

Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy Research

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Section 1: Executive Summary

i) Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced new responsibilities for local government including duties to carry out a review of homelessness in their areas; to publish a homelessness strategy based on this review; to keep the strategy under review; and to consult other local or public authorities, or voluntary organisations before adopting or modifying the strategy (DTLR, 2002). Another significant change to housing policy was the implementation of the Supporting People initiative. The initial Supporting People policy was launched as a framework in 1998 and came into effect in April 2003.

In June 2003 the Policy Studies Research Centre at the University of Lincoln was commissioned by the Lincolnshire County Homelessness Strategy Subgroup (LCHSS) to identify the support needs of those categories of homeless persons in Lincolnshire who fall under the umbrella of 'Supporting People' policy (young people; older people; people with mental health or learning disability issues; victims of domestic violence; substance misusers; and ex-offenders). This report summarises the findings of the research.

ii) Research Methods

The research utilised a range of methods including documentary analysis, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Importantly, the research also incorporated focus groups with homeless people. These were undertaken in Lincoln, Skegness and Sleaford in order to reflect the experiences of homeless people in the County's urban, coastal and rural areas.

A wide range of statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations took part in the research including:

- ACIS
- Boston Borough Council
- Boston Mayflower HA
- Boston Women's Aid
- CAB (Louth)
- CentrePoint Outreach (Boston)
- Connexions
- East Lindsey District Council
- First College Louth
- GFS Platform
- HMP Lincoln
- HomeStart Louth & District
- LEAP
- Lincoln City Council
- Lincoln Drugs Action Team
- Lincoln Women's Centre/Women's Aid Outreach
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Lincolnshire Housing Aid (Shelter)
- Lincolnshire Partnership Trust
- Linx Homes
- Longhurst HA
- Louth Living Well Project
- NCH Leaving Care Service
- NOMAD Trust
- Probation Service
- Rainer Lincolnshire
- Salvation Army
- Skegness Furniture Project
- Sleaford Foyer
- Sleaford Furniture Recycling Project
- Social Services (Community Health)
- Social Services (Education)
- Social Services (Older People)
- Social Services (Social Inclusion)

- Social Services (Teenage Parents)
- South Holland District Council
- South Holland Recycling Project
- South West Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust
- St. Matthews HA
- Sutton Bridge Community Project
- West Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust
- West Lindsey District Council
- YMCA

iii) Key Findings

- Although homelessness in Lincolnshire (3.8 households accepted as in priority need per 1000 households) is lower than the English average (5.5 per 1000), there is evidence that it is a growing problem throughout the County;
- The extent of homelessness varies considerably across the County with East Lindsey having the highest rate (6.0 homeless households per 1000) and South Holland the lowest (1.4 homeless households per 1000);
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the problems of rough sleeping and ‘sofa-surfing’ are underestimated within the County;
- The problem of homelessness in some parts of the County has been exacerbated by population growth, in-migration and increasing numbers of asylum seekers and migrant workers;
- Population density in both East and West Lindsey remains low at only 0.7 persons per hectare, making provision of services for homeless people more difficult;
- The County’s population growth, combined with a range of other factors (as noted above) has led to decreasing affordability in all Districts with Lincoln being the least affordable area;
- Homelessness and decreasing affordability are further exacerbated by a lack of social housing, especially in the more remote rural areas of the County. The social rented sector accounts for only 14.7% of all housing stock in Lincolnshire c.f. 19.2% in England & Wales and 17.5% in East Midlands;
- There are both similarities and differences regarding the Councils’ responses to homelessness. All Councils record increasing levels of homelessness, especially amongst young people;
- Despite limited resources, it is evident that Councils have proactively tried to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002. There are several examples of innovative policies including: choice-based lettings system (Lincoln); advice to under-16s (East Lindsey); and mediation services (North Kesteven);
- There is substantial evidence of joint working between local authorities and statutory bodies such as Social Services (e.g. all Councils have developed joint assessment protocols for young people). Similarly, there is evidence of a strong relationship between local authorities and voluntary agencies;

- Councils have responded well to the needs of vulnerable groups. More specifically, supported accommodation has been developed in liaison with a wide range of different agencies (e.g. NACRO, MENCAP, Women’s Aid), and some floating support and outreach services have been developed to meet the needs of homeless people who are unable to access mainstream services. In most instances, these policies are supplemented by financial support to voluntary organisations;
- There is limited access to both emergency direct access accommodation and Women’s Refuges. Many of the services provided by voluntary agencies are clustered around urban and more densely populated areas, and there are fewer voluntary agencies operating in the south of County. Due to a range of factors, it is arguable that the provision of homelessness services is weakest in the South Holland and Boston areas;
- Although there is some variation with regards to the types of people who are most likely to become homeless, the group most likely to be cited by organisations as being in need of support was young people. Whilst the Supporting People programme has increased funding and enabled better coordination of policy in relation to the needs of homeless young people, some organisations highlighted a number of weaknesses in current policy;
- Most statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations require additional resources, whether to maintain or expand existing homelessness services. However, the problem of organisational sustainability is most acute in relation to the voluntary sector;
- There were few comments by organisations on the needs of homeless older people. This may reflect the stereotype of homeless people as young, rendering older homeless people relatively ‘invisible’. However, the few responses on this topic suggested that the needs of older homeless people within the County were not being met;
- There are increasing numbers of homeless people, especially young adults, displaying mental health needs. Supporting People funding has enabled Lincolnshire County Council to expand its mental health services, although these are under development and the role of outreach teams in relation to homeless people is still to be clarified. There is also a need for more sensitive evaluation tools;
- There were 1,703 recorded incidents of domestic violence throughout the County during 2003/04. However, anecdotal evidence from women’s groups within the County suggests that official statistics may significantly underestimate the extent of the problem. Lincolnshire has only limited emergency accommodation for victims of domestic violence, with only two women’s Refuges, based in Lincoln and Boston;
- Many homeless people within the County display multiple needs, including issues with substance misuse. The relationship between homelessness and substance misuse is complex: substance misuse may lead to homelessness, although homeless people are less likely to receive appropriate support. Although substance misuse services within the County are good, they are not always easily accessible to residents with acute drug problems;

- In relation to ex-offenders, there is an established approach to multi-disciplinary working within Lincolnshire which has been encapsulated within the ‘Supporting People Programme’. At an anecdotal level practitioners comment that the service provided by organisations with which there are formal contracts is very good, but there are insufficient bed-spaces to meet demand. Also, the extent of homelessness or housing services available to offenders in the County varies according to length of prison sentence. Whilst offenders serving a sentence of more than 12 months are eligible for a range of housing support services, those serving less than 12 months receive less support;
- Homeless people stated that: there are more options for homeless people in Lincoln compared with coastal and rural areas; there is a lack of emergency accommodation; accommodation offered by RSLs is not always suitable; and homelessness staff are sometimes unsympathetic.

iv) Summary

To summarise, it is apparent that homelessness is a growing problem throughout the County. Demographic factors such as population growth, in-migration and increasing numbers of asylum seekers and migrant workers – combined with a relatively small social-rented sector and decreasing affordability in the owner-occupied sector – are likely to further exacerbate the problem.

But it is evident that, despite limited resources, District Councils have proactively tried to meet the needs of vulnerable people. There are numerous examples of innovative policies and good evidence of joint working between local authorities and statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations. As stated above, supported accommodation has been developed in liaison with a wide range of different agencies (e.g. NACRO, MENCAP, Women’s Aid), and some floating support and outreach services have been developed to meet the needs of homeless people who are unable to access mainstream services.

However, as the SWOT analysis in Section 6 suggests, there remains a number of weaknesses. Most importantly, there are not yet in place enough Countywide protocols; homelessness services throughout the County vary considerably in terms of both quality and extensiveness; and some homeless services currently rely on the goodwill of an active, but small and under-funded, voluntary sector. In response to these issues, a number of recommendations are suggested in Section 7. Importantly, Lincolnshire Supporting People have already incorporated some of these recommendations into their recently developed five-year strategy. Lastly, it is apparent that there are good opportunities for District Councils to further integrate their homelessness services, and to further strengthen their links with the voluntary and charitable sectors.

Section 2: Background

Introduction

Tackling homelessness constitutes one of the key components of the government's social exclusion programme. As such, there have been broad changes to both homelessness legislation and procedures that have significantly impacted on the way in which local authorities must tackle the problem. The following sections outline the government's most recent policy and legislative responses to the issue of homelessness.

In 2001, the Government published its Housing Policy Statement 'Quality And Choice: A Decent Home For All. The Way Forward For Housing'. The report demonstrated their commitment to tackling homelessness and created the housing policy framework for the next 10 years. In September 2001 the government put into motion the development of a National Homelessness Strategy. In March 2002, the Homelessness Directorate was formed, bringing together the Rough Sleepers Unit, the Bed and Breakfast Unit, and a new team responsible for tackling homelessness. Their aims were outlined in their key homeless policy document 'More than a roof: A report into tackling homelessness' (2002). Although not a full national strategy, the report detailed the future direction of government policy, the style within which it would be delivered, and challenged all sectors to work together to innovate and deliver lasting long-term solutions to homelessness. Although lacking in any specific detail, the report set out the framework for a future strategy and the direction of Government policy. It was launched alongside a written response from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government & the Regions, Rt. Hon. Stephen Byers MP.

In his response he detailed the six key objectives that underpin their approach:

- To strengthen help to people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness;
- To develop more strategic approaches to tackling homelessness;
- To encourage new responses to tackling homelessness;
- To reduce the use of B&B hotels for homeless families with children
- To sustain the two-thirds reduction in rough sleeping;
- To ensure the opportunity of a decent home for all.

The report also provided an analysis of homelessness trends. It found that, whilst levels of rough sleeping have been reducing in recent years, the number of people applying for and receiving help from local authorities under the homelessness legislation had been increasing. The number of households accepted as homeless who are living in temporary accommodation had also been rising and there had been increases in the number of families living in bed and breakfast accommodation. It also acknowledged that there were people living in insecure, temporary, over-crowded or poor condition housing were not sleeping rough or approaching local authorities for help but who may have been at risk of homelessness. The Government set clear

targets to end the use of bed & breakfast accommodation for homeless families with children and to reduce the levels of rough sleeping (Nixon, 2003).

Homelessness Act 2002

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced new responsibilities for local government including duties to: carry out a review of homelessness in their areas; formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on this review; keep the strategy under review; and consult other local or public authorities, or voluntary organisations before adopting or modifying the strategy (DTLR, 2002). More broadly, it aimed to 'enable homelessness services to move from short-term crisis management towards a long-term strategy based on early intervention and support to help people keep their homes' (ODPM, 2002). This will be achieved by: strengthening the assistance available to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness; and ensuring a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness, in particular by requiring a homelessness strategy for every housing authority District.

The Act placed duties on housing authorities and gave them powers to meet these aims, although it also emphasised the need for joint working between housing authorities, social services and other statutory, voluntary and private sector partners in tackling homelessness more effectively. It also widened the categories of priority need to include:

- 16 and 17 years olds;
- Care-leavers aged 18 to 20 years;
- People who are vulnerable because of time spent in care, the armed forces, prison or custody;
- People who are vulnerable because of violence.

However, as Nixon (2003) suggests, assessments of vulnerability are controversial. Broadly, it must be demonstrated that the applicant is less able to cope when homeless, or is at risk of harm in situations where a less vulnerable person could cope without harmful effects. Local authorities do not necessarily accept problematic e.g. drug use, even of a severe and chaotic kind, as a reason for accepting a homeless person as vulnerable (Nixon, 2003: 10).

Supporting People Programme

Another significant change to housing policy was the implementation of Supporting People initiative. The initial Supporting People policy was launched as a framework in 1998 and came into effect in April 2003. It is designed to complement broader government policies such as tackling social exclusion and helping vulnerable people. In terms of homelessness, the role of Supporting People is to both help prevent homelessness and ensure vulnerable people gain greater independence. It also aims to improve the quality, range and flexibility of support services to vulnerable people by focusing provision on local need, integrating support with wider local strategies and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of services. This might include, for example: helping older people to remain in their own home as long as they wish to by funding visiting support services; helping young people leaving care to prepare for greater independence through training in basic skills such as cooking and hygiene; and helping people leaving institutions or who have been homeless to set up home (DTLR, 2002: 18).

Importantly, the Supporting People policy acknowledges that homelessness is not just a 'housing' issue. Although for some, the causes of homelessness are 'clear cut' (for example, giving up an existing tenancy or a relationship breakdown) for others, the causes are more complex (DTLR, 2002: 13). In particular, there is substantial evidence (CRISIS, 2004) that many homeless people experience multiple needs. These may include:

- Mental health problems
- Misuse of various substances
- Personality disorder
- Offending behaviour
- Borderline learning difficulties
- Physical disability
- Physical health problems
- Challenging behaviour
- Vulnerability because of age

(CRISIS, 2004: 6-7).

Supporting People brings together the majority of existing revenue funding streams for supported accommodation into a single pot. It is argued that by pooling budgets it should be possible to target resources and services more effectively to those with greatest need (Nixon, 2003). Importantly, Supporting People funding can be used only for 'housing-related support'. It cannot be used to fund housing management or personal or health care for which other sources of funding are available. Supporting People will affect arrangements for support services that are related to a variety of accommodation types (Porteus et al, 2002).

Supporting People policy also recognises that homeless households are likely to have needs for additional services which fall outside the scope of the Supporting People programme funding, making joint working with commissioners, planners and providers of the following services essential:

- health services;
- drugs/alcohol services including Drug Action Teams;
- Social Services;
- the Probation Service including Youth Offending Teams;
- voluntary sector service providers;
- charitable sector service providers;
- education and training services;
- the Employment Service (Job Centre Plus);
- the Benefits Agency;
- grant making charities and trusts;
- crime and disorder reduction partnerships;
- local strategic partnerships

(Homeless Directorate, 2003: 13)

Whilst the Countryside Agency noted that the new Supporting People arrangements provide a real opportunity to ensure that vulnerable people are independent, they noted that there were three main concerns as to how they would be implemented in rural areas. First, they argued that as the local distribution of Supporting People funding flows from regular audits of need, it is crucial for rural authorities to develop effective and robust mechanisms for assessing need. Second, as rural services are more expensive to deliver, it is very important that budgets reflect real costs and that the 'rural dimension' to these budgets is properly presented and justified. Third, in counties with significant rural communities, but where all of the supported housing provision is currently in the major towns and cities, there will need to be mechanisms to ensure that provision is made from 'the cross-authority pot'. This would secure appropriate development of new provision in rural areas, and also ensure that the funding for town or city based services reflects the reality of their catchment areas (Countryside Agency, 2002: 14).

Homelessness in Rural Areas

The Countryside Agency's State of the Countryside Report (2004) highlights the growing problem of homelessness in rural areas. It noted that while the level of rural homelessness (38.3 households in every 10,000) remains lower than in urban areas (68.3 households in every 10,000), the rate of increase in homelessness was greatest in remote rural areas where, between 1999 and 2003, the number of homeless households increased by just under 30% (Countryside Agency, 2004: 73). The report's key findings relating to housing in rural areas include:

- The social housing sector in rural Districts accounts for only 13.4% of total housing stock, compared to 22.4% of housing stock in urban Districts.
- Since the second quarter of 2002, median house prices in rural Districts have been rising faster than urban house prices. The median house price for accessible rural Districts continues to be the highest of all Districts in England.
- Whilst there was a slight improvement in housing affordability in rural Districts of the South East from 2002-03, affordability in rural Districts elsewhere worsened.
- The proportion of the rural population who would have to spend more than 50% of their household income per month on mortgage payments increased from 33.2% in 2002 to 36.8% in 2003.
- Whilst 77.5% of homeless households in urban areas are housed in temporary accommodation, only 50.9% of rural homeless households are thus provided for.
- In 2001 there were 135,000 second and holiday homes across England, 64.1% of which were in rural Districts. Second homes accounted for 2.5% of the total dwelling stock in remote rural areas in 2001.

(Countryside Agency, 2004: 73)

According to the report, a widening in the definition of 'in priority need' by the 2002 Homeless Act may have impacted on the number of homeless households recorded in

2002-03. Nonetheless, there are particular features of rural housing markets that may cause homelessness, including high levels of private property ownership, high house prices, a lack of social housing, and the shrinkage of the tied housing sector (Cloke et al, 2001 cited in Countryside Agency, 2004: 83). Two important factors relating to the increase in rural homelessness are declining affordability and a decline in social rented sector housing. Affordability in rural areas has worsened due to a range of factors including: in-migration of more affluent people; a shortage of available land; high development costs; demand for second and holiday homes; decline in agricultural employment; rise of part-time service sector (Countryside Agency, 2004: 74). In the second quarter of 2002, rural house prices rose faster than urban house prices. At the same time, new provision of social housing was unable to keep pace with reselling of properties sold through 'right-to-buy'. In addition, there has been a clear decline in the proportion of total housing stock that is local authority (LA) housing in all areas, particularly in accessible rural areas where LA housing accounted for only 5.2% of all stock in 2003. In all areas there was an increase in the proportion of Registered Social Landlord/Housing Association (RSL/HA) housing stock, though overall the proportion of public sector stock declined in rural areas. The increasing proportion of private sector housing over the period is evident in all areas, though particularly in accessible rural areas. (Countryside Agency, 2004: 76)

Characteristics of Rural Homelessness

Recent research (Homeless Directorate 2003, Countryside Agency 2002) has acknowledged the unique characteristics of homelessness in rural areas. Although commonly regarded as an 'urban' problem, it is estimated that around one in five homeless households accepted by local authorities are to be found in rural areas (Homeless Directorate, 2003: 14).

