

## THE DRAFT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

**Cabinet Member** Cllr Ray Stanley  
**Responsible Officer** Head of Housing & Property Services

**Reason for Report:** The Council has a statutory obligation to review and update the Homelessness Strategy at least every five years.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):** The Council adopts the draft Homelessness Strategy

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** The homelessness strategy feeds into the Council's overall housing strategy and is linked to many other Council policies and strategies including the rent arrears management policy and the corporate debt policy.

**Financial Implications:** The cost of homelessness is financed out of the General Fund. Expenditure on homelessness is predicted to be £112k for 2013/14. Any financial implications arising from this report will need to be contained within the overall finances available, as far as possible.

**Legal Implications:** This strategy relates to the obligations arising from the Homelessness Act 2002.

**Risk Assessment:** Failure to have a comprehensive, realistic and achievable strategy to respond to issues relating to homelessness could have both financial and reputational implications.

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Part one of the draft homelessness strategy reviews homelessness in Mid Devon taking account of the District's particular circumstances. It provides information on the nature of homelessness and the current services available. Part two identifies the Council's key strategic priorities and outlines how these priorities will be achieved through the delivery plan.
- 1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on strategic housing authorities in England to publish a homelessness strategy and to review and update this every five years.
- 1.3 The strategy must address a number of issues:
  - The prevention of homelessness
  - The provision of accommodation for those who are homeless
  - The provision of support to those who have been homeless in order to prevent them becoming homeless again
- 1.4 It should also provide an accurate picture of the levels of homelessness in the district.

- 1.5 The document is an essential tool when homelessness decisions are made. Failure to take the strategy into account where it contains material relevant to a particular decision could potentially render a decision unlawful.
- 1.6 The existing strategy covers the period from 2008 to 2013. It replaced the first Statutory Homelessness Strategy written in 2003 following the changes to the Housing Act 2002.
- 1.7 Since it was adopted, the prevailing economic climate has changed and there has been a downturn. In addition, legislation has been developed which has had and is likely to have a further impact on the numbers of those presenting as homeless. In particular, the Localism Act and welfare reform need to be taken into account.
- 1.8 In particular, since the implementation of the Localism Act 2011, the private rented sector will become more important.

## **2.0 Summary of key points**

- 2.1 Homeless acceptances in the district are showing a downward trend; between 2004/05 and 2011/12, there has been around a 90% reduction in homeless applications.
- 2.2 However, the number of approaches made to the Council has increased by a huge extent rising from 47 in 2009/10 to 273 in 2012/13.
- 2.3 Families with dependent children accounted for the majority of homeless acceptances in Mid Devon during the life of the existing housing strategy.
- 2.4 41% of those accepted as being homeless over the same period were aged between 16 and 24 and a further 35% were aged between 25 and 44.
- 2.5 Three specific priorities have been identified within the new draft strategy and these will be the focus of work relating to homelessness going forward:
- Preventing homelessness and sustaining tenancies
  - Increasing the availability of affordable housing
  - Mitigating the effects of the welfare reforms and the localism act
- 2.6 In order to ensure that all the objectives identified are met an action plan has been developed.

## **3.0 Partnership working**

- 3.1 The range of tools used by the Council to assist applicants to prevent or resolve their homelessness at the earliest opportunity have, to a large extent, been developed in partnership with other partners, such as other local authorities in Devon, the Citizen's Advice Bureau, Churches Housing Action Trust (CHAT) and Sanctuary Supported Living.
- 3.2 A multi-agency cohesive approach is very important in terms of tackling homelessness and meeting the Council's statutory duties in relation to homelessness.

3.3 A consultation exercise with partners was carried out at the beginning of 2013 and this highlighted concerns over the impact of the welfare reforms on vulnerable people living in Mid Devon. The new draft strategy contains information about assessments of the implications of the reforms on the District's residents.

#### 4.0 **Publicity**

4.1 Following this report to the PDG, the strategy will be widely circulated to our partners such as Devon County Council (DCC) and CHAT.

4.2 DCC made a number of comments and the draft strategy has been amended to take account of these.

4.3 The final document will be lodged with the local libraries together with a press release to say that it is available on the MDDC website.

4.4 The strategy will be available to view on the website.

4.5 A copy will be available in the member's room.

**Contact for more Information:** Nick Sanderson, Head of Housing & Property Services Tel: 01884 234960 (nsanderson@middevon.gov.uk)

**Circulation of the Report:** Councillor Ray Stanley (Cabinet Member for Housing)

**List of Background Papers:**

**Mid Devon District Council  
Draft Homelessness Strategy  
2013 – 2018**



February 2014

## **Foreword**

Homelessness is more than just not having a roof over your head, the effect that homelessness has over someone's life is detrimental: it can affect their health, employment, learning and whole wellbeing. It is therefore of key importance that Mid Devon District Council has a robust strategy that continues the work to develop services to prevent homelessness and assist those in housing need.

This is Mid Devon District Council's third Homelessness Strategy and is set in a challenging climate of austerity, welfare reforms and difficult housing conditions. Over the course of our previous homelessness strategies, Mid Devon District Council and our partners have worked to establish a range of prevention options. We will continue to work together to develop new initiatives such as No Second Night Out to tackle rough sleeping.

The Government's Localism Act and Welfare Reform Act will have a significant impact on the way we will both prevent homelessness and assist homeless households. There is a need to monitor the changes in benefits such as Housing Benefits, Universal Credit and the impact those changes have on our residents and our ability to respond.

**Councillor Ray Stanley**  
**Cabinet Member for Housing**



## **Part One – The Strategic Context**

### **Introduction**

Not all homeless people live on the street, for some there are frequent moves from one temporary accommodation/shelter to another (e.g. emergency accommodation, refuges, friends' homes, 'sofa surfing') and these are people with no settled home. There are also many households that share accommodation e.g. with relatives or live in unsatisfactory housing.

Anyone can become homeless although some groups are more at risk of homelessness than others are. These groups include young people leaving care, those leaving prison, people suffering from domestic violence, those with a mental health problem, substance misusers, those from troubled families, people on low incomes and those who are in debt. There is a strong overlap between homelessness and deep social exclusion.

The Homelessness Strategy sets out the Council's key strategic aims in tackling homelessness in the District, details how these aims are to be achieved, and sets out actions for delivery.

It is important to acknowledge that this strategy is being launched at a time of significant economic difficulty and rigorous cuts to the public and voluntary sector that could lead to a decrease in services set against an increase in demand. Additional pressures from the Localism and Welfare Reform Acts will no doubt stretch the capacity of existing support services.

### **National Context**

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every authority to carry out a review of homelessness in its area and develop a strategy and action plan for tackling it. National strategies and guidance have helped shape Mid Devon's Homelessness Strategies. The Council published its first Homelessness Strategy in 2003 and an updated strategy in 2008.

With the change of government in 2010 welfare reform is a major part of the government's austerity agenda in order to reduce overall spending.

A summary of the key elements of welfare reform are shown overleaf that have or will potentially, impact on homelessness and homelessness prevention both, in terms of resources to tackle it and demands placed on services.

#### April 2011

- Uprating and increasing the **non-dependent rate** from April 2011 onwards has placed pressure on households with adult children still living at home who cannot contribute towards household expenses.
- **Capping the Local Housing Allowance levels** is likely to make applicants on benefits, for private sector lettings, less attractive to landlords.

#### October 2011

- **Reducing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** from 50% of the Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) to 30%. This has affected many households renting in the private sector.

#### January 2012

- **Limiting payments for people under 35** to the shared accommodation rate (up from 25), making it harder to place young single people in private rented accommodation.

#### April 2013

- **Limiting Housing Benefit entitlement (spare room subsidy/bedroom tax)** for working age people in social housing to reflect family size could increase arrears.
- **Abolition of Council Tax Benefit** replacing it with local schemes with a 10% reduction in central government funding and the stipulation pensioners are protected from the cuts, which will place additional pressures on working age peoples' budgets.
- **Uprating LHA in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI)** instead of the Retail Price Index (RPI) will impact on the number of private sector homes available for rent for applicants on benefits
- **Personal Independence Payments** replaced Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for working age people aged 16 to 64. Existing DLA claimants will be reassessed and transferred over between October 2015 - 2017

#### July/August 2013

- **Capping the total benefits** to a household at no more than the national average wage is likely to impact on larger families. The capping level is £26,000 (£500pw) for couples and families and £18,200 (£350pw) for single person households

#### October 2013

- **The move towards Universal Credit** will end Housing Benefit payments being made directly to landlords, making benefit claimants potentially less attractive as tenants as benefit will be paid directly to claimants monthly in arrears.

The Government introduced the Localism Act in order to address what many believed were fundamental flaws within the social housing system. It was anticipated that this would lead to more decisions about housing being taken locally and would make the system fairer and more effective. The Council has published a Tenancy Strategy, as required by the Act, setting out the matters registered providers of social housing should have regard to when formulating their tenancy policies. The main areas covered include affordable rents, disposals, conversions and the introduction of flexible and fixed term tenancies.

### Localism Act Summary

- **Changes to the homelessness duty** - Local authorities will be able to fully discharge their duty to secure accommodation by arranging an offer of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector, without requiring the applicants' agreement. The original authority will retain the duty where applicants become homeless again within two years.
- **Changes to housing allocations** - Local authorities will have flexibility in managing their housing registers.
- **New forms of tenure** - 'tenancies for life' for new social housing tenants may be replaced by fixed term or flexible tenancies if the landlord decides to adopt them, renewable depending on household circumstances.
- **Affordable rents** - Registered Providers will be able to charge affordable rents (80% of open market value) on new build and convert a percentage of relets.

The Localism Act has introduced a significant change to the way local authorities can use the private rented sector to house those assessed as being statutorily homeless. Local authorities are now able to discharge their duty to homeless households with an offer of "suitable" accommodation in the private rented sector, provided that the tenancy offered is for a minimum of 12 months. Before this local authorities could only discharge the homelessness duty in the private sector with the agreement of the household, but this agreement is no longer required.

The Council will look to develop a comprehensive policy outlining in what circumstances the main homelessness duty will be discharged into the private sector.

