be developed and consolidated - including a single, accessible mediation service and a parenting support service.
- **Providing appropriate accommodation options** - 14 assessment beds for young people would be developed as an alternative to B&B accommodation in order to provide suitable emergency accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.
- **Providing holistic services** - the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) service would help ensure that young people had access to education, training and health services as well as housing services.
- **Children’s Social Care** - this service would be involved in the assessment of young people in housing need to ensure that social care needs were also met and that mediation to prevent family breakdown was offered if appropriate.
- **Children & Young People** - this Directorate had been involved in the development of the Youth Homelessness Strategy due to the synergies with the Children & Young People Plan including the joint aim of raising young people’s aspirations. The support offered to families had been reviewed with the prevention of youth homelessness in mind. The use of parenting co-ordinators was being developed and it was hoped that parenting classes would be held this year. The youth service was working with higher need young people in particular and would be offering mentoring services. Furthermore, pathfinder funding had been awarded for a family intervention programme, based on the Dundee model and it was hoped that this would be provided
by April 2009 and that it would have a positive impact on the prevention of youth homelessness.

- **Supporting People** – The programme offered floating support and accommodation options and was looking to develop these and work with teenage parents in particular. Supported lodgings for young people with higher needs would be developed and the team was working with the London Borough of Southwark to find suitable providers.

4.5 Councillor Page observed that the strategy aimed to support young people to enter the private rented sector by extending the remit of the current floating support service, Lewisham Reach; and asked how appropriate this was. It was noted that young people would not be placed in the private sector immediately as they would initially be placed in supported housing to ensure they got access to education, training and health services etc. However, it was often a very good ‘move-on’ option once the young person was in steady employment. The team worked with private landlords to make sure the property was of a reasonable standard and that the tenancy was secure for at least a year. They also offered financial incentives to landlords to renew tenancies. One barrier to accessing the private rented sector was that young people under 25 were only eligible for ‘single room rent’ benefit only, so were expected to find a room in a shared house rather than a one bedroom flat.

4.6 The Chair noted that the strategy depended heavily on sharing information and collaborative working and asked how this would work and be evaluated. The Committee noted that a group of officers would be identified as ‘owning’ the strategy and they would be responsible for ensuring its implementation and making sure that the information sharing and collaborative working required, took place. Genevieve Macklin, Head of Strategic Housing, explained that the strategy review group would be responsible for implementing and monitoring the overarching housing strategy and the youth homelessness strategy which sat under it and would need to demonstrate progress. The very detailed action points arising from the youth homelessness strategy would be monitored by the homelessness forum.

4.7 In response to a question from the Chair about engaging disengaged young people, Judith Ramsden acknowledged that youth disengagement was a big issue for the council and that it sometimes ‘bubbled up’ as youth homelessness. A different way of working with young people was being implemented, based on successful models from elsewhere, with the key priority being building trust before referral to specialist services. The key worker system where the young person had his or her own mentor was very important but the building up of trust was essential for this system to work. It was further noted that the move away from B&B accommodation (where young people had no support and no rules) was positive as B&B accommodation tended to encourage disengagement. The strategy would ensure that all emergency accommodation was supported accommodation, in order to promote engagement.

4.8 In response to a further question from the Chair, Amanda Downie, Housing Needs Manager, explained that the main cause of youth homelessness was parental relationship breakdown and the main challenge was the core group of young people that were very difficult to accommodate as they had specialist and high needs.

4.9 **RESOLVED:** That the information provided be noted and fed into the committee’s review.
Appendix C: Minutes of the evidences session held on 25 February 2009

1. Review into Youth Homelessness: Evidence Session One

3.1 The Chair welcomed the following witnesses to the meeting:

- Rebecca Long, Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust
- Donna Kerr, St Christopher’s Fellowship
- Richard Michael, London Borough of Southwark

3.2 The witnesses provided the Committee with some background information on what their organisations did:

Rebecca Long (RL) - Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust was a local charity that had been providing hostel accommodation for homeless young women for over 30 years.

Donna Kerr (DK) - St Christopher’s Fellowship offered a variety of services and provided 49 supported housing places in Lewisham for 16-25 year olds; had a new assessment centre for 14 young people (and would be open to referrals soon); and was about to roll out a schools programme in April 2009.

Richard Michael (RM) – The London Borough of Southwark had restructured its team last year to provide more holistic services for homeless people and had two resettlement teams (for vulnerable adults and young people).