While levels of homelessness may be higher in urban areas, it is apparent that homelessness in rural areas is a significant, albeit less 'visible', problem. Research undertaken by CRISIS suggests that homeless people in the countryside are just as likely to sleep rough as their urban counterparts, but they are more likely to use locations such as barns, outbuildings and churchyards that are hidden away from public view (CRISIS, 1999: 14). There are common reasons as to why young people in both urban and rural areas become homeless (most of which were mentioned by homeless people interviewed for this research). Evans (1999) broadly categories the causes of homelessness as: relationship problems (conflicts with parents, abuse and abandonment and splitting up with a partner); and difficulties in finding suitable accommodation. Significantly, although the former causes are not specific to any one type of area, the latter cause is more likely to be associated with rural homelessness. Evans states that in most cases, rural local authorities had been unable to help and private rented accommodation was in short supply, too expensive or landlords were reluctant to let their properties to people who were unemployed, especially if they were under 25 years of age (Evans, 1999: 7).

Although there may be some similarities with regards to the causes of homelessness, it is nonetheless evident that there are wide variations between urban and rural areas in the scale and nature of homelessness problems. The Countryside Agency identifies a number of characteristics specific to rural homelessness:

- there are fewer services providing advice and information and the distances between services and users can make them difficult to access;
- there are fewer networks and low awareness of the services that do exist;
- there is a large private rented sector, but access may be very difficult for young people;
- house prices are high, particularly in relation to the low wages offered for local jobs;
- there is a small social rented sector and very little affordable housing to rent or buy;
- there is more stigma for someone identified as homeless in a smaller community and homeless people are often more isolated than they would be in towns and cities.

(Countryside Agency, 2002: 6)

Interestingly, the CRISIS research suggested that there are both advantages and disadvantages to being homeless in a rural area compared to being homeless in an urban area. The disadvantages included the problem of homelessness not being recognised as a major problem; some (especially young) people feeling that rural or small town life can be claustrophobic and intrusive; being made to feel like an outsider; few facilities or services; and poor public transport services make it difficult to get around and find help (CRISIS, 1999: 39-43). Advantages to being homeless in a rural area include: the peace, tranquillity and beauty of the rural environment; a safer environment (especially mentioned by older homeless people); and more friendly and helpful people (again, especially for older homeless people) (CRISIS, 1999: 38-39). Evans' research cites important differences between younger and older homeless people's attitudes to living in a rural area. Whilst the majority of homeless people preferred living in a rural area, young people were critical of the shortage of things for them to do, a factor that sometimes led to the use of drugs and petty crime. Also, the lack of housing and employment opportunities and, more specifically, the lack of services for homeless people, meant that many gravitated towards local towns and cities (Evans, 1999: 6).

Lastly, according to the ODPM (2003), local authority housing departments in rural areas may find that they are the only service for homeless households in an area; there may also be a restricted supply of housing that might be used for resettlement; communications may be relatively poor (meaning that operating costs in rural areas can be higher than in urban areas because of the time staff spend travelling); and some types of service, for example, floating support, transitional housing services and supported lodgings, may be more effective models for rural areas because they can be operated on a cross-tenure basis and on a smaller scale (ODPM, 2003).

Measurement of rural homelessness

The counting of homeless people in both urban and rural areas is problematic. Local authorities limit homeless figures to homeless households applying for help and those households accepted as statutorily recognised as vulnerable. Some local authorities have also undertaken counts of rough sleepers, although methodologically, these tend to be limited in scope (the limited insight provided by a one night snapshot survey, the invisibility of certain vulnerable groups such as women, minority ethnic people etc. (Robinson and Reeve, 2004)). In comparison, the methods used by voluntary agencies

(especially in urban areas) may lead to double- or triple-counting of homeless people. According to recent research undertaken on behalf of CRISIS, there may be as many as 750,000 people living in B&B; supported housing; at imminent risk of eviction; squatting, in over overcrowded accommodation; or in accommodation that is not overcrowded, but is deemed as unsatisfactory by the head of household (although they do point out that not all of these people will be deemed as 'homeless') (Kenway and Palmer, 2003: 3).

Importantly, the fewer facilities available for homeless people in rural areas may have significant implications for the way it is measured. Evans (1999) found that homeless people in rural areas were less likely to approach the local authority for help in comparison to homeless people in urban areas. Many of the respondents involved in her research experienced a number of difficulties in getting help from the local council and other agencies in terms of what to do and where to go. Also, the help they received from their local council disappointed some people. They found it difficult to find anyone who would take responsibility for helping them. By and large, they described the staff they approached as unsympathetic and unhelpful (Evans, 1999: 10-11). These findings are corroborated by research undertaken by the Countryside Agency (2003). They too found that homeless people in rural areas were more negative than their urban counterparts about the ability of local authorities to help. In contrast, homeless people in rural areas were more positive about the role of voluntary agencies. This is possibly explained by the voluntary agencies' single role of helping homeless people. Also, agency staff were less likely to hide behind bureaucratic and professional barriers (Evans, 1999: 10). Importantly, the Countryside Agency found that living with friends and family was the most common form of homelessness in rural areas.

How the above compares to the findings from this research is discussed in more detail below. However, it also has important implications for the measurement of homelessness in rural areas. There are common methodological issues in relation to counting homeless people e.g. many homeless people do not approach statutory agencies; many fall under multiple jurisdictions (homelessness, community care, children); and some homeless people have multiple records, which, due to issues around confidentiality, are rarely collated. But, the greater concentration of services in urban areas means that homeless people may be double- or triple counted. In contrast, fewer specialised services and long distances to travel may mean that many homeless people remain hidden in rural areas (CRISIS, 2001: 9). Also, the Countryside Agency argue that traditional measures of homelessness have directed the attention of policy and the targeting of resources towards reducing the number of homeless people living in B&B hotels and the number of people sleeping rough. The predominance of homeless people in rural areas living with friends and family suggests that these traditional measures lead to a neglect of rural homelessness by policy makers and service providers. They recommend that reliance on family and friends might be usefully employed as proxy indicator of the availability and adequacy of temporary accommodation in rural areas. More specifically, they offer the following recommendations:

- Estimating the incidence and understanding the experiences of homelessness in rural areas demand that particular attention is paid to the situations of homeless people staying with family and friends.

- Local authority homelessness reviews must employ methods capable of illuminating situations, such as staying with family and friends, neglected by traditional methods of estimating homelessness (such as official homeless statistics and rough sleeper headcounts).

(Countryside Agency, 2003)

Homelessness Strategies in a rural context

The specific characteristics of homelessness in rural areas outlined above suggest that there are particular barriers and issues with regards to implementing homelessness strategies in a rural context. The Countryside Agency state that rural local authorities may be able to successfully develop effective rural housing and homelessness strategies by: agreeing definitions of homelessness and need; designing needs assessment tools suitable for rural areas; and agreeing ways of working with other agencies across large geographical and heterogeneous areas (particularly in relation to Supporting People) (Countryside Agency, 2002: 10). They stress that effective strategic and multi-agency working is particularly important in rural areas and where services are sparse and dispersed, communication and inter-disciplinary awareness are crucial to both finding and helping people who are homeless or at risk. This view is supported by CRISIS who argue that outside large metropolitan areas, it makes sense for local agencies to jointly provide services to local people. This is particularly the case where a small number of people may require specialist services or there is significant mobility of people between local authorities (CRISIS, 2001: 23). Lastly, CRISIS argue that it is particularly important for local authorities to think laterally and include non-specialist agencies such as citizens advice bureaux and youth services, which may have good contacts with single homeless people (CRISIS, 2001: 24).

Despite the apparent need for local authorities in rural areas to provide joint provision and develop partnerships with both statutory and voluntary organisations, there are a number of specific challenges to successfully developing and implementing rural area homelessness strategies. These include:

- Communication needs to flow between the three or four different layers of government in rural counties: the town or parish council, the District council, the county council and, in some areas, the national park authority;
- The rural voluntary sector often lacks the capacity to participate in strategic work.
- Related to the above, many voluntary sector staff do not understand the importance or content of strategic processes and therefore perceive a lack of equality in consultation and planning;
- There are sometimes too many forums - described as 'partnership proliferation';
- There can be a diversity of attendance at forums, from senior strategic staff to local practitioners, leading to a difficulty in agreeing goals and priorities;
- There are concerns about planning for new services for homeless people or those at risk, and the effects of new developments on rural communities. This is linked with a concern by many rural communities to protect or ring-fence new development for local people in need (Countryside Agency, 2002: 27).

Section 3: District Council Strategies

As noted above the Homelessness Act 2002 introduced new responsibilities for local government including a duty to carry out a review of homelessness in their areas, and publish a homelessness strategy based on this review. This section provides a summary of the six District Councils' Homelessness Strategies as contained in the Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008¹. It also examines factors that may impact on homelessness within the County such as housing affordability in the light of more recent data. Supplementary information was gleaned from the Councils' respective questionnaire responses submitted as part of this research and secondary literature.

Boston Borough Council

According to Boston BC, the Homelessness Act 2002 has had a significant impact upon the numbers of homeless applications. Council homeless statistics indicate that the number of homelessness decisions increased from around 12 in the first quarter of 2000 to around 95 in the last quarter of 2003. There has also been a fundamental change in the nature of the Council's homeless priority client base. Historically, priority homelessness has arisen by virtue of having dependent children, being pregnant or in fear of domestic violence. The priority client base is now commonly categorised by: clients who are pregnant with other vulnerabilities such as mental health problems or alcohol and drug abuse; single clients with complex vulnerabilities including mental health issues, alcohol or drug misuse or offending histories; and presentations from applicants whose first language is not English (Boston BC, 2004: 10). Voluntary organisations within the area have reported a significant increase in young people seeking assistance. In comparison, there are few recorded instances of rough sleeping and the Council estimates that no more than 10 people sleep rough on any one night in the Boston area. A rough sleepers count carried out by the Council in 2001 found there to be no rough sleepers, although they intend to carry out a further count in 2004 (Boston BC, 2004: 20). However, anecdotal evidence from other agencies within the District confirms the notion of increasing numbers of homeless people. Similarly to other Districts within the County, Boston has seen dramatic increases in property prices over the last few years. Also, the Council estimate that there are around 5,000 migrant workers living and working in Boston area. (Boston BC, 2004: 11). This, combined with low agricultural wages, may contribute towards the area's homelessness problem.

In 1999 Boston BC transferred its housing stock to Boston Mayflower Ltd. The Council provides a 24-hour, 365 days a year support service and 24-hour admission and support for priority homeless, although they acknowledge that there remains a void in their ability to assist non-priority homeless (Boston BC, 2004: 20). Importantly, there is no direct access emergency accommodation available in the area. Boston BC owns and manages two homeless hostels that provide accommodation for 15 families and two single people. B&B in the form of an approved guesthouse is only used when the hostels are at full capacity or unsuitable. It has recently developed a floating homeless support service and provide six units of supported accommodation in liaison with East Lindsey DC, Longhurst HA, NACRO, Connexions, the SAYL Group and NCH. Research undertaken by the Council in 2002 highlighted a lack of

¹ The Boston BC section also contains information gleaned from their Housing Strategy Statement 2004

awareness amongst both statutory and voluntary organisations and service users in relation to the services provided by the Council. It also reinforced the need to develop joint protocols with other organisations and more widely promote the range and accessibility of advisory services provided throughout the Borough. However, the Council are now developing and maintaining links with other accommodation providers such as Boston Women's Aid, NACRO, Centrepoint Outreach, St Matthew Housing, Salvation Army, Foyer Federation and Lincolnshire FAST (Boston BC, 2004: 20). They are working in partnership with Mental Health services, both locally and at a County level, to produce a Mental Health and Housing Strategy. The Council administrate the Boston Homeless Forum, an organisation consisting of statutory and non-statutory agencies working in partnership to prevent homelessness (Boston BC, 2004: 15). Lastly, Boston BC acknowledge the need to develop a rent deposit scheme to help people access the private rented sector (20)

East Lindsey District Council

East Lindsey has the highest level of homelessness within the county (6.0 households per 1000 accepted as in priority need c.f. 3.8 in Lincolnshire) (Lincolnshire Research Observatory, 2004)). There were 1,406 applications in 2002/03 of which 385 were identified as being in statutory need of assistance. East Lindsey states that there is no evidence of rough sleeping within the District although acknowledges that effective counting is problematic. One of the main reasons for the high level of homelessness is the District's unique geographical characteristic. Its multi-resort tourist coastline is both a draw for homelessness and cause of it. The seasonal employment of young people is particularly problematic as many are faced with homelessness at the end of their employment contract. Accommodation on the coastline is characterised by high rents and a significant, poor quality, private rented sector. Similar to other Lincolnshire Districts, there have been dramatic rises in house prices, decreasing affordability for young people and first-time buyers. The District is sparsely populated and suffers from limited public transport, poor infrastructure, limited employment opportunity and physical isolation issues.

East Lindsey transferred its housing stock to Linx Housing Partnership in 1999. However, in response to the above, the Council has developed a range of policies. To help prevent homelessness, it employs Advice Workers at ten locations throughout the District, and works closely with agencies such as Sure Start and Community Mental Health Teams. To reduce its use of B&B, ELDC has: jointly funded two Safer Communities projects for supported accommodation for young people and teenage parents; established leasing arrangements with a the private sector and partner RSLs for 25 units in the district; and has arranged with the Salvation Army hostel at Skegness for five rooms to be made available to vulnerable 16/17 year olds. Additionally, it has introduced a range of homelessness prevention measures including:

- i. Rent Assist Scheme to secure accommodation in the private sector for all potentially homeless applicants who reside in the district;
- ii. Homelessness Prevention Budget;
- iii. Safe at Home Scheme for victims of third party violence;
- iv. Mediation Service;
- v. Fast tracking of Housing benefit; and
- vi. Discretionary Housing Payments.

In terms of supporting homeless people, ELDC also employ four housing support workers who provide tenancy support to 90 vulnerable households who are in temporary or emergency accommodation. This service is soon to expand to provide additional support to vulnerable homeless people and intensive support to very vulnerable clients who have multiple needs. The support workers link with other agencies such as social services who offer specialist support in other areas. In terms of supporting young people, ELDC distribute advice leaflets to school pupils, work with social services to jointly assess the needs of young people, and have established a referral arrangement with the Salvation Army to provide joint assessments of young people and to allocate a housing support worker.

Lincoln City Council

Lincoln is the county's largest urban centre with a population of 85,595 (Census 2001). It has a growing homelessness problem, recording an increase from 161 applications in 2001/02 to 211 for the six-month period October 2002 to March 2003. Homelessness among young people in the city is of particular concern. In response, they are currently devising a homeless strategy for 18 to 35 year old single homeless people. Demand for accommodation within the city is increasing due to low mortgage interest rates, speculative buyers and increasing demand from the city's growing student population. Similar to other Districts within the county, Lincoln has seen an 'incredible' rise in house prices. Lincoln is also unique in that it is the only Home Office declared 'cluster area' for asylum seekers, and has seen an increase in demand for accommodation from private sector providers for refugees dispersed or migrating to the city.

In response to the city's growing homelessness problem, the Council has instigated a range of policies. It opened the County's first Choice Based Letting Scheme in 2002. The Council has also attempted to minimise reliance on B&B temporary accommodation by providing financial support for a 26-room hostel with a partner RSL, and has an agreement with another partner RSL to provide two units of emergency accommodation for homeless and vulnerable 16/17 year olds. In terms of housing support, the Council has entered into agreements with five external agencies to provide floating support to vulnerable households including young persons, older persons, refugees, ex-offenders and people with mental health or learning difficulties. The main aim of this policy is to help vulnerable people to sustain their tenancies. Lincoln are also considering the appointment of a housing support worker to coordinate floating support to homeless people, and provide two units of accommodation to allow the rehousing of two Community Living Workers in two different areas of the city. Lincoln have established a Joint Assessment protocol with Social Services for determining the needs of vulnerable 16/17 year olds, and provide emergency accommodation for homeless young people through a partnership with a local RSL and supported housing is available for referrals through another partner RSL. Lastly, Lincoln has supported a successful bid by a local RSL to provide four units of self-contained supported accommodation for teenage parents aged under 18 years.