The Government have introduced a Troubled Families programme to address those families that have serious problems including parents not working, children not in school, youth crime and anti social behaviour. As part of the programme, the Government, alongside local authorities, wants to change the way these families are worked with by:

- Joining up local services
- Dealing with each family's problems as a whole rather than individually
- Appointing a single key worker to get to grips with their problems and work intensively to help them change for the long term.

Across Devon, this programme is called the Targeted Families programme and is being coordinated by Devon County Council working with local housing authorities. It is hoped there will be a positive impact on some families that are at risk of homelessness, perhaps because of anti social behaviour.

### **Mid Devon**

Mid Devon is a sparsely populated area of 352 square miles (913 sq. km) in the heartland of Devon. It extends from the edges of Dartmoor in the South West to Exmoor in the North East.

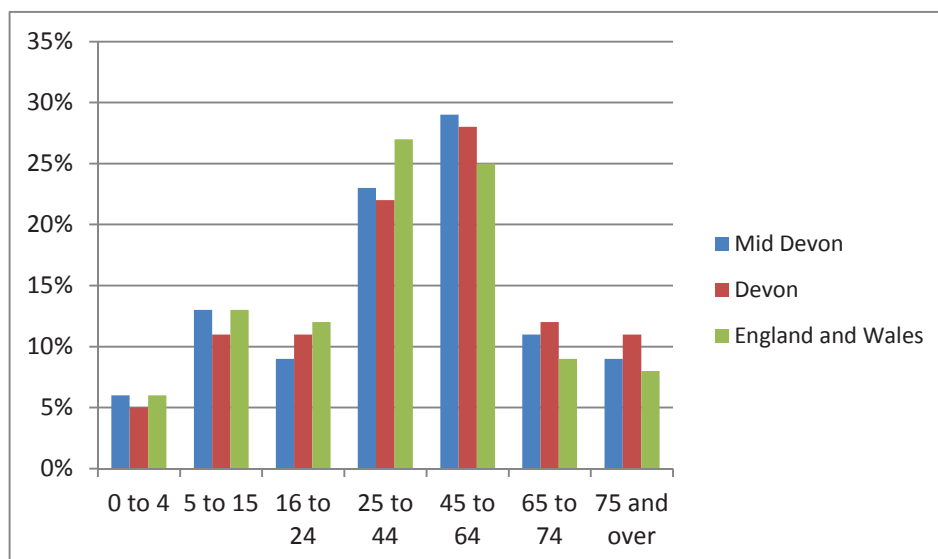
### **Population**

The population in the Mid Devon district rose by more than 11% in the period 2001 to 2011 from 69,900 to 77,750 people. This compares with a rise in population of 8% for the whole of England and Wales and 6%

for Devon as a whole. The current estimated population of Mid Devon is 79,200 (ONS 2013), by 2021, it is anticipated to reach 84,800 (ONS Interim 2011 – Subnational Population Projections).

The largest increases in terms of age breakdown have been in the 25 to 44 and the 45 to 64 groups. This reflects both the Devon and England and Wales trends as can be seen in the graph below.

### Percentage change in Age Structure between 2001 and 2011



(Source: ONS Census 2011)

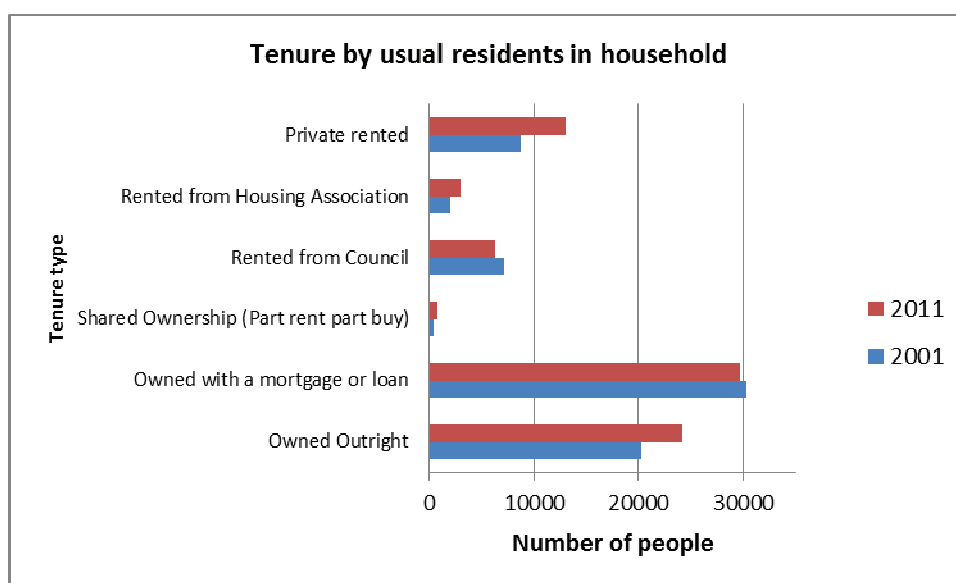
### Housing Stock

The 2011 Census found that there are 33,990 dwellings in Mid Devon, of these 67% are detached or semi-detached properties. The full breakdown of dwelling type in Mid Devon is shown in the table below.

Property Type	Number	Percentage
Detached House/ Bungalow	13,079	38.5%
Semi-detached House/ Bungalow	9,700	28.5%
Terraced House/ Bungalow	7,811	23%
Flat/ Maisonette/ Bedsit	3,211	9.4%
Houseboat/ Caravan/ Mobile Home	189	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,990</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Source: ONS Census 2011)

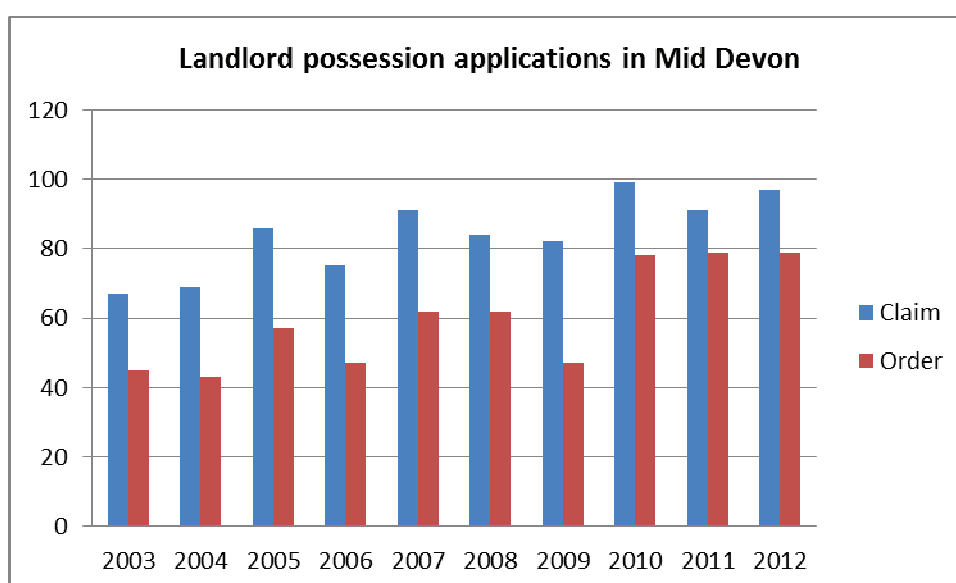
In terms of the tenure type of residents in Mid Devon there has been a 49% increase in the number of people renting privately between 2001 and 2011. In comparison with all households nationally, those living in the private rented sector are typically much younger, with those under 35 accounting for over half of private tenants, despite this age group comprising only one fifth of the population (*Who lives in the private rented sector - Building and Social Housing Foundation 2013*). This age breakdown could affect homelessness numbers should they become reliant on benefits, given the welfare reforms and the limit on local housing allowance payments for people under 35.



(Source: ONS Census 2011)

Following on from the increase in private renting there has also been an increase in the number of applications made year on year for landlord possession claims but more significant is the rise in the number of Court orders being made against those claims. The Council's Housing Service evicted just six tenants in the year 2012 – 2013, three for rents arrears and three for anti social behaviour.

A landlord possession claim is created when a claimant, either a social or a private landlord, begins legal action for an order for possession of a property by issuing a claim in a county court. This change can be seen more clearly in the graph below.



(Source: Ministry of Justice Local Authority level Mortgage and Landlord Statistics)

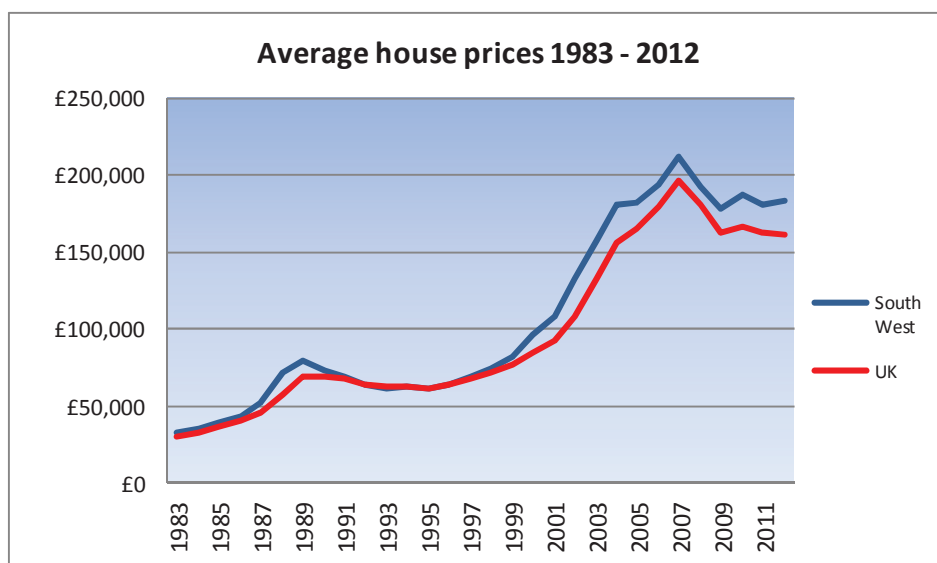
## Affordability and the Mortgage Market

The average house price in the South West in the fourth quarter of 2012, according to the Halifax House Price Index, was £182,894, which equates to a house price to earnings ratio of 5.65 compared with the UK average ratio of 4.47.