3.3 The Committee asked, and received answers to, the following questions (summaries of the responses given can be found beneath each question):

3.4 Have any service users been consulted on the new strategy? (Cllr Scott)

Amanda Downie (AD): Not specifically but this can be picked up on.

3.5 What are the main areas of difference between Southwark’s and Lewisham’s approach to youth homelessness? (Cllr Johnson)

RM: Lewisham’s new strategy is broadly in line with Southwark’s - the main emphasis should be prevention and both approaches have this emphasis. At Southwark, however, officers still have access to B&B accommodation. Southwark also runs a mediation scheme, although there are still improvements to be made to this (outsourced) service and the council is looking at training existing prevention staff to undertake this role.

3.6 What are the ‘glitches’ in the relationship between the Council and charity organisations working in this area? (Cllr Johnson)

RL: When 16/17 year olds are accepted as statutory homeless they can bid for housing even though many would argue that they are too young to be re-housed. They are also, sometimes, housed before 19/20 year olds who have been on the housing list for longer, due to their status and banding. There should be an embargo on 16/17 year olds being housed – they should be in supported accommodation. In addition there should be a mandatory course on resettlement/independent living (covering topics such as budgeting) before young homeless people are housed.

AD: The new allocations scheme will help address this issue. In addition, the new emphasis on prevention will see far fewer young homeless people accepted under the statutory duty, another
route will be taken, meaning that they are more likely to be placed in supported accommodation and be offered their own flat at a much later stage as a ‘move on’ option. In addition, if their support worker feels that they are not ready for their own flat, they will not be offered one. Once in their own flat they would have access to a floating support package if required. In other words, an assessment approach would be followed and young people would only be housed once they had been assessed as being ready.

RM: Southwark does not house 16/17 year olds as it avoids taking any 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty. Southwark also works hard to manage expectations and makes it clear to young people that the expectation is that once they leave supported accommodation at 18 they will be moving into the private rented sector.

AD: Under the new strategy Lewisham will also avoid taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty but will offer social housing once they are 18 if officers feel the young person would be disadvantaged by it not being offered. The view taken by the Council is that the Council might be open to legal challenge if it avoids taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty and then denies them the opportunity of social housing (because if the young person had been accepted under the statutory duty they would have been offered social housing).

3.7 What is offered to particularly vulnerable young homeless people (e.g. those with disabilities, mental health problems, those that are pregnant)? (Cllr Scott)

RL: Unfortunately we cannot house pregnant women once the pregnancy is advanced as we do not have the appropriate facilities.

AD: Lewisham does have some specialist supported places for young single mothers and pregnant women, although these will only take one child. If there are two children involved, the person is accepted under the statutory duty and re-housed.

RM: In those circumstances Southwark would do the same. Southwark was reviewed by Supporting People and it was confirmed that there were no high-support projects and that provision for people with high support needs needed to be improved. We now have the Gateway Project which is a high support needs project and covers mental health needs.

AD: We currently have little provision for young homeless people with high support needs and will be reviewed by Supporting People shortly. This issue is likely to come out and we may need to reconfigure in order to address this.

DK: St Christopher's is not the right environment for babies. However, we can cater for people with high disability needs and we also work with young fathers. An examination of exit forms when young people leave supported accommodation suggests that Lewisham has clients with lower needs than neighbouring boroughs (e.g. Lambeth and Southwark). However, this could be because Lewisham is turning some high needs clients away because they are unable to accommodate them.

RL: The new assessment centres at Farnborough House and Belmont Place will help ensure that people with high needs are more accurately placed than they are at present.

3.8 Should Lewisham adopt the same policy as Southwark and encourage private accommodation as opposed to council housing? (Cllr Owolabi-Oluyole)

AD: Originally (before the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) Service was created) a lot of homeless applications from 16/17 year olds were accepted, the use of B&B accommodation was widespread and social housing was often eventually provided. However, Lewisham now offers supported accommodation and then (sometimes) social housing as a ‘move on’ option (rather than under the statutory duty). The problem with private accommodation for young people is that the single room rent provision (which applies to under 25s) means they cannot afford to rent their own flat but can only afford to move into a room in shared accommodation. This is not always suitable.
RL: Moving from supported accommodation into private accommodation can be successful but not for under 25s. It is difficult to provide suitable shared accommodation.
RM: Southwark is robust in its private accommodation policy in order to manage expectations. Young people are sometimes placed in shared accommodation and can be housed in groups with appropriate support.
AD: Lewisham is not considering this option currently, as we do not have the capacity to look at shared accommodation at present, although we may consider it in future. Lewisham has also taken the view that the Council might be open to legal challenge if it avoids taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty and then denies them the opportunity of social housing.