North Kesteven District Council

North Kesteven is a diverse rural area with a population ranging from sparsely populated villages to the south of Sleaford to the more densely populated Lincoln

fringe. The District has the fastest growing population in the East Midlands, increasing by 17.4% between 1991 and 2001, and is expected to increase a further 15% by 2021. Unemployment is low within the District, although most people are employed in small businesses and average wages are low. Reflecting the county trend, house prices in North Kesteven have increased significantly in recent years, rising by 24.3% in 2001/02. There were 222 homelessness applications in 2002/03 of which 111 were identified as being in statutory need of assistance. The main causes of homelessness were identified as: termination of an assured short-hold tenancy; relationship breakdown; and friends or family being unable or unwilling to accommodate. Similar to other Districts, there is no recorded evidence of rough sleeping within North Kesteven, although there is anecdotal and unrecorded evidence of transient rough sleeping. There is also anecdotal evidence of hidden homelessness, particularly amongst young people.

North Kesteven's homelessness, allocations and advice services are based at the main council offices in Sleaford. The Council operates an INFO-LINKS information service in partnership with Lincolnshire County Council and local councils at two locations, and operates seven information access points throughout the District. In terms of homelessness prevention, the council: provides information and advice; undertakes mediation or liaison with landlords, parents, relatives and friends to secure accommodation; has developed a points system that assists households before a homeless crisis; offers advice regarding property rights and responsibilities; assists tenants at early stages of rent arrears to prevent eviction; operates an early referral system with partner RSLs; and provides financial support to advice and advocacy services. The Council uses its own stock on a temporary basis, and B&B is only used in 'absolute emergencies'. As part of its housing support policy, the council appointed a Homelessness Support Worker in December 2002 to coordinate support from statutory and voluntary organisations. The Council provides support to young people as a member of the SAYL group, undertakes joint assessments with social services and has formed a partnership with the Sleaford Foyer. In relation to joint working, its Community Safety Partnership financially supports an outreach Domestic Violence Service in Sleaford; is a member of the County Domestic Violence Forum which promotes awareness of the service; and participates in a variety of housing related county forums such as the Lincolnshire Housing Forum and Training Group.

South Holland District Council

According to the South Holland DC Homeless Strategy 2003/08, there has been a significant rise in vulnerable homeless households that the Council accepts a duty to assist: from 46 cases in 2001/02 to 118 in 2001/02 and 164 in 2002/03. The main causes of homelessness in 2001/02 were: loss of private tenancies (25 cases); young people leaving home (23 cases); and relationship breakdown (20 cases in 2001/02). Housing affordability has become a major problem and has become exacerbated by private sector landlords seeking to realise the capital value of their properties. Consultation by the Council with other agencies has found that the other key risk factors in homelessness are young parenthood, unemployment, low paid work, loss of owned or rented home, family relationship breakdown and domestic violence. The number of rough sleepers at any one time in the District is officially below 10. However, anecdotally there is high hidden homelessness- 'sofa surfing' among the single, young homeless. The District has experienced a high level of middle aged and older people coming into the area and purchasing general needs stock. The active

property market and increased construction costs means that it is very difficult to develop schemes, particularly where they involve the purchase of existing properties or land that would be suitable for developments on the open market. There were only 3 capital bids for 2003/04, for a total of 13 units. This decrease in bids was at a time when housing need was growing significantly. This meant that in 2001 there were 1406 households in housing need. The economy is heavily dependant on agriculture, horticulture and food processing which employs nearly 60% of the workforce. Whilst employment is plentiful, it is insecure and low paid and there is evidence of hidden rural deprivation caused by isolation. The lack of affordable housing also limits the supply of locally based workers.

In preventing homelessness, South Holland employs a part-time housing advice officer and a team of housing assistants who also provide housing advice. The Council also refer clients to a range of statutory and voluntary organisations such as Connexions, Shelter, CAB and local solicitors, many of whom are based in the Spalding area. In terms of reducing its reliance on housing homeless families in B&B accommodation, the Council acknowledges that its temporary stock cannot meet demand. In response, South Holland arranges short-term leases with the private sector and housing associations. During February 2003, a consultation exercise carried out with users of the Council's housing service found that, although people were happy with the service, communication with households staying in temporary accommodation needs to be improved. The Council acknowledges that support services specifically aimed at homeless households are limited, although there is access to agencies that supply specialised support services for vulnerable single people, young people, young parents, people with mental health problems and victims of domestic violence. South Holland's Homelessness Accommodation Officer has also begun to provide support to vulnerable homeless households in temporary accommodation. In relation to supporting young people, a mediation scheme was implemented during Winter/Spring 2003 aimed at resolving their relationship and housing problems. The Council also jointly works with a number of agencies by: partly funding South Holland Aid's rent deposit scheme; supporting the SAYL scheme; jointly assessing the needs of young people with Social Services; and funding SOFA, a furniture recycling scheme.

West Lindsey District Council

West Lindsey is the most sparsely populated District in the East Midland region, with only 0.7 people per hectare. The largest community is Gainsborough with a population of around 18,000. House prices within the District are buoyant, although there are a number of properties around the Lincoln fringe which are deemed to be 'at risk'. Unemployment at 2.7% is higher than the county average of 2.2%, with the highest levels found in the South-East Ward of Gainsborough. There is also a problem with long-term unemployment which stands at 17% of all those unemployed. During 2001/02, 102 people presented as homeless of which 48 were eligible and in priority need. Of these, 23 had children or were pregnant, 11 had suffered domestic violence, 6 were vulnerable young persons, 6 were either elderly or physically disabled, 1 was housed following an emergency, and there was 1 other vulnerable person.

West Lindsey undertook stock transfer of its housing to ACIS, and contracted its statutory duties under homelessness legislation, in 1999. Whilst the Council acknowledges that it took time for the contractual partnership to settle, it is now

working well. In terms of homelessness prevention, West Lindsey and ACIS have worked together with SureStart to recruit a Community Involvement Worker who works with statutory, voluntary and community groups to ensure that services are responsive and flexible to family and community needs. In partnership with Connexions, Social Services and NACRO, West Lindsey has developed a holistic support network for vulnerable young people which carries out joint assessments and looks at tenancy sustainment packages. They have developed a dispersed housing and support model for people with learning disabilities; set up an income maximisation team; provided funding to NACRO for a One Stop Shop; and provide revenue and hot-desk support to the Rural Housing Enabler Scheme. In terms of temporary accommodation for homeless families, the use of B&B is 'very rare and only used in extreme circumstances'. Alternatively, the Council helped NACRO to set up and manage a rent deposit scheme; has access to accommodation managed by NACRO which provides nine bed spaces for single homeless persons in Gainsborough; and access to 21 spaces for young people aged 16 to 24 at the Market Rasen Foyer. West Lindsey Women's Aid has rented a three-bed property from ACIS for families fleeing domestic violence. ACIS also occasionally make nominations to NOMAD in Lincoln. West Lindsey has also developed a range of policies aimed at providing housing support for vulnerable people. ACIS work with partner agencies to provide floating support and outreach services, funded by the Supporting People Programme; NACRO provide support for 12 tenancies; MENCAP has developed some floating support/outreach services; and Gainsborough Women's Aid helps up to five victims of domestic violence to remain in their own home or supports new tenancies. According to West Lindsey, there is currently no support service available to private tenants although they support the Private Landlords Accreditation scheme and are seeking to identify a suitable partner. Lastly, West Lindsey has established a RSL forum which develops formal partnership agreements, and are expanding their Home Improvement Agency to encompass all vulnerable groups.

Summary

Overview

There are both significant similarities and differences between the Districts in relation to demographic characteristics and homelessness. It is apparent from the above that homelessness is a growing problem across the county. Homelessness in both Lincolnshire (3.8 households accepted as in priority need per 1000 households), and the East Midlands (4.3 per 1000), is lower than the English average (5.5 per 1000) (Lincolnshire Observatory, 2004). However, the extent of homelessness varies considerably across Lincolnshire. Statistics confirm East Lindsey's view that the District has the highest rate of homelessness in Lincolnshire. This is both in terms of numbers of applications (1,406 in 2002/03) and homeless households per 1000 (6.0 per 1000). In comparison, the rate of homelessness is lowest in South Holland with 1.4 homeless households per 1000². Whilst none of the Councils officially recorded high levels of rough sleeping, all agree anecdotal evidence indicates that the problem is underestimated within the County.

The growing problem of homelessness throughout the County has been exacerbated by both population increase and in-migration. During the period 1991 to 2001, the population of Lincolnshire increased by 58,045 or 9.9% (Lincolnshire Development,

² South Kesteven has a similar homelessness rate to East Lindsey at 5.9 per 1000 households.

2004a). If this rate of growth continues, the number of households in Lincolnshire will increase from 272,000 in 2001 to 300,000 by 2011 (Lincolnshire Development, 2004b), placing a significant additional burden on existing housing stock. Continued population growth is also likely to place a further strain on the County's private rented sector, which is the smallest in rural England (Countryside Agency, 2003). However, there are geographical differences in terms of short- and long-term demographic trends. Long-term (1991-2001) population growth was highest in North Kesteven at 17.5% (the fourth fastest growing District in England and Wales (Lincolnshire Development, 2004a)), and lowest in Lincoln at 1.9%. Although Lincoln's growth was low, this nonetheless contrasts with the recent national demographic trend of depopulating urban areas. Reasons for population growth include its designation as a 'cluster area' for asylum seekers, increasing numbers of refugees, and an increase in student numbers (Lincoln has the fourth highest proportion of students in the East Midlands) (Lincolnshire Development, 2004a)). Short-term trends (2001-2002) indicate that the largest in-migration occurred in East Lindsey and South Holland (both 2,600 persons), whilst Lincoln experienced a net out-migration of 200 persons over the same period (Lincolnshire Development, 2004c). However, population density in both East and West Lindsey remains low at only 0.7 persons per hectare, making provision of services for homeless people more difficult.

The County's population growth, combined with a range of other factors (as discussed above) has led to decreasing affordability in all Districts. Land Registry figures indicate that average house prices in Lincolnshire increased by 16.5% to £128,431³. Average house prices are highest in South Kesteven (£148,138) and lowest in Lincoln (£100,236). Significantly, the County's largest house price increase during 2003/04 was in East Lindsey (22.3%), the District that also experiences the highest level of homelessness. Despite having the lowest average house prices, Lincoln is the least affordable area of the County with an affordability index rating of 3.46 c.f. 2.84 for Lincolnshire⁴. Decreasing affordability has particularly limited the housing options of young people and first-time buyers. These trends have also decreased the County's private rented market stock as landlords sell properties in order to capitalise on increasing house prices. Lastly, these trends are not reflected throughout all areas of the County and there are considerable numbers of properties around the Lincoln 'fringe' and coastal areas that are deemed to be 'at risk' (low or variable demand).

The varied employment and deprivation patterns throughout the County may also impact on housing affordability and homelessness. Agricultural work is traditionally seasonal and low paid, possibly leading to higher rates of deprivation and homelessness. The proportion of workers employed in the agricultural sector within the County is relatively high at 5.1% (c.f. 1.5% in England and Wales and 1.9% in East Midlands). Rates of agricultural employment are highest in South Holland (8.7%), Boston (7.2%) and East Lindsey (6.8%) (Lincolnshire Development, 2004a). As indicated by the Homeless Strategies, there is some variation between the Districts in relation to employment characteristics. South Holland's economy is heavily dependant on agriculture, horticulture and food processing which employs nearly 60% of the workforce. Similarly, in North Kesteven most people are employed in small

³ Q1 2003 to Q1 2004

⁴ Calculated as average price of all semi-detached houses sold during the months of July, August and September 2000 divided by average household income August 2000 (Lincolnshire Development, 2003).

businesses and average wages are low. In contrast, the Boston area also attracts a large number of migrant workers, whilst in East Lindsey the seasonal employment of young people is particularly problematic as many are faced with homelessness at the end of their employment contract. The impact of seasonal employment is evident in figures which indicate that unemployment throughout Lincolnshire increases by 36% during the 'low season'⁵. East Lindsey is most adversely affected by seasonal employment rates, containing eight wards where unemployment more than doubles during the 'low season' (including Ingoldmells where unemployment increases by 600%). Deprivation and low income are nonetheless evident in more densely populated urban areas, with unemployment highest in Gainsborough South West (20%), Earlesfield (17%) and Sleaford East (16%) (c.f. 5% in England & Wales, East Midlands and Lincolnshire). Lastly, 'quality of life' scores indicate that seven out of ten of the County's most deprived wards are located in East Lindsey, two in West Lindsey and one in South Holland (Lincolnshire Development, 2003).

Homelessness and decreasing affordability are further exacerbated by a lack of social housing, especially in the more remote rural areas of the County. The social rented sector accounts for only 14.7% of all housing stock in Lincolnshire (c.f. 19.2% England & Wales; 17.5% East Midlands). Much of the County's social housing stock is located in more densely populated urban areas e.g. Lincoln (22.8%) and Boston (20.0%). In comparison, the proportion of social rented housing is lower in West Lindsey (14.9%), South Holland (14.2%), North Kesteven (11.8%) and East Lindsey (10.7%) (Lincolnshire Development, 2004a). Importantly, supply of social housing is unable to meet demand and is under increasing pressure due to the impact of RTB sales and low newbuild rates. For example, although 1,046 social rented properties were constructed in the East Midlands region during 2003/04, only 223 were constructed by local authorities in Lincolnshire. Similarly, RSLs constructed only 1,049 social rented properties in East Midlands during 2003/04 (Housing Corporation, 2004), although it is difficult to determine how many of these were constructed within the County.

District Homelessness Strategies

There are both similarities and differences regarding the Councils' responses to homelessness. All Councils record increasing levels of homelessness, especially amongst young people (who were cited by most respondents interviewed for this research as comprising the largest group of 'hidden homeless'). Geographical and demographic differences as discussed above (asylum seeker cluster in Lincoln, migrant workers in the south of County, seasonal employment issues in East Lindsey and South Holland etc.) may have some bearing on the specific homelessness policies devised by Councils. However, an examination of the homelessness strategies suggests that there are a range of causal factors that are not limited to any one particular area:

- Young people leaving the parental home after a breakdown of family relationships
- People experiencing marital or relationship breakdown
- People experiencing harassment or violence from inside or outside the home
- People suffering mental health problems

⁵ Calculated as the percentage increase in unemployment in February compared to the previous August.

- Substance or alcohol abuse
- A combination of mental health, drug or alcohol problems (multiple needs)
- People leaving hospital after long stays
- People experiencing homelessness because of immigration status
- Housing benefit problems
- Contact with the criminal justice system/prisoners leaving custody
- People in financial crisis with mounting debts
- People sharing accommodation with other households

Despite limited resources, it is evident that Councils have proactively tried to meet the requirements of the Homeless Act 2002. There are several examples of innovative homelessness policies including: choice-based lettings system (Lincoln); advice to under-16s (East Lindsey); and mediation services (North Kesteven). Most local authorities have developed good relations with partner RSLs and jointly developed allocation procedures. There is also substantial evidence of joint working between local authorities and statutory bodies such as Social Services (e.g. all Councils have developed joint assessment protocols for young people). Similarly, there is evidence of a strong relationship between local authorities and voluntary agencies (although there is less evidence of joint working between Boston BC and voluntary agencies). One good example of joint working between a local authority and voluntary agency is Lincoln's development of a referral protocol with the Salvation Army. In general, the strategies indicate that most Councils have responded well to the needs of vulnerable groups. More specifically, supported accommodation has been developed in liaison with a wide range of different agencies (e.g. NACRO, MENCAP, Women's Aid), and some floating support and outreach services have been developed to meet the needs of homeless people who are unable to access mainstream services. In most instances, these policies are supplemented by financial support to voluntary organisations.

However, the Homelessness Strategies also highlight a number of limitations. First, it is apparent that Council statistics underestimate the extent of homelessness within the County (this is discussed in more detail in Section 4), and none keep data on potentially homeless households they do not have a duty to assist. Similarly, although there is little statistical evidence of rough sleeping, anecdotal evidence indicates that the problem still remains. Also, the provision of homelessness services throughout the County is uneven. There is extremely limited access to both emergency direct access accommodation and Women's Refuges. Many of the services provided by voluntary agencies are clustered around urban and more densely populated areas, and there are fewer voluntary agencies operating in the south of County. This not only 'draws' homeless people to more densely populated areas, but consequently places considerable pressure on existing services. There is also evidence that Councils rely on relatively few voluntary sector agencies (e.g. YMCA and NOMAD in Lincoln, Market Rasen and Sleaford foyers). It is unlikely that these services are able to meet demands of all District Councils.

Due to a range of factors, it is arguable that the provision of homelessness services is weakest in the South Holland and Boston areas. There is no nightshelter in Boston and support services for vulnerable people are limited to priority households in the Council's own hostels. Although Boston BC is developing floating support services, there is only limited evidence of liaison with voluntary agencies. As the Council recognises, there is a need to develop joint protocols with other organisations and to

more widely promote the range and accessibility of advisory services provided throughout the Borough. Similarly, South Holland District Council acknowledge that support services specifically aimed at homeless households are limited.