Mortgage as a percentage of income stood at 34.9% in the fourth quarter of 2012 in the South West compared to the UK average of 28.1%. The Homes and Communities Agency considers a 45% household

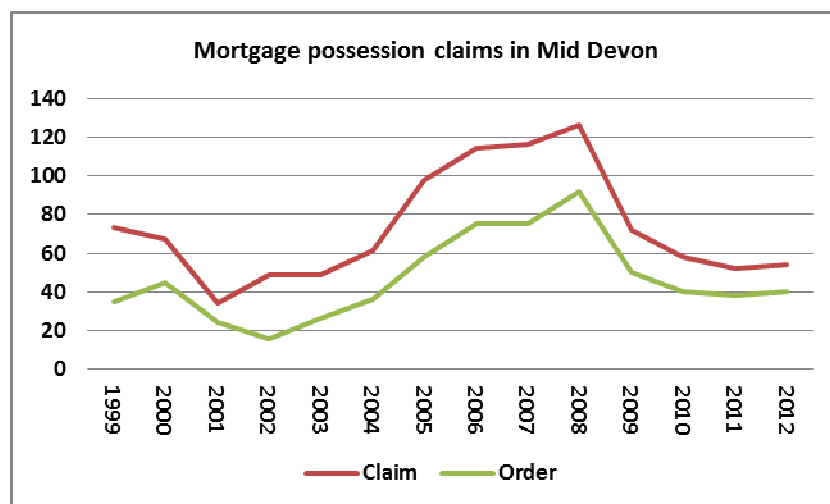
debt to net income ratio affordable in terms of home ownership yet not over stretching in order to allow buyers to adapt to market changes in mortgage interest rates etc.

The chart below shows the increases in house prices from 1983 to 2012 for both the South West and the United Kingdom as a whole. House prices in the South West have been consistently higher than the UK average for the majority of that time.



(Source: Halifax House Price Index)

Mortgage possession actions have shown a continuing downward trend since 2008 although there has been a slight increase in 2012. This fall in the number of claims coincides with lower interest rates, a more proactive approach from lenders managing consumers in financial difficulties and various interventions, such as the introduction of the Mortgage Pre- Court Action Protocol.

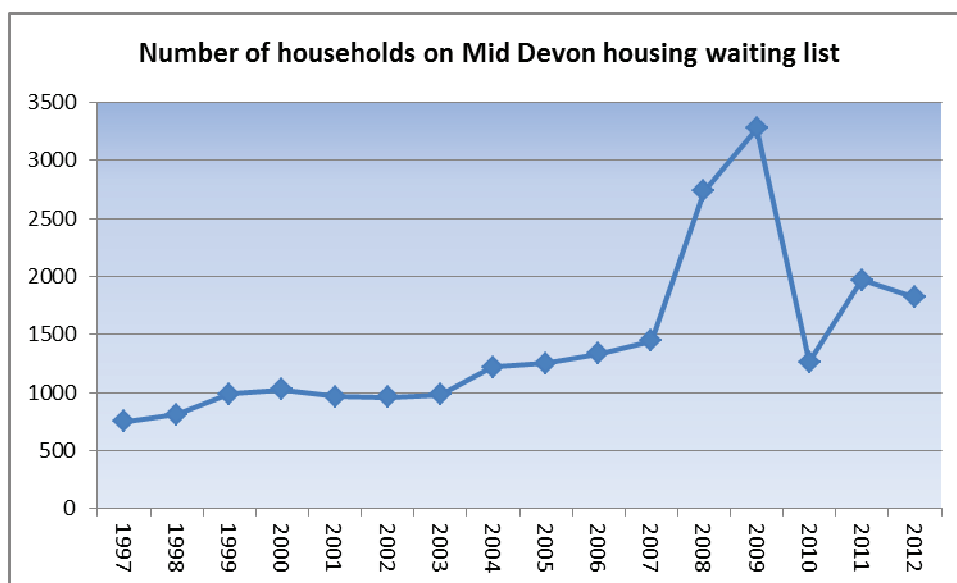


(Source: Ministry of Justice Local Authority level Mortgage and Landlord Statistics)

## Current housing need in Mid Devon

The introduction of the countywide choice based lettings scheme called Devon Home Choice in February 2009 has helped with the Council's Housing Strategy aim of improving access to affordable housing. The scheme was revised in 2012 to reflect the bedroom occupancy changes made in the welfare reforms. This increases in importance as the number of housing applicants continues to grow.

The chart below shows the number of households on the waiting list for social housing in Mid Devon between 1997 and 2012, it shows a large increase after the financial crisis in 2007 that dropped significantly when the choice based letting system was introduced in 2009/10 and all existing applicants had to reapply.



(Source: Dept. for Communities and Local Government)

As at 3 July 2013, there were 1879 applicants registered with Mid Devon on Devon Home Choice. Applications are assessed and put into one of five bands these being A, B, C, D, and E. The 'A' band are those needing emergency accommodation. The 'B' band applicants have a high housing need and those in the 'E' band have no housing need.

#### Devon Home Choice applicants broken down by banding – 3 July 2013

Band	Number of Applicants
A	1
B	150
C	253
D	353
E	1,122
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,879</b>

(Source: Devon Home Choice)

The current breakdown of households on Devon Home Choice, based on property size requirement, at 3 July 2013 is as follows and shows almost half of applicants require a one-bedroom property. It remains to be seen how these numbers change as the Government's welfare reforms in terms of the under occupancy charge or "bedroom tax" will affect the numbers of those seeking to downsize.

#### Devon Home Choice applicants broken down by bedroom size requested – 3 July 2013

Bedroom Size requested	Number of applicants
1 bedroom	878
2 bedroom	704
3 bedroom	254
More than 3 bedrooms	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>1879</b>

The amount of accommodation coming forward for re-letting, 187 in 2012/13 does not match the demand for accommodation. The present system does allow the flexibility to give preference to certain groups such as transferring applicants or existing tenants.

The table below is taken from the Mid Devon Local Housing Needs and Demand Study in 2011. It shows the ratio of waiting list demand to supply and the number of years it would take to meet the demand for individual property sizes through the turnover of existing stock. This is based on the extreme assumption that there is no future need other than the current backlog, which is clearly not the case. For example, it would take just over 6 years to meet the requirements for those applicants requiring 1-bed properties.

### Social Stock, Waiting List Need and Social Turnover

Stock Size	Waiting List (HSSA) *		Social Stock Turnover **		Demand vs. Supply
	Number	%	Number	%	Ratio
<b>1 bedroom</b>	1,022	53.0	167	41.5	6.1:1
<b>2 bedroom</b>	589	30.5	170	42.4	3.5:1
<b>3 bedroom</b>	250	13.0	62	15.4	4.0:1
<b>4+ bedroom</b>	68	3.5	3	0.7	22.7:1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,929</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4.8:1</b>

\* Local Authority HSSA Return – 2010 – 2011 \*\* Mid Devon District Council data

The Study also found under-occupation in the social rented sector of 18.4% suggesting that there are around **712 social rented properties, which are under-occupied by two or more bedrooms** with over 560 of these in the Mid Devon District Council rented stock.

### Affordable Housing

Mid Devon's Local Housing Needs and Demand Study 2011 showed a need for 335 affordable housing units a year. Of this, the split for social rent should be 50% for 1 and 2-bed accommodation and 50% for 3 and 4 bed accommodation. This split changes for intermediate market or affordable rent housing development to 20% for 1 and 80% for 2 bedroomed properties. Despite the shortage of affordable homes in Mid Devon, on 1 April 2010, according to the Empty Homes Strategy, there were 406 dwellings recorded as being vacant for more than six months in the District.

The 100-unit a year target for affordable housing for the period 2008 – 2009 was met, but subsequently the 80-unit target has not been met with only 135 units of affordable housing delivered in the 3 years 2009 to 2012 instead of the 240 target for the period. The target was almost met in 2012 – 2013 when 77 units were built. The Council has started developing its own affordable housing with the first properties completed in the summer of 2013.

	Rented	Shared ownership	Total
<b>2008/2009</b>	74	37	<b>111</b>
<b>2009/2010</b>	21	33	<b>54</b>
<b>2010/2011</b>	47	6	<b>53</b>
<b>2011/2012</b>	27	1	<b>28</b>
<b>2012/2013</b>	50	27	<b>77</b>

## **Review of Homelessness in Mid Devon**

### **Homelessness**

Under Section 175 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the 2002 Homelessness Act), a person is homeless if s/he has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere available for his or her occupation and for which they have a legal right to occupy. A person will also be homeless where s/he has accommodation but cannot secure entry to it or where it is a moveable structure such as a caravan or houseboat and there is no site for it to be placed. Where a person has accommodation they will be treated as homeless if it is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy it, for example due to living with an abusive partner.

### **Threatened with Homelessness**

Again under Section 175 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the 2002 Homelessness Act), a person is 'threatened with homelessness' if s/he is likely to become homeless within 28 days.

Most applicants who approach the service are threatened with homelessness rather than actually homeless at that point. The housing authority must not wait until homelessness is imminent before providing assistance however and should not 'gatekeep' homelessness services whilst seeking to prevent a person from becoming homeless if this is likely within 28 days. Under Section 183 (1) of the Housing Act 1996 housing authorities must decide if there is reason to believe that an applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness and if so the authority must make inquiries (Section 184) into:

- (a) Whether s/he is eligible for assistance, and
- (b) If so, whether the authority owes any duty and to what level this may be.