3.9 What additional services would you like to see offered by the Council? (Cllr Johnson)

RL: A robust mediation service would be beneficial. Also offering young people ‘time out’ – a period of time away from home before a managed return. Also, the experience of being homeless needs to be tougher and there should be stringent rules and boundaries. It can’t be the easy option and a fast track to a new flat. Peer educators can spell out the realities of being homeless and make the family home seem more attractive. Assessment centres must promote a safe return home wherever possible.
AD: A mediation service is proposed in Lewisham’s new strategy, although it is subject to funding being identified. A joint initiative with Social Care (who already provide a mediation service) might be possible.
DK: More work on prevention at an earlier stage would be helpful although it will take a long time to demonstrate results. It is important to monitor where young homeless people come from (e.g. are particular schools over-represented) as this allows the prevention work to be targeted where it is needed most. In addition, (a) there needs to be more supported accommodation for vulnerable 18-21 year olds who are not necessarily ready for independent living; (b) organisations must work more closely with each other in order to provide a seamless service; (c) ‘Time out’ options are a good idea; and (d) more provision is needed for higher need clients.

3.10 What is the impact of work in schools and what systems are in place for identifying and reporting pupils at risk? (The Chair)

DK: The problem with working in schools is that it does not bear fruit until the pupils are 16 so it can take a long time to measure the impact. The peer education programme is voluntary and links into the citizenship element of the curriculum. Information is provided to teachers as well as pupils as they are often the first port of call for young people facing homelessness.
RM: in Southwark, our homelessness prevention officer meets her target of preventing 50% of homelessness approaches. She will visit the home and try to address any underlying issues (e.g. overcrowding). She collects statistics on the schools of young people presenting as homeless and these schools are then targeted, with sessions being delivered in citizenship classes.
AD: Lewisham is not currently working with schools but the peer education programme run by St Christopher’s and already operating in Southwark will be implemented in Lewisham from April (with the first sessions being held in September). The programme involves young people with current or recent experience of homelessness, who undertake a course before leading sessions on youth homelessness for their peers. However, the programme only has funding for one year. Lewisham tracked homeless approaches last year and no specific trends regarding schools were found.
DK: representatives from the five boroughs receiving the service sit on a steering group and it would be helpful to have more input from education officers.
3.11 Is the main reason behind youth homelessness family breakdown? (The Chair)

RL: The young women at Marsha Phoenix have often fallen out with their mothers.
DK: Family breakdown is the main reason and a fairly high percentage cite violence or threats of violence.
RM: Family breakdown is the main reason, although other reasons may lie behind this (e.g. overcrowding, the young person being not in employment, education or training). Our prevention officer will try to address this (e.g. putting the young person in touch with connexions, providing mediation etc.).
DK: For example, the mediation service in Greenwich does an income check and makes sure the family is in receipt of all the benefits they are entitled to.

3.12 What are the main challenges faced in reducing youth homelessness and are there any gaps in the services being offered? (The Chair)

RM: Prevention and managing expectations are key. In relation to the latter it is crucial that all professionals coming into contact with the young person ‘sing from the same song sheet’.
DK: It is crucial to make it clear to the young person that they will not be guaranteed housing and also get them to question whether social housing is something to aspire to. Some young people have very high expectations and want to turn down a flat if, for example, they don’t have a garden.
AD: We now insist on young people presenting as homeless accepting a visit to the family from an officer and we only offer supported accommodation in the first instance. (Previously we were providing flats). Prevention services are working as the number of young people approaching the service and then being accommodated has dropped.

3.13 The Committee also discussed supported lodgings (where families let a room in their house with support from the Council) and noted that this could be very beneficial. Supported lodgings had worked well in Southwark for people with lower needs. Lewisham currently offered this for care leavers and once the Supporting People young persons review had taken place, the Council would consider extending this to young homeless people.

3.14 In relation to the comment that it would be helpful to have more input from education officers on the steering group for the peer education programme, Councillor Scott suggested referring the matter to the Children and Young People Select Committee. However, it was noted that Members would be considering all the evidence submitted as part of this review at the Committee’s next meeting and would be able to agree the review recommendations at that meeting.

3.15 RESOLVED:

(1) That the Committee be updated on the outcome of the consultation with service-users; and

(2) That the evidence received be noted and fed into the review.
Appendix D: The Draft Youth Homelessness Strategy

To be inserted