Table 1: District Councils’ ‘Red Issues’

	Young People	Relationship breakdown	Substance or alcohol misuse	Mental health issues	Financial problems	Employment Issues	Friends/relatives unable to accommodate	Other vulnerable	Other
Boston BC	*	*	*	*					1,2,3
Lincoln CC	*	*	*	*	*				4,5
North Kesteven DC	*	*							6
ELDC	*		*	*		*			
South Holland DC	*	*					*		
WLDC		*						*	7

Other includes:

1. People leaving hospital after long stays;
2. People experiencing homelessness because of immigration status;
3. Housing benefits;
4. Contact with the criminal justice system/prisoners leaving custody
5. People sharing accommodation with other households;
6. People who lose a rented or owned home;
7. Homeless due to disaster.

Section 4: Current and Future Support Needs of Homeless People

Introduction

A main aim of the research was to determine the current and future support needs of homeless people within the County. Information was gleaned from thirty-eight statutory, voluntary, and charitable organisations (not including the questionnaire responses from the six District Councils) by questionnaire and/or semi-structured interview between June 2003 and June 2004. The semi-structured interview topics included:

- i. Current needs of homeless people within the County
- ii. Hidden Homelessness & homelessness records
- iii. Preventative policies
- iv. Organisational capacity
- v. Capacity of other organisations
- vi. Future homelessness provisions

The findings are divided into two sections: the first section summarises responses to the topic areas listed; the second section examines responses specifically in relation to Supporting People groups (young people, older people, people with mental health or learning disability issues, victims of domestic violence; substance misusers and ex-offenders) in more detail.⁶

Section 4a: General responses by topic area

i. Current needs of homeless people within the County

This topic elicited a wide range of responses, most of which confirmed the points about the needs of homeless people discussed above. All organisations confirmed the view that homelessness within the County had increased in recent years. Homelessness was regarded to have increased most in Lincoln, South Holland and East Lindsey. The main reasons for homelessness cited by organisations included: shortage of social housing; decreasing affordability (both owner occupier and private rented sectors); relationship breakdown (particularly between young people and parents); domestic violence; mental health issues; substance misuse; and debt. Some organisations cited changes in employment patterns as a major factor, particularly in south Lincolnshire i.e. a general decline in agricultural employment combined with increasing employment of low-paid migrant workers. Less cited causes included population growth, increase in asylum seekers, and an increase in ex-offenders. One respondent stated that it was the implementation of 'care in the community' policy during the 1990s that has led to the current homelessness problem.

There was some variation with regards to the types of people who are most likely to become homeless. Several organisations stated that it was difficult to determine the needs of homeless people within the County. For example, the NOMAD Trust in Lincoln stated that there was no clear pattern to the types of homeless people who use their hostel. Clients are just as likely to be professionals as to fit the stereotype of a homeless person. Reflecting on homelessness in general rather than their organisational role, this view was supported by LEAP, YMCA, Lincoln Women's

⁶ To maintain confidentiality, the findings refer to organisations rather than individuals.

Aid, Social Services (Older People), Rainer Lincolnshire and St. Matthews HA. However, most organisations stated that growing homelessness was impacting on specific groups including: young people, older people, people with mental health issues, people with learning disabilities, people with substance misuse issues, victims of domestic violence, ex-offenders, migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers (the support needs of these groups are discussed in more detail in Section 4b).

By far, the group most likely to be cited as being in need of support was young people. According to Longhurst HA, the shortage of affordable housing and increasing house prices 'disproportionately impacts on young people and first-time buyers who are unable to get a step on the housing ladder'. Similarly, Sutton Bridge Community Project stated that 'there is a desperate need for more housing provision for young people. In comparison to other Counties, Lincolnshire does not have the same number or range of housing provision for young people'. Louth CAB stated that there had been an increase in young people approaching the organisation for help, although homelessness was usually just one of a number of reasons why young people seek advice (e.g. asking for help regarding benefits). According to St. Matthews HA, the experience of young homeless people in rural areas is made particularly 'acute by a lack of appropriate services'. The main cause of homelessness among young people cited was disagreements with parents. According to Social Services (Education), this problem could be resolved by more mediation and information services being made available to young people throughout the County. Both Social Services (Teenage Parents) and NCH Leaving Care Service agreed that there is an acute lack of suitable accommodation for young people aged 16 to 17 within the County. Many of the young people leaving care also have multiple needs e.g. alcohol or drug misuse, dual diagnosis or ADHD. Young people leaving care are also likely to be stigmatised as 'trouble-makers' by private landlords. Sleaford Foyer supported the view that there are causes of homelessness among young people: 'most of the young people who use the Foyer are homeless because they have been thrown out by their parents or have just left care'. Lastly, one respondent stated that young people were in a better position to deal with homelessness than older people: 'young clients tend to have knowledge of what types of services are, or should be, made available. They may have gained this knowledge by going through the Supporting People process i.e. by the time they come to us, they may have already been involved with one or two other service providers'.

Although many organisations stated that young people were in most need of support, several organisations noted an increase in older homeless people. The Sleaford Furniture Recycling Project has recorded an increase in older men using their facilities: 'one problem for people working in the agricultural sector is that they may have to rely on furnished tied properties. Once their employment ends, they lose both their home and furniture. This issue is made worse by the low wages of agricultural workers as they may struggle to put aside savings for their retirement'. St. Matthews HA has also recorded an increase in middle-aged men seeking support: 'the main cause of homelessness for this client group is relationship breakdown. Compared to younger homeless people, this group have fewer skills to enable them to cope with homelessness'. Although mainly dealing with younger people, the YMCA confirmed the view that as older men tend to rely on women for domestic support, they may lack the skills necessary to deal with homelessness. The NOMAD Trust also stated that the County lacks support networks for older people, especially semi-supported

accommodation. Acknowledging that older people may become more isolated than other groups, Lincoln Housing Aid has employed a mobile support worker.

In comparison, some organisations based in the south and east of the county cited an increase in migrant workers as a major cause of homelessness. Lincoln Housing Aid stated that ‘there is a growing problem with asylum seekers and migrant workers. This is especially the case in East Lindsey where the agricultural business has attracted a lot of workers from Portugal’. Similarly, the Sleaford Furniture Recycling Project stated that although ‘most referrals relate to families rather than individuals, we have recently dealt with an increasing number of refugees and immigrants’. According to the Sutton Bridge Community Project ‘estate agents don’t want to let to migrant workers because they are only temporary i.e. they only have temporary working holiday visas. As there is little affordable accommodation in the County, many of the migrant workers fall into the hands of unscrupulous landlords. I know of one six-bedroom house that was accommodating 25 migrant workers, each being charged £55 per week. This means that they are both badly accommodated and most of their wages goes on rent’. The South Holland Recycling Project also stated that ‘there is clear evidence of an increasing number of migrant workers within the district (probably several hundred). One problem is that whilst employers tend to provide poor accommodation, the workers are unclear as to their rights. Another respondent stated that ‘many migrant workers are afraid to ask for support and end up sharing unsuitable accommodation or even sleeping in cars’ confirmed this view.

In relation to domestic violence, Lincoln Women’s Aid stated that ‘finding decent accommodation is getting harder for everyone and there is no one group of women [who have suffered domestic violence] who are in more need of help than others. However, the demand for places at the Refuge is increasing and all victims of domestic violence need immediate help with housing’. They also stated that only two women’s refuges currently operate within the County (Lincoln and Boston), and alternative housing provision within the County is poor. According to Rainer Lincolnshire, one issue that is often overlooked is the number of young people who are victims of domestic violence: ‘this is certainly an issue and the number of young people who have been abused by family members or siblings is very much underestimated’. Lastly, the YMCA stated that although its clientele wholly consists of men, there is some evidence that a few were victims of domestic violence.

Another group commonly identified as being in need is people with mental health problems. Organisations such as NOMAD, YMCA and Lincoln Housing Aid reported an increase in the proportion of people seeking support who also suffer from mental illness. According to Lincolnshire Partnership Trust ‘many people by virtue of distress from mental ill health also have multiple needs; they may be affected by physical health problems, challenging behaviours, substance misuse or personality disorders too’. Some organisations stated that there were still gaps in both provision and procedures for people with mental health issues. One problem is that the usually lengthy time it takes to allocate housing to clients on release from hospital may lead them to ‘give up waiting and choose substandard or inappropriate accommodation’. Also, one respondent stated that ‘although there’s quite a lot of support for people with mental health issues, the problem here is that there tends to be a lack of coordination between the different statutory and voluntary organisations. For example, the mental health Outreach Team doesn’t always link well with other

organisations. These links need to be stronger. Historically, there tends to be a lack of communication between Social Services and LA Housing Departments'. However, more than one organisation stated that procedures had improved in recent years. For example, the YMCA stated that 'Lincoln PCT now use three floating support workers and mental health assessments get done quite quickly'.

Similar to the above, there is evidence that many homeless people seeking help have substance misuse problems. According to Lincolnshire DAT, the main problem is the increase in East Lindsey's itinerant population during summer. This makes it difficult for DAT and others to direct services, although some homeless drug users have well developed but informal networks. The YMCA stated that 'many residents have drug problems and the organisation works closely with Lincoln FAST and Addaction. Although these services are good, they are not always easily accessible to YMCA residents with acute drug problems'.

The final homeless group identified as being in need was ex-offenders. According to Lincolnshire Probation Service, approximately 11% of all (296) male custody cases within the County in 2002 were categorised as 'no fixed abode', and a further 4% (43) subject to Community Sentences resided in B&B accommodation. Lincoln Prison stated that the main problem relates to offenders who serve less than 12 months, as prison staff can only offer advice and provide information on how to find accommodation. Similarly, Connexions stated that homelessness and housing problems are a 'significant barrier to successful completion of programmes of intervention'.

ii. Hidden Homelessness & Homelessness Records

As noted in Section 2, the measurement of homeless people in rural areas remains problematic. Local authority statistics only record the details of households who apply and/or are statutorily accepted as homeless. Some local authorities have also undertaken 'rough-sleeper' surveys, but these too tend to be statistically limited. According to the local authorities' homelessness strategies, there is considerable anecdotal evidence of both rough sleeping and large numbers of hidden homeless within the County. All of the organisations that took part in this research supported the view that official homelessness statistics greatly underestimated the extent of the problem throughout the County. Young people were most likely to be cited by organisations as comprising 'hidden homeless', with many having to rely on friends and families for temporary accommodation.

According to the South Holland Recycling Project: "There is definitely a problem with hidden homelessness within the County [and there is] an increasing number of young people who are unable to access either the social rented or private rented sectors. This is particularly the case with respect to young couples. Although they may not be roofless, as many reside with parents, their present accommodation may be insufficient. The problem is exacerbated by low wages in the agricultural sector. Unemployment is very low in the area, but wages are insufficient to enable access to the market". Similarly, St. Matthews HA stated that 'there is hidden homelessness in both urban and rural areas. However, the problem is less visible in rural areas. For example, a lot of young people may return home if they are unable to find decent accommodation. Single and young people tend to rely on friends if they become homeless.' This view was supported by NOMAD who stated that: 'there is definitely

a problem with hidden homelessness within the area. It's difficult to estimate but there are a lot of people who run the gamut of sleeping on friends' and families settees before they seek help from NOMAD. There's also a lot of overcrowding e.g. two people sharing a one-bed flat'. Again, according to Longhurst HA: 'this is definitely a problem. In particular, there are a lot of young single people who may be sleeping rough or using friends for temporary accommodation.' Lastly, Louth CAB stated that 'there's a lot of hidden homelessness, mainly young people. A lot of desperate people are coming through the door. Hidden homelessness is across the board'. One respondent stated that the numbers of hidden homeless in Lincolnshire are 'at least double the numbers officially recorded'. Although there remains insufficient evidence to determine the exact extent of hidden homelessness within the County, comments by organisations suggest that:

- Homelessness within the county is much higher than official estimates
- Young people probably comprise the largest group of hidden homeless
- Most 'hidden homeless' are staying with family or friends
- 'Hidden homeless' may only contact statutory or voluntary organisations as a 'last resort' (one reason why official estimates are low)
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that hidden homelessness in remote rural areas of County is much underestimated (mainly due to fewer homeless services and facilities)
- Despite a lack statistical evidence, rough sleeping in both rural and urban areas remains problematic
- There are large numbers of 'hidden homeless' amongst migrant workers in the south and east of the County
- There are seasonal variations in hidden homeless in coastal regions

One reason why 'hidden homelessness' is difficult to estimate is the weakness of official records. Although all local authorities are required to keep homeless (PIE) and lettings (CORE) records, these are not wholly representative of homelessness within the County. A number of organisations highlighted these weaknesses in current local authority homelessness information systems. According to Lincoln Housing Aid: 'it's very difficult to accurately record numbers of homeless people. PIE statistics are very limited and they're really just a count of homeless people who seek help. The real figures are much higher. The Rough Sleepers' count is not much better. The counters are not allowed in certain places so the count is always underestimated. It's important to have much better counting procedures in the County. Lincoln Housing Aid counts all queries and how the problem is dealt with'. Similarly, Linx Homes stated that: [CORE statistics] only record our permanent, not temporary, allocations. Also, the problem with statistics is that they don't record applicants from outside of the District. Homelessness in Lincolnshire is a seasonal problem – there tends to be a lot more people seeking accommodation during the summer months than the winter months'.

Most voluntary and charitable organisations also maintain homelessness records, some recording quite detailed information in comparison to local authority records. For example, YMCA use both manual and computerised systems and 'each resident has their own file and any change to their situation is manually recorded. All administrative and financial information is managed by a bespoke computerised system (FATURA). We also send information on lettings to CORE at St. Andrews

University'. LEAP keep records of both current and ex-clients ('these are kept in case an agency requires a reference'), whilst Skegness Furniture Project 'keeps a user database called DBASE. These are not necessarily homeless people, but it does include user details such as gender, age, ethnicity etc.' Organisations who receive Supporting People funding, such as Women's Aid, are also required to keep detailed records of service-users. One good example of a recording system is that developed by the NOMAD Trust in Lincoln. They record a range of client details including:

- Monthly count (including existing clients, new clients and 'returnees')
- Age
- Sex
- Ethnicity
- Area of origin
- Last accommodation
- Problems (substance misuse, mental health etc.)
- Reason for homelessness
- Involvement of statutory services (probation, social services etc.)
- Move-on details (housed by family and friends, local authority etc.)

Although representing only one organisation in Lincoln, a brief analysis of NOMAD's figures for the period April 2003 to March 2004 provides some interesting results. During this period there were a total of 433 clients; nearly half (44%) were new clients, 17% were existing clients, and 39% had were 'returnees' (people who stayed at the hostel during non-consecutive periods). Significantly, over a quarter of clients (28%) described their last accommodation as 'sleeping rough', with 27% having stayed with family or friends. Two thirds of clients derive from within the County whilst nearly half (45%) referred themselves to NOMAD (the second largest category was 'other' at 28%, with referrals from the police and NOMAD's day-centre joint third at 6% each). People aged 26 to 35 comprised the largest age group at 31% of clients, compared with 28% aged 18 to 25, 21% aged 36 to 45, 13% aged 46-55, and 7% aged 55 or over. The main reasons for homelessness were 'relationship breakdown' at 32% and 'tenancy breakdown' at 11%. Over a quarter (29%) of clients had mental health issues; 21% alcohol dependency issues; 18% drug dependency issues; 11% learning disability issues; 10% physical disability issues; and 10% displayed signs of self-harm. Around three quarters (76%) of clients were in contact with statutory agencies including the probation service (19%), courts (10%), and police (9%). Significantly, although over a quarter of NOMAD's clients reported a mental health problem, only 1% were in contact with local mental health teams.

It is apparent that much useful information can be gleaned from NOMAD's records. However, there is little evidence of information sharing between statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations. One recommended solution is the implementation of a countywide homelessness information system. In general, organisations supported this notion with comments including: 'it's important to know what are the needs of homeless people in the County, and where those needs are' (Lincoln Women's Aid); 'it's important to have up-to-date figures' (Lincoln YMCA); 'you need to have up-to-date information and it may give you a good idea of what kind of services are needed across the County' (Sutton Bridge Community Project); and 'it would give organisations a better picture of the homeless situation in Lincolnshire' (St.

Matthews). Nonetheless, some organisations also displayed reservations: ‘the last thing that the YMCA wants to do is to start doing the work of central government’ (YMCA); ‘you’ve got to bear in mind that you’re not comparing like-with-like. Lincolnshire is a large county and the East Lindsey District just doesn’t compare with, for example, Lincoln’ (Linx Homes); ‘it would only be as good as the information supplied. Organisations collect information in different ways so they may not always tally. A lot of organisations also keep a lot of useless information’ (NOMAD).

iii. Preventative policies

This topic gleaned the smallest range of responses. Almost all organisations stated that the best way to prevent homelessness is to provide more affordable housing. In particular, organisations emphasised the small, dwindling social rented sector stock as being one of the main causes of homelessness. For example, South Holland Recycling Project stated that:

‘It’s a catch-22 situation. The problem has been growing for around 20 years. Demand for housing in the area has increased due to an influx of migrant workers and older people returning to the County to retire. Housing supply has not kept up with demand. The Council is working hard to resolve the problem, but it’s not yet clear what would present a comprehensive solution. Basically, more affordable social housing needs to be made available. One way of doing this is to ensure that private building companies dedicate a proportion of their newbuild to affordable rented housing (e.g. make more use of S106 legislation)’ (South Holland Recycling Project).