### **Duty to Homeless Applicants**

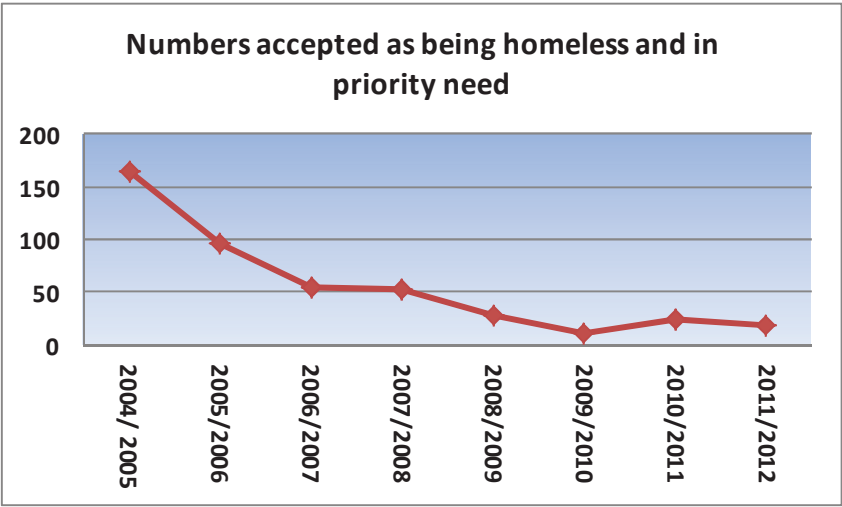
The level of duty to an applicant is dependent on the outcome of the inquiries made, which could be:

- The applicant is homeless and in a priority need group - the Council has to offer interim (temporary) accommodation to the applicant until secure accommodation is found, in most cases this requires a local connection to the District. If there is no local connection a referral will be made to the appropriate local area.
- The applicant is intentionally homeless and in priority need - the Council has to offer time limited interim accommodation (usually for 28 days) and the applicant has to find their own permanent accommodation, although assistance can still be given to help the applicant secure accommodation, for example through a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.
- The applicant is homeless but not in a priority need group - the Council must provide advice and assistance to the applicant but there is no duty to provide accommodation. The 2002 Homelessness Act transformed the advice and assistance that should be given. Each applicant should have their individual needs assessed leading to person specific advice and assistance, tailor-made to the individual applicant.
- The applicant is assessed as not homeless - the Council owes no duty but must inform the applicant of their decision.
- The applicant is ineligible - do not have recourse to public funds being subject to immigration control.

### **Key findings, data and trends**

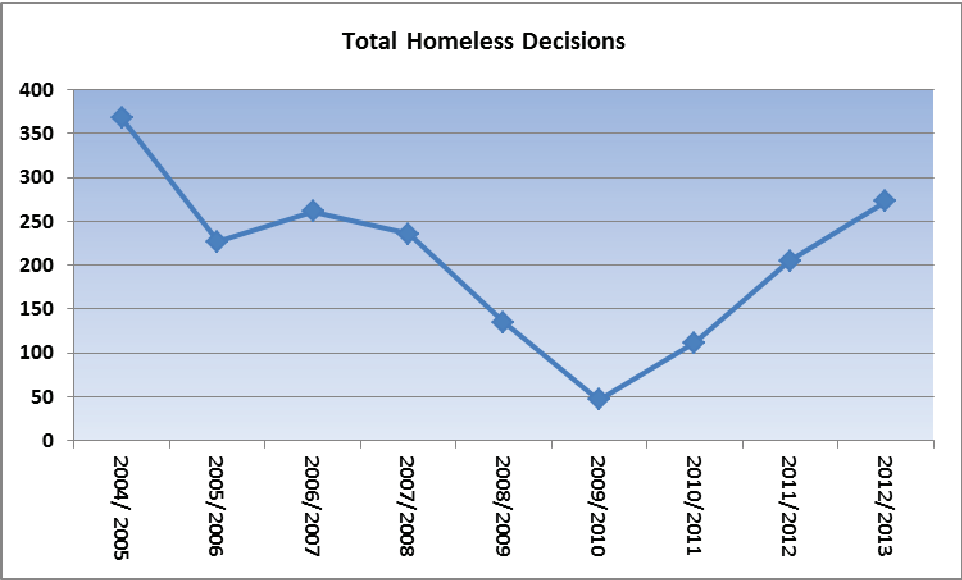
The Homelessness Act 2002 requires that homelessness strategies must be based on a review of homelessness in the local authority area.

Homeless acceptances in Mid Devon are showing a downward trend, between 2004/05 and 2011/12 there has been around a 90% reduction in homeless acceptances.



This reduction is a positive achievement and is directly attributable to the early intervention and preventative measures taken by the Homelessness Team and its partners. Effective intervention can enable homelessness to be prevented or the loss of the current home to be delayed sufficiently to allow for a planned move.

However, while the number of acceptances has decreased the total number of approaches made to the Council has seen a fivefold increase since 2009/10 from a low of 47 to 273 in 2012/13. Following the recent introduction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the planned changes in benefits, it is anticipated that homeless levels will increase in the future as more households are placed under greater financial pressure.



### Causes of Homelessness

Parental, relative or friend eviction and loss of assured shorthold tenancy have consistently been the top two reasons for people becoming homeless in Mid Devon. Loss of assured shorthold tenancies could continue to be the main reasons for homelessness as the welfare reforms take place, in particular, the

move to direct monthly payments of housing costs to the tenant through the new Universal Credit as well as the changes to Local Housing Allowance and Council Tax Rebates.

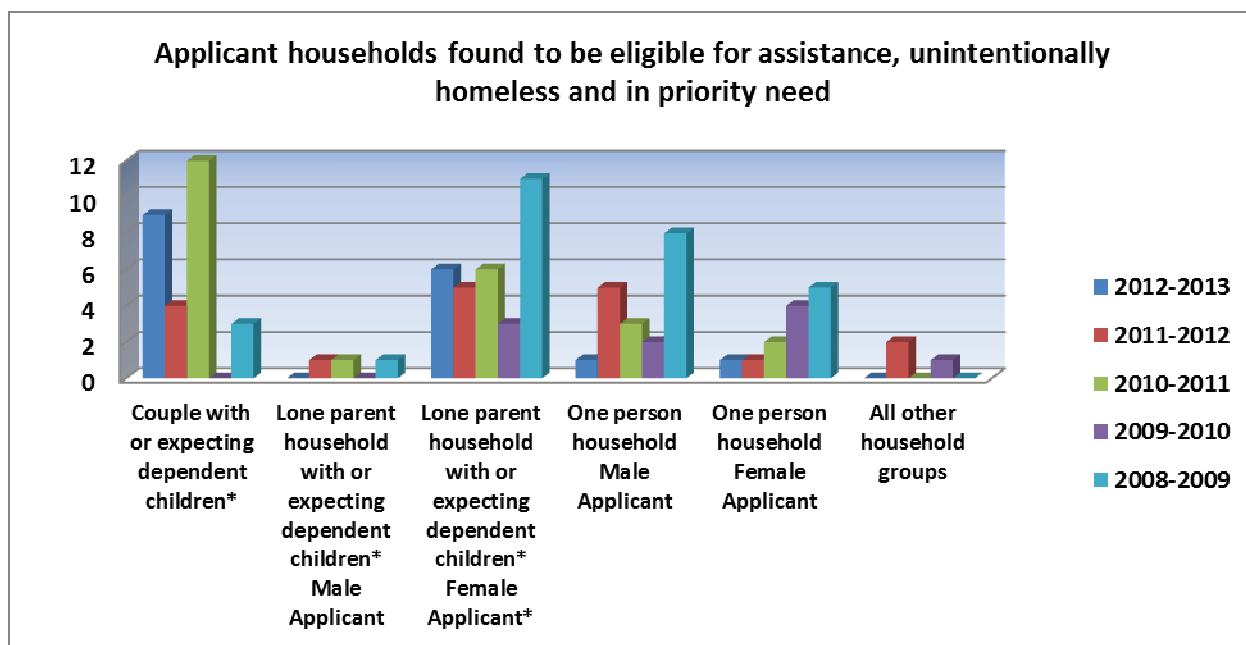
Reason	2008 - 2009		2009 - 2010		2010 - 2011		2011 - 2012		2012 - 2013	
	Acceptances		Acceptances		Acceptances		Acceptances		Acceptances	
	No. of	% of	No. of	% of	No. of	% of	No. of	% of	No. of	% of
Parents/ Family/ Friends unable to accommodate	13	47%	2	20%	9	37.5%	5	28%	4	23%
Breakdown of relationship with partner - violent	4	14%	3	30%	3	12.5%	1	5.5%	2	12%
Breakdown of relationship with partner - non violent	0	0%	0	0%	2	8.5%	0	0%	1	6%
Mortgage arrears	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5.5%	0	0%
Loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	7	25%	3	30%	9	37.5%	7	39%	9	53%
Leaving institution	0	0%	2	20%	0	0%	2	11%	0	0%
Other	4	14%	0	0%	1	4%	2	11%	1	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Acceptances of priority groups

Of those households where a full duty has been accepted, the table below shows the breakdown by the different priority groups over the five years from 2008 onwards.

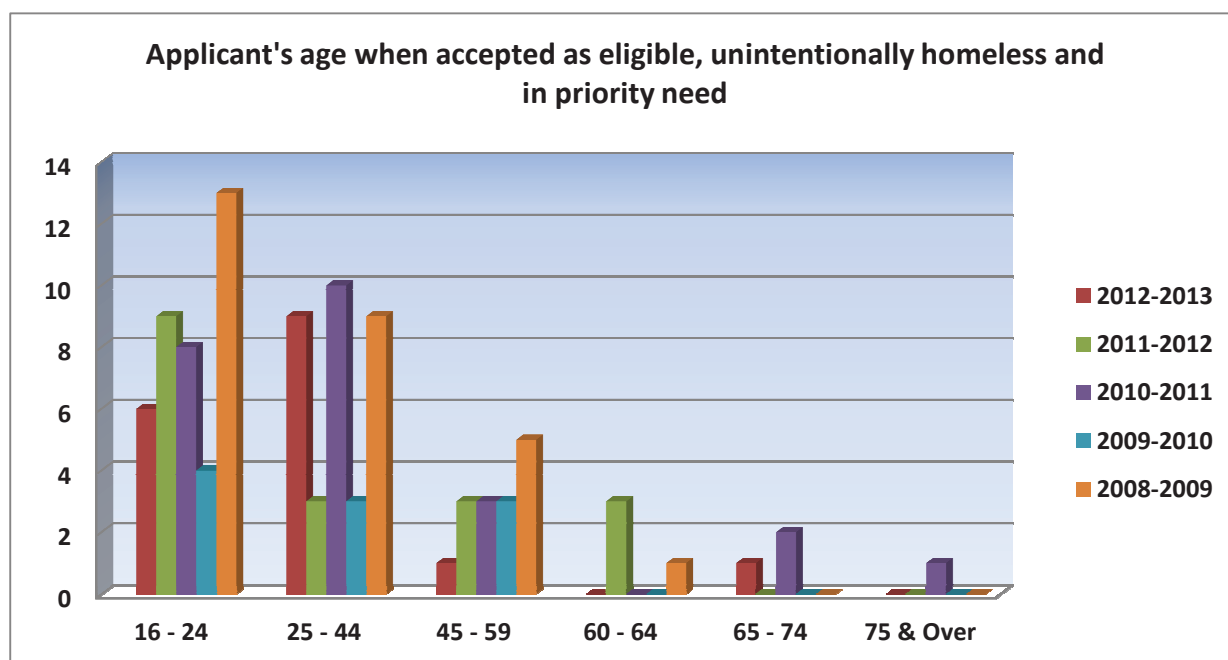
Priority Groups	2008 - 2009		2009 - 2010		2010 - 2011		2011 - 2012		2012 - 2013	
	Acceptances		Acceptances		Acceptances		Acceptances		Acceptances	
	No. of	% of	No. of	% of	No. of	% of	No. of	% of	No. of	% of
Families with dependent children (including pregnant)	14	50%	3	30%	19	80%	10	55.5%	12	70%
16/17 year old care leavers	4	14%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5.5%	1	6%
Physical disability	2	7%	2	20%	0	0%	1	5.5%	0	0%
Mental illness	3	11%	2	20%	2	8%	3	17%	0	0%
Drug / Alcohol dependency	1	4%	0	0%	1	4%	0	0%	2	12%
Leaving institution	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Violence/ Fear of Violence	0	0%	2	20%	0	0%	1	5.5%	2	12%
Other	4	14%	1	10%	2	8%	2	11%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>