Whilst most organisations stated that there is a need for more general needs housing, around half of the organisations argued that there needs to be more supported housing, especially for young people. For example, according to Longhurst HA: ‘there needs to be more support for young people. It can be hard for them to cope with the experience of homelessness’. Some organisations stated that better provision of general needs and supported housing also has to be combined with better information, again, especially to young people:

‘Information for young people is essential. For example, most young people don’t realise that a lot of RSLs have allocations agreements with local authorities. So, when they present themselves as homeless, they have to register with the LA. This can cause a delay of several weeks in their application for RSL accommodation. If young people were aware of this policy, they may decide to remain with family or friends until their application is processed’ (St. Matthews HA).

Other preventative policies suggested by organisations included: more joint working between all organisations; more outreach services; more floating support services; better coordination between statutory and voluntary organisations; better training; more resources; better coordination of homelessness policies throughout the County; more mediation services; and better assessment of homeless people’s needs.

iv. Organisational capacity

This topic attempted to determine the extent to which existing resources enable statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations to meet their existing homelessness policy commitments. On the whole, statutory organisations stated that the current central government policy of restricting local authorities to an ‘enabling’ role within the housing market was unlikely to be reversed in the near future. This emphasised, rather than detracted, from the view that local authorities need to work closely with partner organisations and RSLs. Most comments made by RSLs, particularly those providing supported housing, stated that a lack of financial resources limited their development of newbuild. For example, both Rainer Lincolnshire and St. Matthews HA stated that their ambition to increase the provision of supported housing in Lincoln is severely limited by insufficient funding. In contrast, Longhurst stated that they have: ‘a robust development programme which doesn’t require additional development resources. However, we also have an agreement with St. Matthews HA to provide supported housing, but the Supporting People funding for this is limited. There also needs to be more funding for general needs housing’.

Unsurprisingly, voluntary sector organisations were most likely to state that any gaps in their organisational capacity were due to insufficient funding. It is apparent that there are quite complex financial arrangements between statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations within the County. Voluntary organisations rely on financial support from a wide range of statutory and charitable organisations, as well as private donations. Whilst welcoming the financial support they received from both local authorities and the Supporting People programme, most voluntary organisations stated that current funding arrangements were insufficient to ensure financial and organisational stability. For example, Skegness Furniture Project stated that:

‘Sustainability is the main problem. In financial terms, the Skegness Furniture Project is living hand-to-mouth. The government are trying to encourage sustainability and financial independence by persuading the project to become a social enterprise. The main government policy for achieving this is the Capacity Building and Infrastructure Fund. The problem with this policy is that the SFP do not sell either goods or services [they recycle furniture and charge a nominal fee for delivery], so it is impossible for it to become financially independent. Also, the project relies mainly on volunteers rather than paid workers. Lastly, there is the expectation that the project will provide financial estimates for the next five years, but the current situation means that they are unable to provide estimates for the following year!’ (Skegness Furniture Project).

Similarly, according to the Sleaford Furniture Recycling Project:

‘There are two main problems: a lack of funds and a lack of storage space. The SFRP receives no funds from any other agencies and has to rely on sales of furniture to keep in employment. A lack of storage space means that we constantly have to turn down offers of furniture. There is also a lack of other types of furniture recycling projects in the County. Similar schemes in Lincoln (NOMAD), Spalding and Grantham have now closed. This puts a lot pressure on the SFRP, although our limited

resources mean that we are unable to cover the whole of the Lincolnshire area' (Sleaford Furniture Recycling Project).

Some voluntary organisations highlighted the need for more supported housing within the County. For example, Lincoln Women's Aid stated that the six rooms at the Lincoln Refuge do not meet the needs for victims of domestic violence in the area (in comparison, Nottingham has four Refuges). Ideally, there should be at least one other Refuge in Lincoln with space for around 10 families, and additional Refuges in Lincolnshire's major towns.

'What would also be useful is some form of temporary supported housing (a 'halfway-house'). The needs of clients at the Refuge tend to change over time. Initially, many of the clients are traumatised by their experience of domestic violence and need considerable support. However, once they've been in the Refuge for a while, their support needs change. Sometimes, this can lead to conflict between clients. What is needed is some form of semi-supported accommodation for clients who are ready to leave the Refuge, but have yet to be allocated permanent accommodation' (Lincoln Women's Aid).

Similarly, Sleaford Foyer argued that it would help if they could provide some form of semi-supported accommodation to young people:

'We really need some form of 'half-way' house. For example, we could do with, say, five 1-bed flats close to the Foyer. What we are trying to do here is to encourage clients to be independent. But there's not a lot we can do for them once they leave. We do try and keep in touch, but it's difficult. It would be better if we had accommodation that provided some form of support if they wanted it. Then they could turn to us for help if they have a problem. At the moment, there's nothing like that. It would also be helpful if Lincoln CC made more properties available to us' (Sleaford Foyer).

Interestingly, NOMAD stated that changes to legislation placed additional burdens on the organisation's resources:

'Our main problem is with changes to legislation. We don't always have the funding if legislation changes and we need to train someone to say, keep up with health and safety laws. A lack of funding is also a big problem. It means that staff are not sure whether or not they'll be employed from one year to the next and that causes a lot of instability – it becomes impossible to plan for more than one year at a time. We rely on the goodwill of other organisations for which we're grateful, but in an ideal world we'd be able to train our own staff and not have to worry about the cost' (NOMAD).

To summarise, it is apparent that most statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations require additional resources, whether to maintain or expand existing homelessness services. However, the problem of organisational sustainability is most acute in relation to the voluntary sector. Despite the welcome addition of Supporting

People funds, some organisations in the voluntary sector still experience severe financial difficulties. Whilst few voluntary organisations face immediate financial crises, it is evident that a shortage of funds hampers their ability to plan far beyond their immediate situation. If voluntary organisations are to continue to play a key role in supplementing the homelessness services of statutory agencies, it is essential that this issue be resolved.

v. Capacity of other organisations

Similar to the above, most organisations stated that both a lack of funding and lack of suitable, affordable housing limit the capacity of external organisations to deal with the County's homelessness problem. According to the Skegness Furniture Project: 'again, the main problem relates to funding. There are too few people, too few resources and too many people to help. In general, there are too few resources for organisations to cope with homelessness in the County'. In particular, some organisations stated that there is a lack of suitable provision for single (especially young) people. Rainer Lincolnshire stated that: 'the main problem is a lack of accommodation once clients decide they want to become independent. There needs to be more, high quality, 1-bed flats made available to clients'. Similarly, Sutton Bridge Community Project stated that: 'it's apparent that most organisations that work with homeless people in the County have limited resources. For example, there's a complex in Kings Lynn that provides secure, self-contained flats to homeless young people – there is no equivalent in Lincolnshire. There needs to be more supported accommodation for young people, especially 'half-way houses' for young people leaving care'. However, whilst also acknowledging the lack of suitable housing, some organisations stated that some gaps in housing provision were not limited to 'bricks and mortar'. According to LEAP: 'there's a lack of emergency accommodation in the Lincoln area. Also, the referral process can be a little bit slow. For example, if someone needs specialist support e.g. because they have mental health or drug problems, the process can take weeks. Some organisations were particularly critical of Lincolnshire Social Services:

'I don't know about resources, but I do know that a lot of agencies have to learn to get along better. A lot of services don't want to work with other organisations. A good example is Social Services. They don't always tell us about the needs of clients, probably because they think that if the client has e.g. drug problems, then this will prejudice their chances of getting a place at the Foyer. The problem is that we only find out about the problem later and then we have to go back to Social Services for help. They have to be more open and honest about clients' (Sleaford Foyer).

and...

'The main problem is Social Services saying that they can't deal with the input of people into a rural area like Lincolnshire. Also, it is true that rural districts such as East Lindsey cover such a wide area and just don't have the same facilities available as, say, Lincoln. But, the main problem is that Social Services don't always provide an adequate care package. They are happy for us to accommodate their clients, but their clients don't always receive the care package they need - then they're surprised

when we evict them! Lastly, it has to be recognised that housing is only part of the solution – other agencies have to provide the required support for homeless people’ (Linx Homes).

and...

‘The problem here is that there tends to be a lack of coordination between the different statutory and voluntary organisations. For example, the mental health Outreach Team doesn’t always link well with other organisations – links need to be stronger. Historically, there tends to be a lack of communication between Social Services and LA Housing Departments’ (Lincoln Housing Aid).

According to Sutton Bridge Community Project, ‘there appears to be little cross-border partnership working between the different counties. For example, if a person is allocated accommodation in, say, Worksop, there’s always a debate about who is going to bear the financial costs. Lastly, there has to be better use of existing facilities. Although there are large numbers of young, ‘hidden homeless’ in south Lincolnshire, the Johnson Hospital in Spalding has been empty for two years. This is a good opportunity to renovate the building for use as temporary accommodation’.

vi. Future homelessness provisions

This topic elicited a wide range of responses including:

- More affordable housing.
- More direct access accommodation throughout the County.
- A mediation service in Lincolnshire.
- More general needs housing.
- More shared ownership housing.
- More family homes in rural areas.
- More Lifetime Homes for older people.
- More access to quality, single-person housing.
- More assured tenancies.
- More 1-bed houses.
- More specialist accommodation for 16/17 year olds.
- Better-resourced organisations to provide specialist support to certain groups e.g. people with learning disabilities or mental health needs.
- More flexibility for support mechanisms.
- Better liaison with health practitioners.
- Better support from Social Services.
- Better support for people with mental health or substance misuse problems.
- Better support for young women who are pregnant or have children.
- More direct access accommodation for victims of domestic violence.
- More properties suitable for people with disabilities within a family.
- Better support for young people.
- Better ‘joined-up’ working between agencies.
- More dispersed housing for people with mental health problems.
- Better funding of furniture projects to enable them to cover a wider area.
- Better provision for people with substance misuse problems.

- More shared semi-supported housing.
- More mobile advice centres.

Section 4b: Supporting People Groups

This section examines organisational responses specifically in relation to Supporting People groups:

- i. young people
- ii. older people
- iii. people with mental health or learning disability issues
- iv. victims of domestic violence
- v. substance misusers
- vi. ex-offenders

i. Young People

As highlighted throughout this report, most organisations state that growing homelessness within the County has mostly impacted on young people. This group are also considered to constitute the largest number of ‘hidden homeless’. Whilst the Supporting People programme has increased funding and enabled better coordination of policy in relation to the needs of homeless young people, some organisations highlighted a number of weaknesses in current policy.

NCH Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service (LLCS)

The LLCS provides a holistic after care service for young people leaving care in Lincolnshire. The service is divided into three districts: South, East and West (the same areas that are used by Lincolnshire Social Services and Lincolnshire Police). LLCS coordinate the accommodation, health and education needs of 16 and 17 year olds leaving care. They liaise with a wide range of organisations including: Lincoln City Council, Connexions, Primary Care Trusts, Probation, YOT, Rainer Lincolnshire, FAST etc. According to the LLCS, good networking and liaison with other agencies is essential to ensure that young people are provided with sufficient support. If expertise is not available ‘in-house’, then LLCS will obtain it externally. ‘It’s very much about working together, which we do very well’.

The LLCS or Social Services don’t actually own or manage any accommodation – ‘we have to use what’s available in the market. Also, it’s the local authority that has the responsibility for housing vulnerable young people – we have the responsibility to pay for the accommodation’. LLCS used to have a number of shared houses and flats, but the new Supporting People regulations meant that this was no longer feasible: ‘if you have a large accommodation block, then it’s fine to employ a manager and a support worker. But when you’ve got, say, a couple of houses in Lincoln and another couple in Grantham, then it’s just not feasible to appoint a manager and support worker for each cluster. Lincolnshire is a large county, and managing houses spread throughout the County is just not cost-effective’.

According to LLCS, the main problem is that there isn’t enough specialist accommodation in Lincolnshire for 16 and 17 year olds. A lot of young people leaving care have problems e.g. alcohol or drug abuse, dual diagnosis, ADHD but ‘Lincolnshire just doesn’t have enough specialist accommodation to support these needs. The Council gives young people leaving care priority status, but if the

accommodation is not there, then they can't be housed. We refer clients to agencies such as FAST, LEAP etc. but these tend to have long waiting lists. We also look for accommodation outside of the area e.g. Grimsby, Scunthorpe, Grantham, and Newark'. If there are no spaces at those organisations, then LLCS sometimes use private landlords – 'obviously, they can't provide the support that's needed. We do offer intervention, but if a young person starts to cause problems for the landlord, then it's possible that they'll be evicted. If they do get evicted then they'll probably become "sofa surfers"'. LLCS only uses B&B accommodation as a 'last resort'. Lastly, if they can't find a young person accommodation, then they contact the client's friends and family. 'But, most of all, these young people want suitable accommodation in a place that is close to friends, family etc.'

Interestingly, LLCS stated that although there is a lack of suitable accommodation for young people leaving care, 'there's also a problem at the other end of the scale. Some of the agencies offer accommodation with, say, 10 hours of support. That's fine if it's needed, but some clients may not need as much as 10 hours. The problem is that we still have to pay for that support, say £400 per week, and that can really put a strain on our budget. If we accommodate one person with 10 hours support, then it's possible that this might drain resources from elsewhere. Supporting People is about giving people the right amount of support, but to do this requires some degree of flexibility'. Young people leaving care tend also to be stigmatised by housing providers, 'but it's essential that they have some of stability in their accommodation. The high costs of accommodation also discourage them from working. They only receive £44.05 per week benefit and some of that may have to be paid in service charges'.

Lastly, LLCS stated that 'these young people are both vulnerable and without many of the life skills or family support that we take for granted. Without proper support, many of them fall prey to more 'experienced' people. What is needed is: more specialist accommodation for 16/17 year olds; more direct access accommodation; more flexibility for support mechanisms; and better coordination of policy with health practitioners'.

Social Services (Teenage Parents) (SSTP)

According to SSTP, Lincolnshire Social Services provides well-developed support for specialist groups e.g. unaccompanied asylum seeking children. One of their main roles is to liaise with support workers to identify the needs of young people. They provide floating support, but not accommodation. This is provided by ASA (a property holding company).

They currently support 60 to 70 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and have the capacity to provide support to around 200 care leavers.

SSTP stated that whilst there are a lot of support organisations for 16-17 year olds, their needs have been placed at the 'periphery of the agenda'. In relation to other organisations, a 'bricks and mortar' approach to the housing needs of young people means that there is currently a lack of support services. There is also evidence of gaps in the effectiveness of cross-agency networking. There needs to be: better assessment of the needs of young people; a better developed network of support services for 16-17 year olds (as these are not covered under core work of SS); more suitable housing for young people ('too many of the properties allocated to 16-17 year olds lie on the

periphery of estates’); more support services; and a greater emphasis on preventative policies (e.g. mediation services).

Social Services (Education)

The person interviewed from the Education Section of Lincolnshire Social Services is a Citizenship Advisor for schools who is currently seconded as an advisor for ‘Action for Drug Education’. The post is funded by the Confederation for British Teaching, a non-profit organisation. The respondent stated that they do not directly deal with children, but advise schools and parents on drug misuse prevention throughout Lincolnshire. They also provide training and act as a ‘broker’ to other organisations (i.e. they provide advice and act as a representative if necessary). Although the role does not involve direct involvement with homeless young people, they are a member of DAT Young Persons Group, and liaise closely with Lincolnshire Police, Social Services, YOT and Youth Service. Whilst the respondent stated that they have limited knowledge of homelessness issues in Lincolnshire, they believe that homelessness among young people is predominately due to relationship breakdown with parents, a problem that could be avoided by a greater emphasis on preventative work e.g. mediation services. Mental health problems are also an important factor (either causing, or resulting from, homelessness) suggesting the need for better mental health support to young people. One of the main issues is that homelessness among young people in Lincolnshire is not perceived to be a serious problem by, for example, schools and therefore not given enough attention to providing young people with information about services etc. Also, vulnerable young people need support rather than being put into unsuitable accommodation. Lastly, according to the respondent ‘there isn’t joined-up working among different agencies. There isn’t yet a consistent approach to solving the problems of young people’.

LEAP (Lincolnshire Education & Accommodation Project)

LEAP is a registered charity. They currently employ 8 staff including 5 Project Workers and 3 Admin/Management staff. The organisation provides training to young people via LAGAT Training and Development. The organisation is entirely funded by the government, although they occasionally receive donations of furniture.

LEAP currently manage six 4-bed supported houses for young people aged 16 to 25 in Lincoln. They only accept agency referrals (e.g. Social Services, Connexions, Lincoln City Council etc.) and not self- or emergency referrals. Most clients are in need of accommodation because of either a relationship breakdown with parents or because they have recently left care. There is no permanent support service available for each house although a Project Worker visits every day. In case of emergencies, a Project Worker is available 24-hours a day. Clients stay for different periods, usually until they feel confident enough to be independent. In some cases, this can be a number of years. LEAP receives nominations every day although most are placed on the organisation’s waiting list. They are hoping to provide emergency accommodation facilities in the near future. As well as providing accommodation, LEAP also offers a floating support service. Supporting People finance LEAP to provide a total of 68 hours floating support per week. The amount of support that any one client receives can vary between a minimum of 3 hours and a maximum of 20 hours per week.