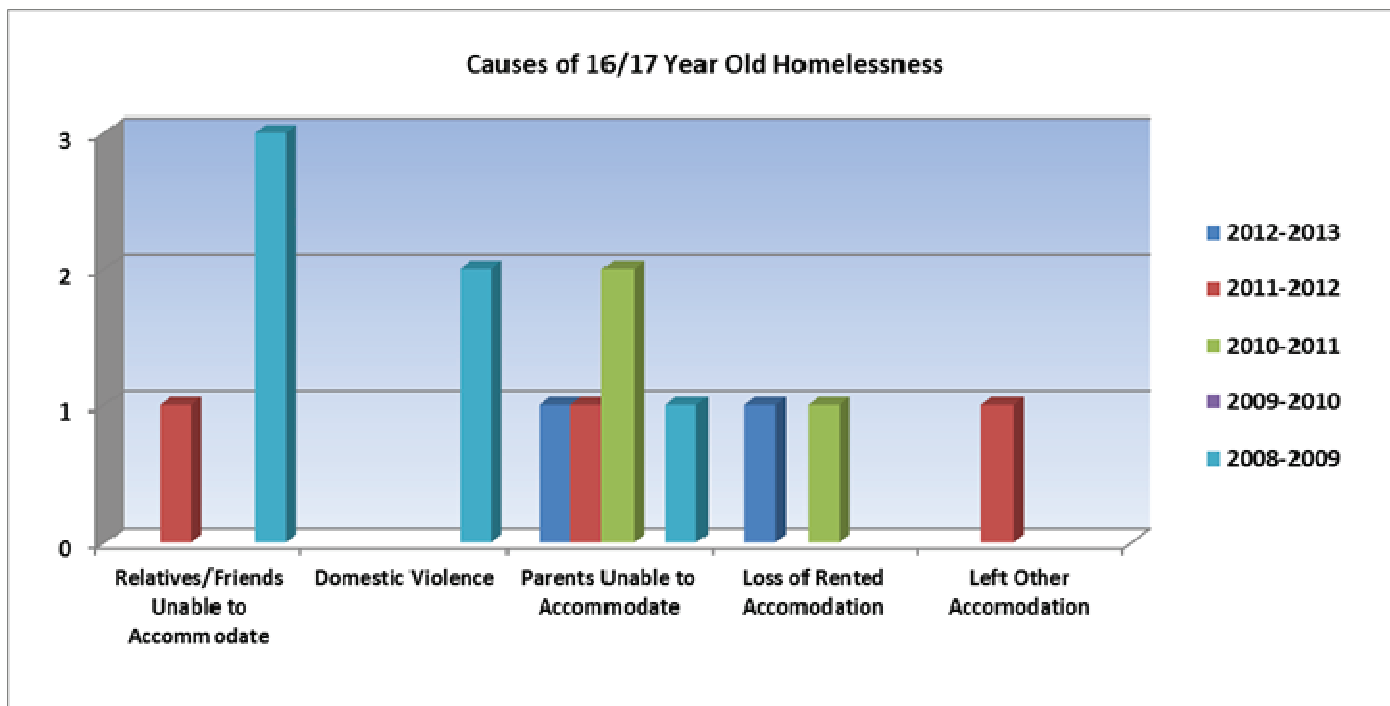
Families with dependent children account for the majority of homeless acceptances in Mid Devon. Between 2008 and 2013, 62 of the 97 households accepted as eligible for homelessness assistance contained children. A female lone parent headed half of the families accepted, with 28 households made up of couples with children. There were a slightly higher number of single male applicants to female applicants accepted.



The age profile identified is striking with 41% of accepted homeless applicants being young people aged between 16 and 24 and a further 35% between 25 and 44. This probably reflects the greater availability of alternative accommodation for older people threatened with homelessness rather than a lack of demand.

Given the forthcoming welfare reforms and the changes to Local Housing Allowance which have already taken place, this pattern is likely to continue.





### Prevention Toolkit – reducing homeless presentations

The Council is working with other local authorities in Devon to develop a meaningful partnership. Devon County Council (DCC) is developing the Community Hub and this will be the main way in which we would expect to work with partners in connection with those where homelessness is not just a housing issue, but something intrinsically linked to complex and chaotic life experiences. The Council will be involved in advising on DCC's commissioning plan and future specification.

Working in partnership with DCC, the homeless service takes a pro-active approach to ensure that the needs of homeless 16/17 year olds are adequately met. The work of the homeless team is vital in supporting and resolving housing issues for vulnerable young people in our community.

By working closely with DCC, the Council ensures that a joined-up service is available to prevent young people's homelessness, where possible, and to achieve sustainable housing solutions.

Developing effective homeless prevention interventions is central to our role. As well as working with individuals we engage with families, other colleagues working in other Services within the Council, agencies, schools and colleges to promote early intervention and prevention of youth homelessness. Examples of effective prevention casework may include home visits and family mediation, including behavioural and prevention contracts. Where possible, we will work closely with schools and colleges and work with the young person to address their ongoing education and support needs as well as assisting in obtaining information on activities or clubs and projects in the local area.

Effective working with statutory and voluntary agencies is also an important tool to ensure that young persons' housing needs are met. This will include working with CHAT (Churches Housing Action Trust), Young Devon, Smartmove, the Youth Enquiry Service and Supported Living Schemes. On occasions, the homeless case worker may find the use of a homeless prevention fund an effective prevention tool.

The Council will work with Social Services, as appropriate, and where DCC has a duty to 16/17 year olds, other housing options will be investigated.

For the time-being, the Council, working with our partners, uses a range of tools to assist applicants to prevent or resolve their homelessness at the earliest opportunity. In addition to the list below, the

Council continues to work to develop new and innovative prevention services.

- Devon Home Choice (Choice based lettings)
- Deposit and Rent in Advance Scheme (DARS) - helps applicants access private rented accommodation
- Floating Support – provided by Sanctuary Supported Living across Mid Devon to provide support to those in private and social sector tenancies and owner occupiers where they are at risk of losing their home
- CAB funding for debt advice and the Court service desk
- Community Housing Aid – Smartmove - a private rented sector access scheme bringing together homeless people and property owners to create sustainable tenancies.
- Working with CHAT (Churches Housing Action Trust) – who provides support and advice to potentially homeless and homeless people.
- Supported lodgings for young people working with Young Devon and Social Services.
- Homeless Prevention Fund – proactive use of funds to reduce repossessions and evictions
- Community Housing Aid – Nightstop – a same day emergency accommodation scheme for young people aged 16 – 25 in the homes of trained and approved volunteer hosts.
- Devon & Cornwall Housing Options Partnership Coordinator – contribution towards the cost of this post supporting the work of district councils in Devon.
- ADVA (Against Domestic Violence and Abuse Partnership) – help services for victims of domestic abuse.
- BCHA Street Homeless Outreach Team (SHOT) – helping secure accommodation and support for single people as well as supporting our response to the Government's No Second Night Out initiative for those sleeping rough.
- Local Welfare Assistance Fund – will provide rent and deposit assistance as well as money management advice via Money£wise which is part of Wessex Resolutions.
- Dedicated Housing Benefits Officer to fast track temporary accommodation and rent/deposit applications.
- Homeless Prevention Panel (HPP) multi agency forum used to look at housing options for 16 – 21 year olds.

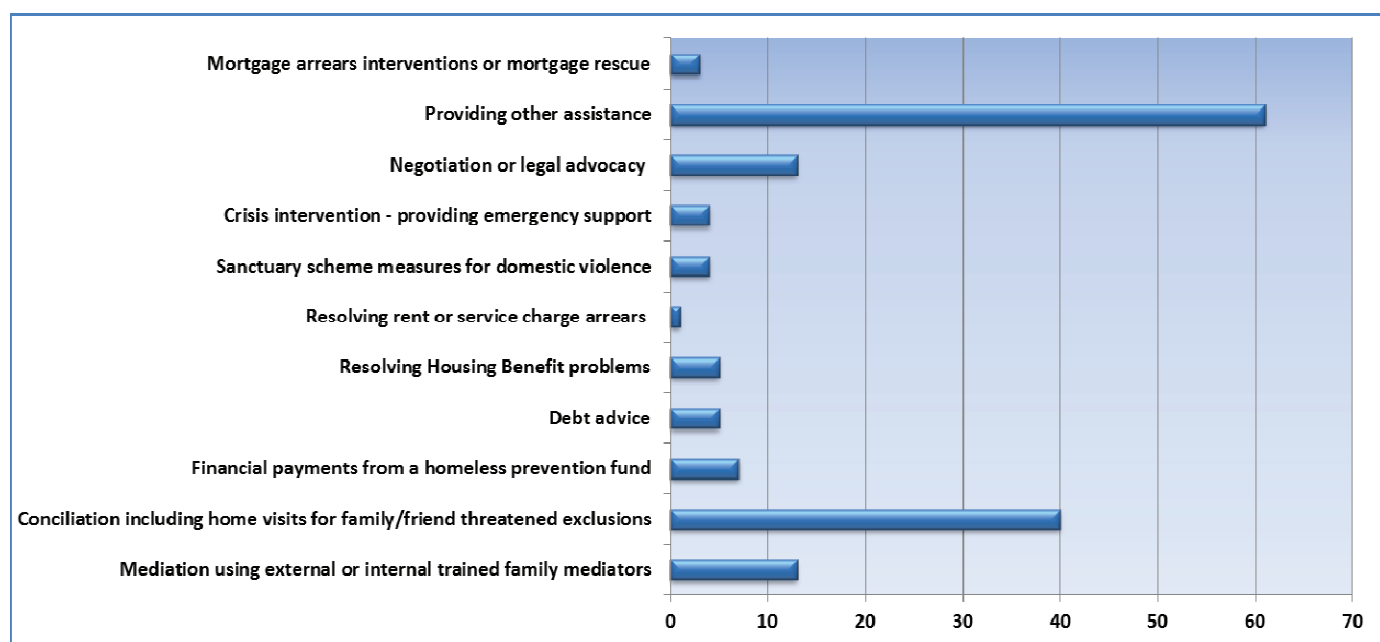
Through these prevention measures while there has been an upward trend in approaches, there has been a downward trend in acceptances. Effective prevention is considered successful where a person has been able to stay in their current accommodation or been able to find alternative accommodation in a planned way.

### Homelessness preventions 2008 – 2013

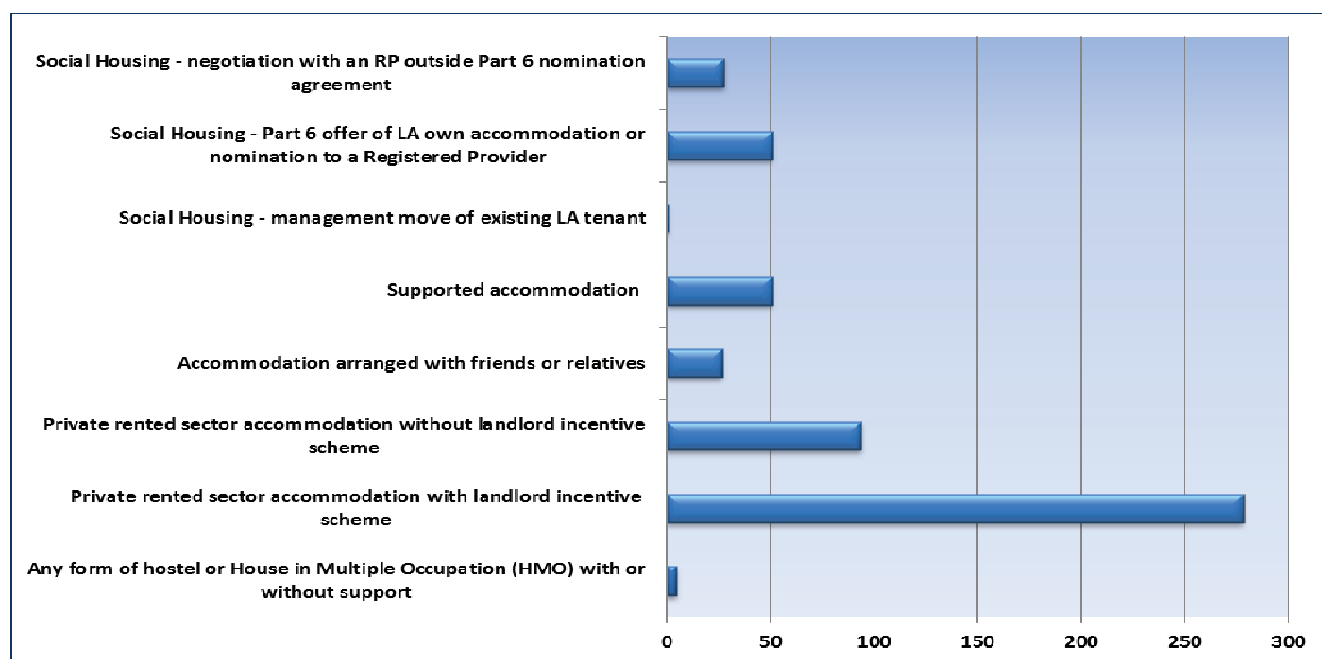
	2008 – 2009	2009 – 2010	2010 – 2011	2011 – 2012	2012 – 2013
Preventions or relieved (remain in the home)	71	77	172	82	155
Preventions or relieved (found alternative accommodation)	53	77	74	75	58
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>213</b>

Where people are helped to remain in their existing home, the main types of intervention after general advice to 199 of the 355 cases over the period 2008 – 2013 consisted of providing other assistance which involved more detailed casework followed by conciliation including home visits for family or friend threatened exclusions.

The chart below shows the full breakdown of the 156 prevention cases that required detailed casework by the homelessness team.



Where people are unable to remain in their existing accommodation and alternative accommodation is found the most commonly used intervention is the rent deposit scheme, which enables a household to be rehoused within the private rented sector. The second most used option is rehousing in the private rented sector without a landlord incentive. Full details of the types of alternative accommodation found for the 535 households over the period 2008 – 2013 are shown below.



Mid Devon will continue to promote the private sector as a positive alternative to social housing, and provide deposit and advance rent (DARS). We have developed partnerships with external agencies to deliver a bond scheme, which helps more homeless people or those threatened with homelessness. Some of the Council's new Local Welfare Assistance scheme, which replaces the national Social Fund as part of the welfare reforms, will be used to fund deposit and rent advances.

Mid Devon already has a dedicated officer within the Housing Benefit section to 'fast track' temporary accommodation and rent/deposit applications. With changes to the Local Housing Allowance and the move to Universal Credit good relationships with our landlords will be even more important.

Mid Devon actively promotes support to tenants via a dedicated officer who works for Sanctuary Supported Living but is based at the Council's offices in Tiverton. This support can be provided at the start of a tenancy or if difficulties arise during the tenancy. It can also be provided to owner-occupiers.

Referrals can come from organisations or through self-referrals. The table below shows that both the Council's Homelessness and Neighbourhood teams were among the main sources of referrals to Sanctuary's Floating Support Worker. The Community Mental Health team also made significant referrals in 2008 through to 2010 before a decision was made that the service would be provided by Rethink.

Referrer	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>MDDC Neighbourhood Team</b>	7	5	2	8	<b>10</b>
<b>MDDC Homelessness Team</b>	6	2	2	8	<b>0</b>
<b>Community Mental Health</b>	7	3	6	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Children &amp; Young Person Services</b>	0	2	2	3	<b>2</b>
<b>Churches Housing Action Team (CHAT)</b>	0	1	4	1	<b>0</b>
<b>Smartmove</b>	0	0	2	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Community Housing Aid/Probation Service Contract</b>	1	0	2	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Social Services Complex Care</b>	0	0	1	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Self-Referral</b>	2	1	1	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Transferred From Other Sanctuary Service</b>	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Homemaker Southwest</b>	1	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Other Local Authority</b>	0	0	0	1	<b>0</b>
<b>Exeter &amp; North Devon Alcohol Service (ENDAS)</b>	0	1	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Amber Project</b>	0	0	0	1	<b>0</b>
<b>Women's Refuge</b>	0	2	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Exeter Drug Project (EDP)</b>	2	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Rethink</b>	1	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>

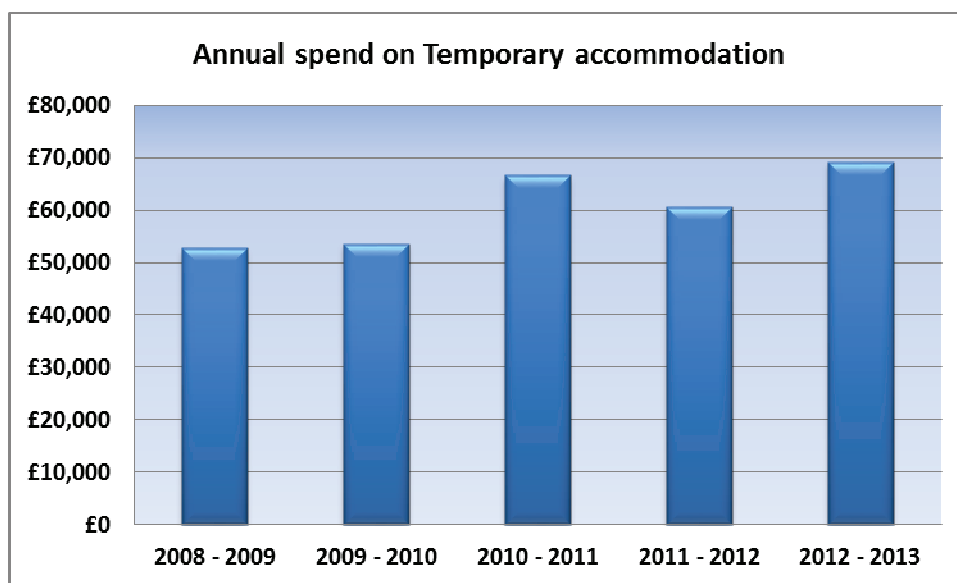
### Temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast use

Temporary accommodation in Mid Devon is provided through a small number of Bed and Breakfast guesthouses and hotels some out of the district including a hostel/hotel in Taunton. The hostel in Taunton has 24-hour cover and residents can prepare their own food. Other temporary accommodation is also available within the Mid Devon council stock.