LEAP stated that ‘as we only deal with young people, it’s difficult to comment on the needs of other groups. However, it’s fair to say that all homelessness in the County is

still a great problem, and all types of homeless people need support. There's a lack of emergency accommodation in the Lincoln area. Also, the referral process can be a little bit slow. For example, the process can take weeks if someone needs specialist support e.g. because they have mental health or drug problems. But what is most needed is more emergency accommodation'.

Sleaford Foyer

Sleaford Foyer opened in 1994 as the UK's first purpose built rural foyer. It provides accommodation and vocational training for 14 young people aged 16-25 who are stuck in the 'no home, no job, no home' cycle. It currently employs six staff including: one Manager; one Administration/Support Worker; one Project Worker; one Support Worker; one Cleaner; and a Caretaker- although the Foyer are currently in the process of recruiting two additional Support Workers. The Foyer is funded by Supporting People although the building is owned and managed by Leicester HA.

Since 2003, all Foyer clients have to be involved in either work or training before they are allocated a room. The main reason for this is that Lincoln City Council will not pay housing benefit to clients with a 'nil income'. If the client is already receiving e.g. a training allowance or another form of benefit, then their housing benefit application can be processed more quickly. However, clients that do not have an income will not be turned away from the Foyer. Clients have to complete a 'Profile of Assessment' (a personal training scheme). Training is undertaken at the Foyer but is administered by Broxtowe College. Clients receive £50 on completion of the course. The scheme has been such a success that the Foyer Group will soon adopt it as national policy.

According to the Foyer, most of the young people they accommodate are homeless because their parents have thrown them out or they have recently left care. However, 'homelessness affects young people in different ways. For example, some of the clients at the Foyer are victims of abuse. Whilst some victims may deal with their abusive situation quite well, others may fall to pieces. It's difficult to determine the support needs of each client as they're all different'.

The Foyer's main need is for better-resourced organisations to provide specialist support to certain groups e.g. people with learning disabilities or mental health needs. The Foyer Group does employ a mental health worker, but she is 'spread out too thinly throughout Lincolnshire. So, it might be that a client has mental health needs and requires immediate help, but because of the demand for the mental health worker, they may not be seen for five or six weeks'. They also need some form of 'half-way' house. 'For example, we could do with, say, five 1-bed flats close to the Foyer. What we are trying to do here is to encourage clients to be independent. But there's not a lot we can do for them once they leave. We do try and keep in touch, but it's difficult. It would be better if we had accommodation which provided some form of support if they wanted it. Then they could turn to us for help if they have a problem. At the moment, there's nothing like that. It would also be helpful if Lincoln City Council made more properties available to us'.

Rainer Lincolnshire

Rainer Lincolnshire is a national charity that has been providing support to young people for over 200 years. Nationally, Rainer runs more than 65 services and projects, working with thousands of under-supported young people each year. The organisation

has developed a wide range of accommodation and services for homeless young people aged 16-25 years throughout the County, including:

Lincoln:

- 10-bed hostel (general needs)
- 4-bed house (semi-supported)
- 8-bed hostel 'Abbey House' (refugees)
- 20-bed hostel at South Park (mixed general needs and refugees)
- 15-bed hostel at Portland Street (general needs)
- 4 x 4-bed houses at Sincil Bank (1 x general needs; 3 x refugees)
- Advice Centre

Boston:

- 11-bed hostel
- 2 x 4-bed houses (semi-independent)

Gainsborough:

- floating support service.

They employ around 70 staff including 60 Support Workers and 10 Admin/Management staff. As well as managing accommodation, they provide 'floating support' to around 130 clients. Although Rainer only accommodates people aged 16 to 25, the floating support service is available to older clients. The organisation focus on a wide range of areas that may affect young people including: supported accommodation, learning and employability, tackling crime, supporting young people and their families, and personal development and health. Most clients are referred by agencies e.g. Social Services, YOT, Connexions etc., although some are self-referred. Many of the young people they work with have 'been involved with the criminal justice system, are in or leaving care, homeless, may be young parents, or are facing serious deficits in their education affecting their employment prospects. Often they are facing a combination of these issues'. They have recently established a 'Mobile Advice Centre': 'this is basically a van that contains an interview room and carries a range of information sheets and leaflets. At present, it is focussing on the coastal area where there are scant resources, and where an increasing number of migrant workers live. The main aim of the Mobile Centre is to provide help and information to young people before problems arise'.

According to Rainer, 'it's difficult to determine the needs of homeless people. However, young people who are victims of domestic violence is certainly an issue. The number of young people who have been abused by family members or siblings is very much underestimated. There are now large numbers of refugees who require specialist support, particularly if they are victims of torture. Also, there are an increasing number of migrant workers in the rural parts of the county that may also need specialist support'.

In terms of additional resources, 'the main problem is a lack of accommodation once clients decide they want to become independent. There needs to be more, high quality, 1-bed flats made available to clients. One of the reasons for this is that refugees tend to stick together. Some people might think that this is ghettoisation, but it's actually

because they want to support each other in the face of racism from outside. There's also a need for more mobile advice centres'.

YMCA Lincoln

YMCA is a charitable organisation that provides 64 units of supported accommodation to young people in Lincoln. The units were refurbished and enlarged in 2000, and although they now offer better facilities, this meant reducing the total number of units from 96. Each self-contained unit contains kitchen facilities and a fitted wardrobe. The YMCA employs 12 gymnasium staff and 19 housing staff. There is a minimum of two support staff on duty at any one time. The Probation Service sponsors one support worker, although they don't specialise in probation work. Units are allocated on the basis of an interview and all applicants must meet five eligibility criteria: they must be aged 18-35 (although YMCA will allocate to older applicants if space is available); be capable of contributing to a balanced community; display basic care (e.g. personal hygiene); are not misusing drugs; and display basic skills (e.g. reading and writing). The last criterion is to ensure that they can maintain their tenancy.

According to the YMCA, all residents display similar needs ('they all need accommodation and support'). However there are some differences between older and younger clients. Young clients tend to have knowledge of what types of services are, or should be, made available. The YMCA stated young people may have gained this knowledge by going through the Supporting People process i.e. by the time they arrive at the YMCA, they may have already been involved with one or two other service providers. In contrast, older YMCA residents (the oldest current YMCA client is aged 44) are less likely to have experienced homelessness. They may also lack some of the skills, knowledge and confidence that can help younger residents deal with being homeless. This is particularly apparent with regards to older men who may have spent much of their adult lives relying on women to provide domestic support.

Many of the YMCA residents have drug problems and the organisation works closely with Lincoln FAST and Addaction. Although these services 'are good, they are not always easily accessible to YMCA residents with acute drug problems'. The YMCA also works closely with local mental health teams: 'these services have much improved in recent years and the YMCA gets mental health assessments done quite quickly by liaising with Lincoln PCT's 'floating support' workers'.

In terms of additional resources, the YMCA stated that there needs to be more access to quality, single-person housing: 'Lincoln City Council has sold off much of the best accommodation so there's little accommodation of decent standard left'. Also, there are problems with rules and regulations for homeless people. For example, residents with previous local authority rent arrears are not eligible to receive help from the Council unless their arrears are paid off. Sometimes, the Council may allow the residents to pay in instalments of say, £10 per week. 'That may not seem a lot, but if you're receiving only £45 a week in benefits, it's unlikely that you're going to want to pay £10 to the Council'.

A second problem relates to the 'verification framework'. Residents have to provide two forms of identity and one form of proof of income (e.g. either work slip or proof of benefit receipt) before they are allowed onto the Council waiting list. 'But, this is

impossible for most homeless people'. Lastly, the 'nil-income rule is unfair. Lincoln City Council does not pay housing benefit to people who have no income. Recently, there was a resident who did what the government told him by getting a job and signing off benefits. It turned out that the job was unsuitable (he was working in a freezer without proper protective clothing), so he gave the job up. Because he no longer received a wage or benefits, he had no income. Consequently, Lincoln City Council stopped his housing benefit, so he ended up owing us £65 in rent. Although we always allow clients to pay off arrears on a weekly basis, a lot of them get scared and abscond. In this way, the benefits system is setting people up to fail'.

ii. Older People

In contrast to the above section on young people, there were far fewer comments by organisations on the needs of homeless older people. To some extent, this may reflect the stereotype of homeless people as young, rendering older homeless people relatively 'invisible'. However, the few responses on this topic suggest that the needs of homeless people within the County are not being met.

Social Services (Older People)

Social Services deal with around 19,000 clients a year of 'which hundreds require some form of support. But, it's not always easy to determine who is vulnerable as the definition of 'vulnerability' is constantly evolving'. They act as a commissioning body to other organisations and have developed a five-year housing strategy (but have yet to develop a Homelessness Strategy). Social Services do not manage accommodation, although they: provide 'care-management funds'; make funding available to other organisations for training and education on a range of issues including homelessness; assess the needs of individuals and make recommendations; and assist with applications for adaptations grants. They liaise with a wide range of organisations (e.g. local authorities, Primary Care Trusts, Probation Service, RSLs etc.) to ensure that people with special needs are adequately housed.

According to Social Services, few policies have made an impact on homelessness since 1996. One of the main problems regarding homeless people is their lack of access to primary and secondary health care. Many homeless people are in poor health and their level of morbidity is much higher than average: 'there's the possibility of dying on the street'. Also, many homeless people of all ages have problems accessing benefits particularly due to issues with 'eligibility criteria'. The main issue regarding homeless older people is a lack of joint working. At present, different local authorities may have different approaches to the problem. Whilst partnership working has improved in recent years, 'there is still resistance to change by some agencies and homelessness policy needs to be better coordinated across the County. Also, there needs to be better coordinated responses to different issues e.g. housing, health, mental health etc. (i.e. an 'integrated approach'), whilst some areas may require targeted investment e.g. clinical psychology. Unfortunately, there is also some resistance to change in policies from practitioners as they work as specialists and therefore tend to see individuals in terms of specific categories. For example, someone may have borderline learning difficulties, but not receive any support. This can later lead to housing problems'. Generally, voluntary workers tend to be more flexible than statutory workers. What is needed is a more coordinated approach to homelessness: 'a comprehensive monitoring and review strategy would enable a regulated service'. Lastly, although Social Services were optimistic about the County

Homelessness Strategy, 'its success depends on the extent to which people can adapt to working in new ways'.

NOMAD Trust (Lincoln)

Although the NOMAD Trust in Lincoln deal with all age groups, around 7% of its residents in 2003/04 were aged 55 or older. NOMAD's respondent stated that there is a severe lack of support services for older people within the County, and it is worthwhile quoting at length NOMAD's comments regarding this problem:

'There is a big need for supported housing, especially the shared accommodation type where people have the freedom to come and go. For example, we have a client in his 60s who is showing the first signs of Alzheimer's. He was at the top of the Council's waiting list for supported housing when they suddenly withdrew their offer. They shut the door in his face, so he's back to staying with us. Everyone has the right to dignity at the end of his or her life. Another problem is that a lot of the people we see have spent a long time in institutions and they lack the necessary skills to look after themselves. But, we can't do it; we just don't have the facilities to support them. The staff are there to make sure that clients have a bed to sleep in and someone to talk to. They don't have the specialist health skills that a lot of clients need. There's one client who has been using NOMAD for years, but now that he's doubly incontinent, we can't accept him. It's a shame, but we don't have the staff or facilities to cope with him. There are a lot of clients who have special needs, but we can't help them. Also, there's a problem with agencies responding to our referrals too slowly. Sometimes, they respond quite quickly to simple cases, but if the case is complex they can really drag their feet. In a nutshell, we end up with the clients that no one else wants'.

iii. People with mental health or learning disability issues

Lincolnshire Partnership Trust (LPT) (Strategic Perspective)

LPT provide ongoing support to clients with mental health needs throughout the County. They are divided into three Divisions (East, South and West). All localities throughout Lincolnshire have Support Workers, CPNs (community psychiatric nurses), OTs (occupational therapists) and other medical professionals as a support resource. Each Division employs an Assertive Outreach Team consisting of two mental health workers who work 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., 7 days a week, and one Project Coordinator (including one Coordinator who specialises in housing needs). The Teams respond to the needs of individuals who are not able to access regular mental health services. They also provide in-patient facilities for people 'stepping-down' from residential treatment. LPT are also planning to employ a dedicated 'supporting people' officer. At the time of interview (September 2003), the service did not have many clients as, initially, funding only allowed for Teams to work 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. However, Supporting People funding had enabled LPT to expand its service, and it was planning to increase the number of mental health workers to 28. However, there was ongoing debate as to exactly the type of service required.

Under the NSF (National Service Framework) LPT provide a planned and co-ordinated service when a crisis like homelessness occurs for a mental health service user on CPA ('care plan approach'). They avoid using hospital admission, nursing homes or rehabilitation facilities to accommodate clients affected by risk of homelessness. Some specialist provision does already exist but is largely contained on compact sites, managed with some common sharing of facilities and does not necessarily offer secure tenancies or assimilate users into the community. There may be a "move on" policy in some, but management tends toward maintaining long-term housing for individuals who are living with limits on their rights. Dispersed housing avoids a single building's use and a ghetto of a mental health service-dependant culture; it also allows occupants to rehabilitate, realise their potential to live independently and ultimately, to blend into the background population taking up secure tenancies on the property. Support needs for the homeless are increasingly being met by Community Support Workers, CPNs and other specialist workers in the field so (joint) training and resourcing the specific provision would significantly improve results.

LPT stated that there are increasing numbers of homeless people, especially young adults, displaying mental health needs. One problem is that most homeless people with mental health needs are not referred to LPT: 'there is not enough done regarding homelessness and housing and homeless people should be able to receive the care and treatment that they need. LPT are now expected to enable and facilitate housing, rather than provide. This is a good decision as people should only receive mental health services when required. This shouldn't necessarily entail bringing them off the street but providing outreach workers. Mental health services should be provided in the community and clients should use generic facilities'. LPT have no formal arrangements regarding the management or allocation of properties to clients, although they have arranged two priority allocations with Lincoln City Council. They were also in the process of negotiating allocation rights with Lincoln RSLs and District Councils. LPT were also reviewing services to facilitate 'floating support' (long-term) and rehabilitation (short-term).

According to LPT, their remit for providing support to homeless people had still to be clarified (particularly in relation to the role of Outreach Teams), although they were developing a housing strategy ('it's important that housing providers know what type of mental health services are available'). Lastly, there need to be more sensitive evaluation tools, as 'we need to know absolute numbers of those in need of support, not merely an approximation'. LPT were piloting MANCAS, a new computerised assessment care plan tool in Grantham, which would hopefully become Countywide during 2004.

Lincolnshire Partnership Trust (Operational Perspective)

The respondent is employed part-time by the Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Trust as a Community Support Worker on the Locality Mental Health Team. They operate in Louth, Horncastle and the adjacent coastal strip of East Lindsey. A large part of their work is to provide support for people living in the community who are recovering from mental ill health. They work closely with East Lindsey Environmental Services on issues such as improving access to local authority or RSL accommodation through the housing register, and act as the main contact for LPT staff who are supporting service users with unmet housing needs. Accordingly, the Local Authority's staff

usually meet the housing needs of LPT clients who are at risk of homelessness: 'there is no indication at this time that the Trust is keen to be a landlord, although it takes seriously the problem of housing for service users'. The respondent stated that: 'following a referral I would establish what relevant information is held on the housing register or missing or needs updating on it. Generally, I pass back to the referrer details of information needed to advance an individual's housing priority. Frequently confidentiality issues and questions about the need to know arise too. Health confidentiality policies make evidencing unmet need, vulnerability and absence of intentionality difficult when homelessness is threatened or realised. When a service user is, or has been unwell, exploring prejudices about risk or explaining the omission or commission of some bizarre act leading to homelessness, can help alter an otherwise negative outcome'.

A survey of clients seeking assistance to move or obtain housing over a six month period undertaken by LPT showed that: homelessness, or the risk of it, was the principal factor in over 30% of the referrals; 92% of clients were single or not cohabiting; 64% were males; the effects of mental ill health on the family featured significantly in 22% of those referred; and all but one client sought accommodation near the family home - 'having the local support of friends and relatives remains a priority. In contrast, in one case, where mental health and the neighbours were a factor, distant housing was eagerly accepted'. LPT also stated that many people, by virtue of distress from mental ill health also have multiple needs: they may be affected by physical health problems, challenging behaviours, substance misuse or personality disorders. 'It must be agreed that anyone who is unwell, especially an individual suffering mental distress as a severe and enduring condition or an acute episode, are less able to cope with housing problems. When homelessness is an issue, their needs can be easily (conveniently) obstructed by authority, bureaucracy and by differences in agency procedures'.