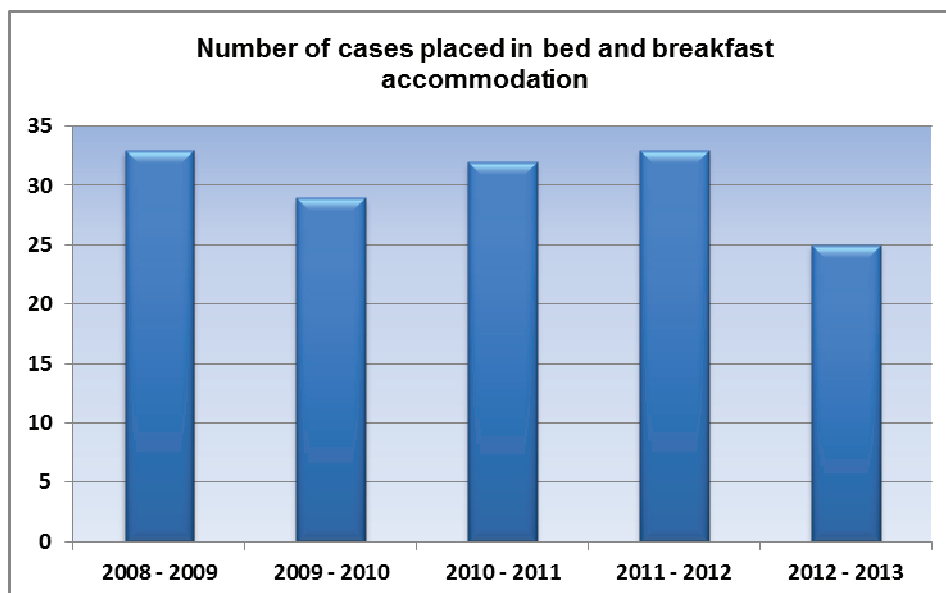
There are seven one-bed flats in Cullompton, which were formally for young people, but now all ages are accommodated there. The project to furnish three flats outlined in the last Homelessness Strategy to save on Bed and Breakfast (B & B) costs has now been completed. Beds, fridges and microwaves are provided. The other temporary accommodation is in Tiverton. These six one-bed flats and bedsits have a limited use as they are among older persons accommodation and need to be sensitively allocated.

The project to furnish the flats in Cullompton cost £500 per flat. Over the 18 months the flats have been in use, nine families have been housed there so far. It is difficult to calculate the savings made because of this project. As an example, the cost of housing a family in bed and breakfast accommodation for 6 weeks is £1890 of which only £552 would be covered by housing benefit whereas 6 weeks in one of the flats would cost £450, all of which could be covered by housing benefit. There are plans to furnish another flat in 2013/14.

Expenditure on bed and breakfast accommodation increased in the years 2008 – 2011 dropping in 2011 – 2012 but rising again in 2012 – 2013 despite the number of cases placed in bed and breakfast accommodation decreasing.



One of the reasons for the rise in expenditure has been the lack of move on properties available to rehouse these cases, which has resulted in their having to remain longer in bed and breakfast accommodation. Although these cases have not had to remain in B & B longer than the 6-week government limit. The other reason for the increase has been the rise in the B & B nightly rates.



## Rough Sleepers

The Government defines people sleeping rough as those sleeping, standing beside bedding or bedded down in the open air or other places not designed for habitation. This includes those in tents not used for recreational purposes. Mid Devon carries out a mapping exercise each autumn when all the voluntary

groups are contacted and a questionnaire sent out. In 2011, five rough sleepers were identified and this dropped to three in the autumn of 2012.

A formal Night Shelter has been set up and is opened for Rough Sleepers when the weather drops below freezing point. The Night Shelter is due to close before the winter of 2013 as the site forms part of plans to redevelop the area to provide 10 new affordable rent properties. Alternative options for provision are being explored.

### **No Second Night Out (NSNO)**

The Government recognises that rough sleeping can be avoided in many cases if people have access to stable accommodation and get help at an earlier stage. The Government has prioritised help for single homeless people recognising that they often do not benefit from homelessness prevention schemes. It has rolled out the No Second Night Out (NSNO) scheme, developed in London, nationally and is providing extra funding to local authorities for this initiative.

In February 2012, the Department of Communities and Local Government provided £606,000 for 10 local authorities in Devon and Cornwall County Council to adopt the NSNO principles. The Devon and Cornwall Rough Sleeping Partnership and Devon Housing Options Partnership have set out principles to be adopted across the two counties to reduce rough sleeping and to deliver the Government's NSNO standard.

In April 2013, BCHA Street Homeless Outreach Team (SHOT) took over provision of outreach services in Mid Devon. Rough sleepers will be identified through phone calls from the public to the Devon and Cornwall Rough Sleepers dedicated phone line and verified through SHOT or verification from an agreed agency linked to NSNO delivery, this includes; Police, Local Authority Staff, Healthcare Professionals or Day Centre Staff.

On receipt of a referral, the Outreach Team have 48 hours to verify and assess the rough sleeper on site. Upon assessment if the rough sleeper falls within one of three specific categories, then an offer of accommodation for a minimum of 72 hours will be made whilst a Single Service Offer can be explored and offered.

A Single Service Offer is a clear message that will be given to individual rough sleepers. It will be realistic, based on an assessment and include the support required to ensure that the individual will not sleep rough in the area or elsewhere. This can include a reconnection (an offer of accommodation elsewhere, not simply a ticket home) or an offer of accommodation locally.

If the Single Service Offer is realistic and sustainable and has been refused by the client, then we will end the accommodation provision. If the client continues to rough sleep then it will be the job of the Outreach Team to continue to work with the client and local agencies to refer back to the Single Service Offer. If the client continues to rough sleep then we will explore enforcement actions.

Since September 2012, we have helped two individuals to reconnect back to their local area and have helped two others into accommodation in the private rented sector. In June 2013 a further two individuals have been identified and have received a Single Service Offer and we are looking to help them find accommodation in the private rented sector.

### **Preventing homelessness – what works in Mid Devon?**

In order to fulfil our legal obligations under Section 179 of the Housing Act 1996 in addition to the advice and information provided free of charge the Council has worked to fund a range of other early intervention and homelessness prevention services.

## Deposit and Rent in Advance Scheme (DARS)

The Council administers the scheme that provides either a deposit or bond and the first months' rent in advance to allow homeless applicants or those threatened with homelessness to secure private rented accommodation. The deposit and first month's rent is paid in the form of a loan that the applicant then repays. The bond is a "promise" of money made to the landlord that they can claim against if there is any damage to the property. If a claim were made then the money would be recovered from the tenant.

There are certain restrictions on the type of property the Council will consider making a loan for, these are:

- The tenancy must be for a minimum of 6 months
- The property must not be overcrowded based on the applicant's family make up
- If the property is mortgaged or leasehold the landlord must have permission to sublet
- There must be valid buildings insurance
- The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating must be no lower than 37.

As part of the scheme, the Homelessness team offer the following:

- Free advice to both the tenant and landlord on the tenancy process
- Inspection of the property and where a bond is provided a video inspection would be carried out
- Fast tracking of housing benefit payments and, if needed, the benefit can be paid directly to the landlord
- A point of contact if any issues arise

The table below shows the number of successful applications made each year and the cost of the scheme.

Year	Spend	Number of successful applications
2008/09	£55,493	63
2009/10	£43,856	43
2010/11	£50,384	53
2011/12	£79,318	85
2012/13	£59,430	68

## SmartMove

SmartMove is a rent deposit scheme, which works with people in Mid Devon who are looking for accommodation in the private rented sector and live on a low wage or benefits. They only take referrals from nominated referrers such as Mid Devon District Council.

They offer landlords a written guarantee in place of a cash deposit on behalf of clients and then support the tenants to enable them to act responsibly and maintain their tenancies. This bond or written guarantee is live for an initial 6 months in order to give the tenant time to save up for the deposit. Once this deposit has been saved then this will be given to the landlord who will lodge it with a Tenancy Deposit Scheme. If the deposit has not been saved then a bond for a further 6 months can be offered. They also look to house people without a bond and can do this where a landlord does not require a bond or the fees are raised through crisis loans or other means such as through a charity.

The table below shows the number of referrals made to and the numbers helped through rehousing in the 4 years SmartMove have administered the scheme on Mid Devon's behalf. SmartMove also provide help to people to maximise income, complete benefit claim forms and manage debts and budgets. They have had success in working with people to remain in their existing home. They have also worked with the Council as part of the No Second Night Out initiative.

Year	Number of Referrals	Number of referrals rehoused
2009/10	97	40
2010/11	110	39
2011/12	102	30
2012/13	80	32

### Local Welfare Assistance Fund (LWA)

Following the abolition of the Social Fund administered by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) from April 2013 the Government has devolved funding to Local Authorities. Devon County Council has overall responsibility for administering the funding in Devon. It set up the Devon Local Government Steering Group (DLGSG) as the body responsible for distributing funding to District Councils to operate their own LWA schemes. The DLGSG have specified that each authority's LWA should achieve three strategic outcomes, which are:

- Increased self-reliance and resilience
- Quick and effective support for those with high priority short term needs
- Help for people to establish themselves in, or remain in the community

There is no requirement for local authorities to replicate the Social Fund scheme and the funding can be used flexibly. The DWP have stated that they "expect the funding to be concentrated on those facing greatest difficulty in managing their income and to enable a more flexible response to unavoidable need."

Mid Devon District Council was allocated the following funding for 2013/14:

Programme Funding	Administration Funding
£111,590	£23,580

Devon County Council will retain a 10% contingency fund although any overspend of the budget allocated will have to be funded by the Council. No funding has been allocated by central government for 2014/15 yet although a significant reduction is suggested.

The Council will provide support in the following ways to claimants:

- Money management advice provided by an external agency (Money£wise)
- Food parcels through funding provided to support local food banks provided by CHAT
- Furniture through funding provided to Turntable
- Rent deposit scheme

No cash payments will be made to claimants. The scheme is intended to help individuals and families cope with extreme and severely difficult one off situations.

As funding is limited, it is primarily intended to help residents within Mid Devon who are vulnerable, have exceptional need, have limited income and limited access to other funds such as savings. It is expected that the majority of applicants will be receiving income support, job seekers allowance, employment and support allowance or pension credits. Applicants with savings of £500 or more will not be accepted.

The table below shows how the 98 applications received up to 20 June 2013 are broken down into the type of help requested.