One problem is that 'acquiring housing on discharge from hospital or similar accommodation often takes too long or is unsuccessful anyway. Whilst waiting for suitable accommodation, experience shows that clients are likely to give up, they may return to an environment that contributed to their condition or will readily choose substandard inappropriate accommodation and even just accept sleeping on a friend's floor, rather than feel "confined"'. This identifies a specific and unmet support need. When such complex housing need arises it would help to identify a named experienced worker and a "lead agency" with overall responsibility to provide a co-ordinating role. 'Then the services might be seen to be effective in working together, cut out duplication and thereby also be cost efficient in dealing with homeless'.

With the potential of new Supporting People project money there is an opportunity for the Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Trust to seek out a responsible RSL partner to remove some homelessness difficulties. The respondent proposed the provision of dispersed accommodation for the most vulnerable group of service users. It would be up to LPT to address issues related to risk and ensure staffing for the project with a robust dynamic package that meets the initially high support requirements for this testing and vulnerable group. 'A RSL would be expected to provide property in the community and manage it assertively with strict boundaries and at the same time exercising tolerance and sensitivity when needed'. In order to maintain the rolling nature of the project, as tenancies succeed and other individuals came into the system,

a partner RSL would acquire new property or make it available from its existing housing stock. 'Best practice dictates that such a project would offer choice, be subject to fair written agreements and be in line with CPA i.e. planned for each individual, with measurable goals and time limited. Housing is not my employers identified responsibility and they know better than most the challenge presented by such a project. Remember, for some, mainstream housing will not work and may not be their choice anyway'.

iv. Domestic Violence

According to Lincolnshire Police, there were 1,703 recorded incidents of domestic violence throughout the County during 2003/04. However, anecdotal evidence from women's groups within the County suggests that official statistics may significantly underestimate the extent of the problem. Also, CORE statistics show that that only 1.8% of the 2,040 lettings made by Lincolnshire District Councils during 2002/03 were to victims of domestic violence. Unfortunately, Lincolnshire has limited emergency accommodation for victims of domestic violence, with only two women's Refuges, based in Lincoln and Boston.

Boston Women's Aid (BWA)

BWA provide support, information and advice to women who are homeless following incidents of domestic violence. The Centre is open to all women in and around the Boston area, and offers advice on legal and housing rights (including advice on domestic violence issues and options to prevent homelessness), information, support, guidance and training in a wide variety of subjects. It also offers a drop-in centre open on three days per week. They also support clients with homelessness applications, from accompanying women at initial interview to offering advice at reviews. Service users are both social housing and private sector tenants.

BWA employ four staff including one Coordinator and three Project Workers. Until March 2004, BWA also employed a Child Support Worker. The organisation provides the following services:

- Refuge accommodation: 10 x bedspaces + 3 cots (housing a maximum of 4 families)
- Move-on accommodation: 11 x bedspaces + 3 cots (housing a maximum of 4 families)
- Women's Centre
- South Holland Domestic Violence Outreach Project
- Floating Outreach Support Project (Boston, South Holland & East Lindsey)

BWA were involved with the production of the Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy and are active members of the Boston Homeless Forum. They also receive information and minutes from the East Lindsey Homeless Forum meetings. BWA act as advocates for both their hostel clients and women seeking information and advice at the Centre. As such, they liaise with a wide range of organisations on homelessness issues, including District Councils, CAB, Social Services, Housing Associations, RSLs and other voluntary organisations

They also liaise with Local Authorities and Housing Associations in other areas on behalf of clients. They provide daily, monthly or quarterly statistical information to

Social Services, Supporting People Team, Housing Associations: 'BWA values the participation and involvement of women and children service users and encourages and welcomes feedback from them. Women and children are consulted and involved on any issues which significantly affect their lives or their comfort, and are involved in the operational and strategic work of BWA'. BWA hopes to continue to provide a comprehensive support service for women and their children, including the provision of high-standard emergency accommodation. Lastly, BWA have identified the need for an outreach facility to cover a wide rural area along the east coast. They hope to secure funding to develop this service, which they feel will have a positive impact on the number of women made homeless through domestic violence.

Lincoln Women's Aid (LWA)

Similar to the BWA, LWA provides hostel accommodation to female victims of domestic violence, offers advice on legal and housing rights, and runs a drop-in centre. The organisation has charitable status and is mainly funded by the Supporting People programme and small donations. The Refuge can currently house six families, including eight children. Each room is simply furnished with beds, sink and vanity unit. Clients share cooking facilities, toilet facilities and a lounge with other families.

Demand for places at the Lincoln Refuge is high. According to LWA, the Centre normally receives at least one application per day. However, the rooms are normally occupied for months and it is therefore unusual for a place to be available. If no space is available at the Lincoln Refuge, clients are referred to one of the other Refuges in the region (Nottingham, Newark or Boston). The Women's Centre also uses a bespoke database that contains details of spare places in Refuges around the UK. Alternatively, clients are referred to other agencies such as social services, housing associations and Lincoln City Council. Most clients who are referred to these organisations 'will be temporarily allocated to B&B'.

The main process for allocating housing for clients is:

1. If space is available, allocate a room at the Lincoln Refuge.
2. Check availability of space in other refuges in the region (Nottingham, Boston & Newark)
3. Use the database to check for spaces outside of the region.
4. Refer to other local agencies (Social Services, housing associations, local authority)

As well as liaising with housing organisations, the Refuge works closely with the police.

According to LWA, finding decent accommodation is getting harder for everyone. Demand for places at the Refuge is growing and all victims of domestic violence need immediate help with housing. Housing provision in the area is poor. Refuge clients seeking a 1-bed flat will normally be allocated quite quickly by RSLs, but families seeking two or three-bed houses will normally have to wait for five or six months. Both Longhurst HA and Lincoln City Council have an agreement with the Refuge to house clients as soon as possible ('this probably reflects the priority-need status of clients').

The six rooms at the Lincoln Refuge ‘do not meet the needs for victims of domestic violence in the area (in comparison, Nottingham has four Refuges). Ideally, there should be at least one other Refuge in Lincoln with space for around 10 families. Also, the present Refuge isn’t appropriate for people with a disability, so any new facilities should have disabled access. What would also be useful is some form of temporary supported housing (i.e. a ‘halfway-house’). The needs of clients at the Refuge tend to change over time. Initially, many of the clients are traumatised by their experience of domestic violence and need considerable support. However, once they’ve been in the Refuge for a while, their support needs change. Sometimes, this can lead to conflict between clients. What is needed is some form of semi-supported temporary accommodation’.

Lastly, LWA stated that: ‘there needs to be a Refuge in each of Lincolnshire’s major towns. In particular, there is no Women’s Refuge in East Lindsey - the nearest are located in Grimsby, Lincoln and Boston. Not surprisingly, many women want to stay in their own locality, limit the disruption to children’s education, and be close to family and friends etc.’

*Gainsborough Refuge*⁷

In March 2003 a single refuge place and floating support service was developed in Gainsborough. Established just before the implementation of the Supporting People programme, demand for the service initially outstripped supply by more than 300%. Despite extra funding from the Supporting people programme in 2004, funding levels will be soon be reassessed to ensure that the service meets local demand.

v. Substance Misusers

As noted in the above sections, many homeless people may display multiple needs, including issues with substance misuse. For example, the YMCA in Lincoln stated that many of their residents have drug problems. Similarly, 21% of NOMAD’s clients have a problem with alcohol misuse, and 18% drug misuse. NOMAD also stated that the relationship between homelessness and substance misuse is complex: substance misuse may lead to homelessness, although homeless people are less likely to receive appropriate support. Also, although substance misuse services within the County such as Lincoln FAST and Addaction ‘are good, they are not always easily accessible to residents with acute drug problems’ (YMCA).

Lincolnshire Drug & Alcohol Action Team

Lincolnshire Drug & Alcohol Action Team is a non-statutory, strategic planning group for all substance misuse issues (including alcohol) within the county. DAAT was established as a partnership in 1995 and represents key agencies involved in tackling substance misuse. DAAT strategy focuses on four key themes: helping young people to resist drug misuse; protecting communities from drug related anti-social and criminal behaviour; enabling people to overcome drug problems; and stifling the availability of illegal drugs.

DAAT works closely with statutory and voluntary organisations and played a key role in the development of the Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy. It liaises with organisations on two levels: first, it works with District Council Chief Officers to

⁷ NB Representatives of the Gainsborough Refuge were not able to be included in this research.

develop strategies; and second, it discusses how to implement strategies with the Council's Drug Treatment Reference Group. DAAT also liaise closely with housing related organisations such as NACRO and CentrePoint. It doesn't provide accommodation but does commission housing from other organisations. Also, DAAT directly funds some housing posts e.g. it supports housing officers in South Kesteven and Lincoln, whilst some housing posts are jointly funded through Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs). DAAT's funding process and housing strategy will be made easier by the amalgamation of the existing five CDRPs into three CDRPs: Lincoln and West Lindsey; East Lindsey and Boston; and North Kesteven, South Kesteven and South Holland

DAAT stated that providing support to homeless people with drug issues is most difficult in East Lindsey, mainly due to the area's increase of itinerant population during the summer. This makes it difficult for DAAT and other support organisations to direct services, although some homeless drug users have well-developed informal networks. At present, DAAT's support resources are quite limited although each CDRP provides between £11,000 and £14,000 to fund three outreach workers throughout the County. DAAT concentrate on one of the three main areas in Lincolnshire at any one time and make referrals. For example, between January and March 2003 they worked in East Lindsey and made a total of 1066 referrals including:

- 4 to tier 1 treatment services
- 5 to tier 2 treatment services
- 1 to NACRO
- 7 to OASIS
- 854 educational referrals
- 212 dedicated drop-in/outreach venue referrals

According to DAAT, the main problem in relation to supporting homeless people with drug issues is that different District Councils have different policies. There is therefore the need to develop a countywide protocol. There is also a need for more outreach workers and services. In particular, the views of outreach workers should be taken into account when developing homelessness strategies.

NACRO

NACRO manages supported accommodation for 16-65 year olds in Gainsborough, mainly people with substance misuse problems. The Gainsborough accommodation consists of 11 bedspaces including: one 4-bed room; one 3-bed room and two 2-bed rooms (1x4BR, 1x3BR, and 2x2BR), fully furnished. This is general needs supported accommodation, part of a resettlement package and is partly based on self-assessment (the package also covers benefit claiming, literacy skills, etc). There are no residential staff although support is available between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m..

A one-stop shop has also been set up in Gainsborough which is staffed by NACRO and Addaction, and takes referrals from ACIS, Social Services, etc. It is for clients who are not yet in treatment and is open on Wednesdays between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. NACRO have also set up floating support with ACIS. Eight ACIS tenants have been identified, all in Gainsborough, and all in treatment. According to NACRO, the main problem was heroin. Most clients are aged 18-24 year olds, although some are aged up to 30.

The organisations NACRO mainly work with are Addaction, Probation, and ACIS. The One-Stop-Shop makes referrals to Addaction, whilst ACIS, prison services or probation services make referrals to NACRO. Most referrals to NACRO come from the Probation Service. NACRO also refer some clients to ACIS as part of their resettlement package. They do support work which involves three-way meetings with the client and their Probation Officer to agree who did what. This arrangement works well – each offender had a named probation officer, so NACRO knew who to deal with. Occasionally, they tried to refer clients directly to Lincoln clinic (this is now Addaction’s role), in order to get them stable and so on, and they also liaised with the Clinic when problems occurred. Occasionally, Lincoln Clinic referred clients with housing needs to NACRO. They also receive referrals from CAB, the Job Centre, and Connexions. In relation to under-18s, they usually received a request for a joint assessment from ACIS, in conjunction with Social Services.

According to NACRO, the main problem is a lack of accommodation. The client usually managed to stay with friends or was referred to FAST or LEAP in Lincoln, which ‘got them away from temptation for the time being. No doubt some slipped through the net because of the time taken to access accommodation. They tend to go to Lincoln or Nottingham, because of the availability of night shelters in those areas. There was a need for more accommodation – it was as simple as that!’ There is also a need for supported and specialist needs accommodation. Their tenants are largely self-supporting, and the use of self-assessment procedures largely got round the problem of younger people being reluctant to admit a need for support.

NACRO staff are on call 24 hours a day, in case of need (not to monitor for abuse or breach of the rules). NACRO have a clear policy on the use of drugs, including accessing support for a drug problem. The presence of drugs and drug paraphernalia did not automatically lead to eviction. NACRO followed the Wintercomfort guidelines, using written warnings etc. They only involved the police as a last resort. They had never had to evict anybody, though written warnings were a regular occurrence. They had successfully banned visitors from the premises on a number of occasions. Sometimes the tenants had been grateful for this.

NACRO used a process of co-monitoring of their tenants with other services. Assured shorthold tenancies were reviewed continually, through a formal monthly meeting, and outreach was provided to ‘move-ons’ to check that they were successful. One of their tenants had been with them for three years, but this was unusual. They employed a referral worker who collated all referrals to their accommodation. They are planning to set up a support group for NACRO clients. Lastly, they stated that rurality was certainly an issue, but it wouldn’t be if there was sufficient accommodation, support, outreach services etc.

vi. Ex-offenders

Lincoln Prison

The Prison provides no specific support to homeless offenders, but a Probation Support Officer (seconded) provides advice on housing matters. A Job Centre Plus Support Officer provides advice on employment, whilst the Prison’s Housing Liaison Officer deals with a range of accommodation issues including: liaising with the

Probation Service and landlords, providing information on how to find accommodation, and dealing with housing benefits.

The Lincoln Prison respondent was in charge of the Prison's Resettlement Project and also managed the Prison's Custody to Work Scheme. This involves both providing training for inmates and helping them to find accommodation. They work closely with Lincolnshire Action Trust. This is an organisation that aims to contribute to a reduction in re-offending by improving the employability of offenders and prisoners. They also liaise with NACRO who train the Prison's 'Custody to Work' staff.

There are different support mechanisms for prisoners who serve a sentence of more or less than 12 months. Prisoners who serve more than 12 months may apply for release 'on license' ('Home Detention Curfew'). However, a condition of licensed release is that the prisoner is residing at a known address. All licensed offenders are allocated their own Probation Officer who may help them to find suitable accommodation. Most prisoners either find suitable accommodation or return home, although granting of the license is conditional on the property being 'secure'. Accommodation can be difficult to arrange for prisoners who have committed specific crimes (especially those with a history of sex abuse or violence). There are a number of Bail Hostels throughout the County that provide accommodation on a temporary basis.

One minor problem is that, for a variety of reasons, some offenders are registered as NFA ('no fixed abode'). Although they are unable to be released on license unless they have some form of accommodation, some don't want to receive help. NFA offenders used to receive a small additional allowance to help them find accommodation. However, these payments have now stopped ('they weren't being used to pay for accommodation'). The Prison now attempt to secure accommodation and the additional allowance is paid direct to the landlord. Also, Lincoln City Council now pay housing benefit direct to landlords.

The main problem is with offenders who serve less than 12 months. The prison staff can only offer advice and information on how to find accommodation. Occasionally, if the offender already had accommodation and is serving a relatively short sentence, the Prison may negotiate maintaining the contract with the landlord. However, many of these prisoners are assessed at Lincoln Prison before being allocated elsewhere, and so don't require help with accommodation.

The Prison have arranged with East Lindsey District Council to allow offenders to be placed on their waiting list. ELDC have simplified their Application Form, and amended it so that the 'risk' can be considered. In general, there is not enough accommodation in Lincoln. However, the main problem is that there is currently a lack of liaison between different organisations (which is why the Prison is currently liaising with ELDC). The Prison's Housing Liaison Officer is also trying to establish links with housing agencies and landlords.

Lincolnshire Probation Service

The Lincolnshire Probation Service is organised into three Divisions: East, South and West. In 2001, the Service undertook a 'snap-shot' survey of clients, the findings of which were later used to inform their 'Accommodation Strategy'. The survey indicated: a total caseload of 1034 offenders, the largest proportion being male

offenders subject to statutory supervision, cohabiting, and aged between 18-25 years. Around one-in-10 of male custody cases within the County are categorised as 'no fixed abode', and a further 4% reside in B&B accommodation. Females make up 10% of the caseload and the vast majority were either tenants or 'living with another'. It was not possible to clarify whether the accommodation was secure, of decent standard or adequately met the offenders' needs.

Lincolnshire Probation Service has recently appointed a manager who is responsible for Supporting People housing and accommodation issues. Their role involves: attendance at the Strategy Group's quarterly meeting of representatives from housing providers and 'commissioning services'; establishment of information flow and analysis of patterns and trends; publishing the above information and where patterns and trends are identified, drawing these to the attention of relevant Divisional Managers; monitoring Service Level Agreements with specific providers; and progress issues identified by Divisional Managers on a macro level.

Within the 'Supporting People' Framework in Lincolnshire, offenders are regarded as a specific needs group. Additional support is provided to those sentenced to a Drug Treatment and Testing Order (DTTO), and have successfully completed detoxification. There is one Home Office Approved Hostel (now called 'Approved Premises') which has 18 bedspaces for offenders subject to Community Rehabilitation Order or Post Custody Licence, with an additional requirement to reside there. NACRO also provide 4 bedspaces specifically for substance misusers who have successfully completed a programme of detoxification which comes with dedicated Tenancy Support Worker. Furthermore, RPS Rainer provides 'floating support' for up to six DTTO offenders at any one time.