Food referrals		Furniture			Rent Deposit / advance			Money Advice		
Approved	Declined	Approved	Declined	Pending	Approved	Declined	Pending	Engaged	Closed	Customer failed to engage
46	10	12	5	4	2	0	6	5	6	2

## Mortgage Rescue Scheme

The Government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme is aimed at vulnerable homeowners who are at risk of having their home repossessed, three groups are eligible for the help, these are:

- The applicant or someone that lives with them has dependent children (someone who is 15 or younger or a person aged 16 to 18 who is a full time student) who lives with them;
- The applicant or someone that lives with them is pregnant;
- The applicant or someone who lives with them is elderly, ill or disabled.

The Council works with Shelter who carries out a detailed assessment of an applicant's circumstances to decide whether they meet the Mortgage Rescue criteria. If they do, then the case is passed to South West Homes who then approach housing associations to see if they would be willing to buy the property based on the condition and value of the property and rent it back to the occupier at less than market rent.

The Council has helped two cases through this route plus a further three cases are going through the process.

## Targeted Families

The Targeted Family Programme is Devon's response to the Government's Troubled Families Programme, which aims to turn round the lives of 150,000 families in the UK by helping adults get back into work; young people back into school and reduce crime and antisocial behaviour.

In Mid Devon, the Council is working with a range of other statutory partners and voluntary sector organisations to provide intensive family support to families in need. By providing a more co-ordinated response to families with multiple issues, the programme hopes to create better outcomes for families, and help them make positive choices about their future. In July 2013, the programme is working with 62 families in Tiverton and the plan is to roll out the programme to the Culm Valley and Crediton areas. Mid Devon District Council is supporting the programmes' development and administration and is working with Council tenants and other residents on housing issues.

## Part Two - The Strategy

### Introduction

Part One of the strategy reviewed homelessness in Mid Devon, looked at the District's particular circumstances and provides information on the nature of homelessness and the current services available.

Part Two identifies the Council's key strategic priorities and outlines how these priorities will be achieved through the delivery plan.

## Welfare and Social Housing Reforms

A consultation exercise with partners carried out at the start of 2013 highlighted concerns over the impact of the welfare reforms on vulnerable people living in Mid Devon.

The Council has undertaken assessments of the implications of the reforms on the District's residents. While some of these figures are estimates, they highlight the need to respond to the reforms in a proactive way to ensure the benefit cuts do not lead to unnecessary homelessness.

- 48 claimants were affected by the shared accommodation rate when it was introduced in January 2012
- In April 2013 219 council tenants were affected by the implementation of the spare room subsidy (bedroom tax) losing on average £12.75 a week and 98 housing association tenants were affected losing on average £15.21 a week
- Discretionary Housing Payment applications have shown an increase following the implementation of the spare room subsidy.
  - 141 applications were received in 2011/12 (85 successful – average award £21.33 a week)
  - 189 were received in 2012/13 (94 successful – average award £21.58 a week)
  - 105 applications have been received up to the start of July 2013 with 46 successful applications with an average weekly award of £14.63 a week
- The DWP have identified 24 families in Mid Devon who may be affected by the benefits cap (June 2013)
- No figures have been provided by the DWP on the numbers of claimants likely to be affected by the move to Universal Credit. 2,500 working age housing benefit claimants have been identified by the Council's Benefits Service who could potentially be affected by the changes

The Localism Act allows local authorities to fully discharge their duty to secure accommodation by arranging a suitable offer of accommodation in the private sector without requiring the applicant's agreement as was previously the case. The Council will look to develop a comprehensive policy outlining in what circumstances the main homelessness duty will be discharged into the private sector. The policy will include an assessment of suitability, property condition, cost/ affordability and family type.

## Gaps and Emerging Trends

Evaluating current provision and the consultation exercise completed with external agencies at the start of 2013 has identified where gaps in existing services are. The main gaps identified in Mid Devon are to:

- Investigate developing a private sector leasing scheme to enable the Council to discharge their homelessness duty to the private rented sector
- Review the nomination agreement for private landlords who use Landlord Empty Property Loans to improve empty properties to let out
- Greater engagement with the private rented sector in developing further housing options
- Develop protocols with registered providers and the Council's Housing Services team to ensure that suitable housing options advice is given at the end of a fixed term or flexible tenancy
- Investigate the lack of supported housing options identified through consultation within Mid Devon to prevent applicants being referred to schemes out of district to areas such as Exeter

Although some gaps in service provision have been identified and the delivery plan will work towards addressing these it is important to remember that existing prevention services, including those fully or part funded by the Council, will need to be maintained. Agencies have raised concerns about funding for existing services in the recent consultation exercise and this will become increasingly difficult in this age of austerity and cuts in local government funding.

## Strategic Priorities

The overall vision for the Council is outlined in the key objectives taken from the Corporate Plan 2012 – 2015, which are:

- Thriving economy
- Better homes
- Empowering our communities
- Caring for our environment

This homelessness strategy is a key component within the Council's overall housing strategy which is currently being reviewed. The new strategy document will be published mid-2014. Five priorities were identified within this strategy:

- Delivering affordable housing
- Making better use of existing housing stock
- Preventing homelessness
- Managing the impact of an aging population
- Reducing the impact of welfare reform

The housing strategy is being informed by a strategic housing market assessment which will provide detailed information about the amount of new homes needed in the District over time. It also takes account of local planning policy which has been developed to address issues arising from the last Housing Needs Survey, undertaken in 2011.

In terms of homelessness following the review of the current circumstances in Mid Devon and considering the challenges facing the District going forward, three specific priorities have been identified and will be the focus of the strategy.

1. Preventing homelessness and sustaining tenancies
2. Increasing the availability of affordable housing
3. Mitigating the effects of the welfare reforms and the Localism Act

### **1. Preventing homelessness and sustaining tenancies**

The Council will continue to work with its partners to prevent homelessness by intervening early, further developing tenancy sustainment services and providing high quality advice and support. The Council will continue to look for new and innovative ways of preventing homelessness and helping tenants sustain their tenancies and remain in their homes. Key actions to achieve this objective include:

- Ensuring our homelessness advice service and prevention information is up to date and well publicised
- Working towards achieving the Government's Gold Standard for homelessness services
- Providing advice and information to private sector landlords about the welfare reforms and changes in local housing allowance
- Working with partner agencies to identify gaps in provision and funding and seek solutions
- Working proactively with registered providers including the Council's own Housing Services to reduce evictions from social tenancies particularly in light of the new flexible and fixed term tenancy regime
- Investigating the development of a private sector leasing scheme to enable the Council to discharge the homelessness duty in the private rented sector
- Developing and promoting the Council's No Second Night Out duty

- Investigating alternative options for the provision of a Night Shelter following the redevelopment of the site of the existing shelter

In a climate of diminishing resources and where DCC will be reducing its own contribution to homelessness prevention, the Council is planning to review the structure of the housing needs teams. There are currently two teams; the Housing Allocations team and the Homelessness team. Any changes will be designed to ensure that the delivery of service to those in need of affordable housing and homeless provision, prevention and housing advice is improved.

## **2. Increasing the availability of affordable housing**

The Council will work to maximise the supply of good quality, affordable housing and make the best use of the District's social housing stock. Key actions to achieve this objective include:

- The Council pursuing development opportunities to build new affordable housing itself
- Maximising all opportunities to increase the supply of new affordable homes in the District
- Continuing to work with private sector landlords to improve the quality and accessibility of the private rented sector
- Continuing to work to bring empty homes back into use as affordable housing
- Considering the District's needs when negotiating with housing developers to ensure opportunities are not lost
- Ensuring that affordable housing is meeting residents requirements and monitor the impact of local lettings policies
- Developing a private sector leasing scheme
- Review supported housing provision following gaps identified through the consultation exercise with other Agencies

Over half the housing applicants registered for rehousing on the Devon Home Choice (DHC) scheme in Mid Devon have been placed in the E or "No Housing Need" band. However, there are cases registered in this band where affordability is a real issue. Some people on low incomes in private sector accommodation find it very difficult to pay the rent and are very anxious to move in to social housing. It is for this reason that Mid Devon has retained the E Band. However, other strategic housing authorities in Devon have reviewed their own allocation schemes and have removed all those who have been found to have no housing need, in accordance with the provisions of DHC policy from their own housing registers. The Council plans to undertake more research to inform debate about the future viability of the E band in the District.

As a landlord, the Council is now using flexible tenancies to make best use of the housing stock and is taking a robust approach to identifying and ending tenancy fraud. There is also help available for those who need to downsize. This involves giving advice on housing options available, subscribing to a national home-swapping scheme, and giving priority for rehousing through the DHC scheme. These initiatives lead to a greater turnover leading to more stock being available for those in housing need.

As a strategic housing authority, it is important that the Council takes steps to increase the supply of one- and two-bedroom accommodation as this is the size of home most commonly requested by housing applicants. This imperative must inform future discussions with our colleagues in Planning, negotiations with developers and our own building programme.

## **3. Mitigating the impacts of the welfare reforms and the Localism Act**

The Council will work to mitigate the impacts that the welfare reforms will bring. By working in partnership, this will be done by identifying households whose homes will be put at risk by the reforms and by working with them to prevent homelessness. Key actions to achieve this objective include:

- Ensuring Discretionary Housing Payments assist those most in need
- Ensuring the efficient and effective use of existing stock in the District by assisting households to downsize where appropriate
- Investigating the potential for increasing the number of shared houses to assist under 35's affected by the changes to the shared accommodation rate
- Working with registered providers and the Council's Housing Services to offer good quality advice and assistance to tenants whose flexible or fixed term tenancies will not be renewed at the end of the term
- Developing a policy outlining the circumstances where the homelessness duty will be discharged into the private sector
- Continuing to promote the floating support services provided by Sanctuary Supported Living to those at risk of losing their home

In order to ensure that all the objectives identified are met an action plan has been developed. The Homelessness Strategy feeds into other strategic documents including the Housing Strategy, the Local Investment Plan, the Corporate Plan and Tenancy Strategy amongst others.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

Homelessness is more than just about a person needing a home. It affects all aspects of a person's life from their health to their ability to remain in or gain employment and maintain social networks.

Despite the rapid increases in approaches since 2009, the homeless service has been effective in dramatically reducing the numbers of cases accepted as homeless and in priority need. The preventative work undertaken by the Homelessness team in partnership with other agencies has meant that large numbers of people have been able to avoid becoming homeless.

Prevention work is now seen as the key and while this element of the service has been successful, it is essential that work is undertaken to investigate and respond to the future challenges identified in this strategy.