Probation focus on the accommodation needs of offenders, in respect of which homelessness and housing problems can be a significant barrier to successful completion of programmes of intervention to reduce reoffending. The 'Supporting People Initiative is fundamental to the achievement of the National Probation Service's Accommodation Strategy'. The Service is also a member of the multi-disciplinary strategic partnership, 'Supporting People Programme'. Within this framework there are regular 'Commissioning' group meetings and 'Strategy' group meetings. The latter is a meeting between housing providers and 'commissioners'. At an individual case level, Case Managers liaise with the accommodation providers directly; this includes Statutory, Voluntary and Private sector. Divisional and other middle Managers attend (as and when time permits) a variety of advisory committees. Divisional Managers also attend Crime and Disorder Partnership meetings regularly.

Currently, Probation does not regularly produce information on the housing needs of its clients. However, they intend to publish monthly National Standards Monitoring forms which look at terminated supervision and accommodation status at start and end of supervision. E-OASys provides a detailed part of all offender assessment including accommodation issues but aggregated data is not yet available, though this is worked on nationally. Once available, this will provide useful information to undertake supply mapping.

There is an established approach to multi-disciplinary working within Lincolnshire which has been encapsulated within the 'Supporting People Programme'. At an

anecdotal level practitioners comment that the service provided by the organisations with which there exist formal contracts is very good, but there are insufficient bed-spaces to meet demand. Problems are reported with regard to the availability of local authority tenancy accommodation and a significant waiting list. Within Lincoln, the situation is considered to have become acute since the arrival of the University and the preference of local private landlords to accommodate students rather than offenders.

Section 5: Focus Groups

Background

As evident in the Council's Homelessness Strategies and corroborated by comments above, there are some substantial differences in the provision of homeless services throughout the County. One aim of this research was therefore to determine to what extent, according to the views of homeless people, homeless services differ in the urban, rural and coastal areas of Lincolnshire. Focus groups with homeless people were undertaken in Lincoln ('urban'), Spalding ('rural') and Skegness ('coastal'). The main topics discussed were: access to homeless services, quality of services, and quality of advice and assistance. In total, 18 homeless people took part in the focus groups including: Lincoln (5 respondents, held at NOMAD Trust on 28 January 2004); South Holland (3 respondents, held at the South Holland Centre, Spalding on 7 April 2004); and Skegness (10 respondents, held at Witham Lodge, YMCA on 26 May 2004). The full transcripts of the focus groups are available in Appendix 1, and the main findings are summarised below.

Findings

Before examining the findings in detail, it is worthwhile noting a number of general points. First, it is possible that the location of focus groups may have had some bearing on the findings i.e. both Lincoln and Skegness focus groups were held at homeless hostels, whereas the Spalding focus group was held in the town's Civic Centre. This may be one reason why, compared with Lincoln and Skegness, the Spalding focus group consisted of fewer individuals. Also, two of the three Spalding respondents were members of homeless families, whereas all of the Lincoln and Skegness respondents were homeless individuals. Whilst this may slightly limit comparison between the groups, it nonetheless provides a good contrast between the needs of homeless individuals c.f. families. Second, whilst the focus groups included some older people, most respondents were aged under 40. Third, it is apparent that the reasons for homelessness described by the respondents accorded with both current literature and District Council records. Reasons included: relationship breakdown; leaving prison; breakdown of relationship with parents; substance misuse; domestic violence; and loss of tenancy due to private landlords capitalising properties. Lastly, many of the respondents displayed multiple needs, such as mental health issues, learning difficulties and substance misuse issues.

i) Access to services

In general, respondents from all three focus groups were quite critical of the lack of homelessness services. However, it is apparent that the Lincoln focus group respondents had more choice of homelessness services than respondents from the rural and coastal focus groups. Despite this, Lincoln respondents stated that there are few homelessness services available in the city. Apart from NOMAD, only LEAP and YMCA provide temporary accommodation in the city. The YMCA is '*good, although they won't let you in if you're over 35*'. Similarly, LEAP offers a good service and provides more long-term support than the other organisations (one respondent stayed in LEAP accommodation for one and a half years), although being allocated a place can '*take ages*'. Although the support they received from NOMAD was good, it was

insufficient as *'you can only stay for 28 days, although sometimes they might let you stay a bit longer'*, and *'we have to be out by 8am every morning, and then we can't come back until 8pm'*. Due to a lack of suitable accommodation during the day, *'we have to sleep in the library'*.

One of the main problems cited by the Lincoln respondents was the long waiting lists for suitable accommodation. All the respondents agreed that *'there's not much housing available in Lincoln. I've been on the waiting lists of NACRO, LEAP and Longhurst for ages'*. Matthew stated that he had *'made an application to Longhurst, but I've been told that I'll probably be on a waiting list for a while. I might try my luck and go back to Essex'*. Although Ian *'had to wait at least 18 months for a flat, once I had one, I got good support from NOMAD. I got things like pans, a bed and bedding, and enough tinned food to last me a week.'*

Similarly, the Spalding respondents stated that there is poor access to homelessness services in the area. For example, Michelle, her husband and four children (two girls and two boys) moved from Buckinghamshire to Lincolnshire in 1997. They were living in private rented accommodation when they were given three months notice to quit as the property had been sold. They immediately decided to pre-empt their homeless situation by registering with the Council. Three months later, the Council told them that no suitable accommodation was available so they decided to buy a small caravan for £750. According to Michelle, the caravan was a good temporary solution during the summer months, but not the winter. It was cramped for a family of six, and had limited cooking and washing facilities — *'everyone had to share a toilet which was really unhygienic and the nearest water pipe was 100 yards away'*. One problem is that *'there are too many private houses being built in this area, and not enough Council houses. We did see some boarded up Council houses in Spalding, but the Council told us that they had already been allocated. There are too many older, single people living in large houses while a lot of younger families have to cope with small houses'*. Michelle also believed that private rents had recently increased: *'they've really jumped up in the last four or five years while wages haven't gone up half as much. Also, they usually want one month's rent in advance and a month's deposit. We just can't afford to rent privately any more'*. Sarah, her husband and their daughter became homeless in August 2003. Two of the Spalding respondents stated that they were aware of the long waiting lists and limited suitable permanent accommodation in Lincoln. Also, the respondents believe that private sector housing in the area is too expensive to be a viable alternative to social rented housing

In contrast, one Spalding respondent was positive about the Council's role in finding her alternative accommodation. May is aged 60. She lived with her husband in a bungalow near Spalding. However, in April 2003, after suffering domestic violence for a number of years, she *'just walked out and left — I was dreading my husband coming back from work every day, so I just had to get out'*. Between April 2003 and January 2004 May *'stayed with friends and family — in over 20 different beds and places'*. As soon as she turned 60 in October 2003 she visited South Holland DC. She was classed as *'homeless and vulnerable because my husband was violent. They gave me extra points and in January 2004 I was given a bungalow. They even gave me a voucher to put towards decorating the place'*. May stated that she was *'quite happy with the way that the Council had helped me. I may have been lucky, but the Council have always got things done quite quickly'*.

The Skegness respondents tended to reflect on a lack of specialist support services for homeless people. For, example, Sean has a neurological disorder that requires specialist treatment. His medical problem depresses him, which occasionally leads to bouts of heavy drinking: *'I turn to drink to stop the boredom, but then it makes me even more depressed'*. Sean had been living at the Lodge for three months but was soon to relocate to a specialist neurological Unit in Wigan. Staying at the Unit will be *'a bit like being in prison'*. The Unit will provide specialist medical treatment and help him to develop life skills. For example, one of his present problems is that he *'can't handle money'*. Sean stated that once his treatment at the Unit is complete, he will be resettled to an area of his choice. He has received *'a good care package. The only problem is that what's in Wigan isn't available in Lincoln. There is a Lincoln Unit that deals with brain injuries, but not general neurological disorders'*. He also stated that whilst *'it takes ages to get support, it's usually good when you do get it'*. Sean stated that one of the main problems about being homeless is not always knowing what services are available. Also, *'there are a lot of people out there who need support but aren't capable of getting it for themselves'*.

Similarly, it was apparent from one Skegness respondent that vulnerable homeless people do not always find sufficient support. Robert became homeless about a year ago when his parents asked him to leave. He stated he was diagnosed as a *'paranoid schizophrenic'*, which meant that he was *'sometimes difficult to handle'*. He spent a couple of months living on the streets and a few weeks in a squat before being referred to Witham Lodge by Boston BC.

Another Skegness respondent stated that there is a problem with a lack of ongoing support. Josh has a history of self-harm and alcoholism. He has been intermittently homeless for a number of years and had been residing at the Lodge for two months. He described being homeless as a *'vicious cycle'*: he would get depressed, start drinking, and end up in trouble. The police had arrested him for being drunk and disorderly and referred him to the Lodge. Josh felt that there was no support network in Lincolnshire: *'you can go into counselling, but they don't really know how you feel – you need to be able to relate to the person who's helping you'*. In particular, there are few services in Lincolnshire that offer one-to-one support: *'being homeless makes you feel that you're living in a box, so you turn to drink or drugs'*. Josh had been hospitalised for around one-and-a-half years because of his self-harm problem. Despite this treatment, when he came out he felt that he was *'back to square one. There was no one to talk to and no one to turn to get support. So, I got around my problems by slashing myself. I was also taking a lot of medication. When I was in hospital I started to get frustrated, so I smashed the place up. There needs to be more support out there. There's Addaction in Lincoln but they don't help homeless people. There's no one in Boston – there's more support here [in Skegness].'* He further stated that *'someone coming to your house once a week would really help – like a CPN. When you do get support, it only lasts for about three months which isn't long enough. You need a group of people that you can call on for help if you need it. There aren't enough CPNs in this area. Being able to talk to a volunteer would be better than nothing. I've asked for a Community Support Worker but they never respond'*.

One Skegness respondent argued that there needs to be more semi-supported housing in the area. Sarah is 24 weeks pregnant and has been living at the Lodge for seven weeks. She worked temporarily at Butlins. Her family live in Pickering, North Yorkshire, but she didn't want to return there because of *'family problems'*. She stated that *'there aren't enough Council properties'*. She also stated that there aren't enough affordable properties in the private sector: *'even if you're working you can't afford to rent a house or a flat'*. One problem with staying at the Lodge was that she would have to find alternative accommodation before her baby was born. She believes that, as she has a high priority, the Council will probably rehouse her. However, by then *'it'll be really stressful. I'll probably have to move after I have the baby and then decorate the new place'*. She stated that the Council have got their priorities wrong: *'they're more concerned about pulling in the tourists than they are about giving people decent houses'*. Also, *'there needs to be a hostel where help is available if you want it, but not if you don't. You know, like NACRO'*. Sarah is hoping to be rehoused by the Council after her baby is born.

ii) Quality of services

Rural respondents stated that both the permanent and temporary accommodation they had been offered by the Council were unsuitable. For example, Michelle's family were offered permanent accommodation in Gosberton, but whilst it *'was nice, it was too far away from work'*. Also, *'we didn't have any furniture — we had sold it all because we couldn't afford to put it into storage'*. They were then offered B&B accommodation in Peterborough, but rejected it because *'she had heard some bad stories about living in a B&B, and anyway, it was still too far from work'*. Similarly, Sarah, her husband and their daughter became homeless in August 2003. She immediately approached South Holland DC. Initially, the Council offered the family a house in Donnington. However, the family declined this offer, as *'they wanted to stay near friends'*. The Council then offered to provide temporary accommodation in B&B in Peterborough, but this wasn't suitable as *'my daughter is diabetic and she has to eat at the right time'*.

In general, the Lincoln respondents were positive about the homelessness services provided by the voluntary sector, although they were less positive about statutory services. In particular, they stated that they received good support from NOMAD, YMCA & LEAP. The main problem was the lack of suitable permanent accommodation. Whilst some of the respondents had been successful in gaining accommodation, they felt that it was not always suitable. For example, Ian stated that the flat allocated to him by Lincoln City Council was not large enough to allow overnight or weekend visits by his children: *'the thing is, they only tend to offer you a one-bed flat, which isn't always big enough'*. Similarly, Al had been *'offered a flat by the council, but I had to turn it down as [Birchwood] is too far away from my friends and the town centre'*.

Another important issue noted by the Lincoln respondents was a lack of support services. Steve was allocated a flat by Hull City Council but suffered from mental health problems. He then *'had a nervous breakdown and I had to move out. When I was on the streets, the police just saw me as a problem- they kept moving me on'*. Similarly, Ian had begun to drink heavily after his marriage broke down. He had recently spent some time in prison and felt that he did not receive sufficient support from the probation service on release: *'My wife left me and I started drinking. I've*

been in prison for a while. You get no help at all when you leave. If you've served less than four years, all you get when you're discharged is £53 and nothing else. You can't get a job if you tell them you've got a criminal record, and if you lie, they can sack you. The probation service is just a waste of time- they just told me where the YMCA is'. Steve believed that not being local prejudiced his chances of gaining support: 'there can be a problem with local people. I'm from the northeast, and when people find out that you're not local, they don't want to help'.

Most of the Skegness respondents' comments about the quality of services were cited in their case studies above e.g. Sean's statement that *'it takes ages to get support, [but] it's usually good when you do get it'*, or Josh's comment that *'when you do get support, it only lasts for about three months which isn't long enough'*. However, the respondents were very positive about the Salvation Army's services. For example, the police referred Kate to the Lodge after she became a victim of domestic violence. She had been there for one week. She felt that the Lodge staff had been very helpful and supportive: *'there's always someone if you want to talk – they're really great'*. She had been living in Skegness for one year and may return to her family house in County Durham. Similarly, Bill stated that the Lodge had helped him *'no end. Being here gives me good company and the staff are very helpful'*.

iii) Quality of advice and assistance

In general, there were few comments from Lincoln or Skegness respondents regarding the quality of advice or assistance. The exceptions were, Ian's (Lincoln) comment that Probation had done little to help him after he left prison; Josh (Skegness) stating that there is no support network in Lincolnshire; and Sean's (Skegness) statement that one of the main problems about being homeless is not always knowing what services are available. There were contrasting comments from Spalding respondents about the quality of advice and assistance. As already noted, May stated that the Council had done all they could to help her. However, another respondent, Sarah, was very critical of the Council's 'Homeless Section': *'They don't understand that when you become homeless. You not only lose your home but your security and everything that goes with it — your child's school, your friends. The Council don't consider the human element of being homeless — they don't realise that you lose everything'*. She also felt that Council Homeless Officers were not sympathetic to their needs: *'the Homelessness Officer you saw last time was never available. It was always their day off, and anyway, they didn't really care. You explain your situation to one Housing Officer, and then the next time you visit you have to explain it all over again to someone else. It would be better if you could stick to just one. It would also help if you were able to see the same Officer each time you visited. This may not seem important, but you don't need all the little issues like having to explain yourself when you're feeling under stress. You've got to make the best of a bad situation, but when you go to the Council you get knocked down. They need to show a bit of compassion. Apart from that, the lot of them should go to charm school'*. Sarah also felt that there is a stigma attached to being homeless: *'the Council put you in a box as though you're a certain type of person and then look down their noses at you'*.

She was also critical of the waiting list system: *'They send you a list every week to show you where you're on it, but it's useless — every week you might be in a different position. Even if you're at the top of the list, it doesn't mean that you'll get offered a*

house. I've decided that it doesn't pay to be honest — I'm going to put it on much stronger next time. You get to the point where you just can't take it any more. That's why I ended up complaining to my local MP'. Sarah felt that the current system for helping homeless people 'just doesn't work'. Lastly, she stated that being homeless was 'really expensive — moving twice, paying for storage, paying for a B&B — and then knowing that we've got to do it all over again because we're living in temporary accommodation. They should build a block of flats to house homeless people rather than putting them in B&B. Being homeless is hell. Now that I've been through it, I wouldn't wish it on anyone'.

Summary of focus group findings

i) Access to services

- There are more options for homeless people compared with coastal and rural areas (Lincoln)
- Shortage of alternative accommodation in Spalding area (Spalding)
- Private sector too expensive to be a viable alternative to social rented housing (Spalding)
- Clients regarded as vulnerable appear to be prioritised (Spalding)
- Limited emergency direct access accommodation for homeless people in Lincoln (Lincoln)
- Long waiting lists and limited suitable permanent accommodation in Lincoln (Spalding/Lincoln)
- Permanent accommodation not always suitable (Lincoln)
- Lack of support services (Lincoln)
- Lack of temporary accommodation for over-35s in Lincoln (Lincoln)
- Shortage of suitable daytime facilities in Lincoln (Lincoln)
- Homelessness is expensive (Spalding)
- Vulnerable people not always finding support (Skegness)
- Lack of specialist units in County (Skegness)
- Lack of ongoing support (Skegness)
- Need for semi-supported housing (Skegness)
- Lack of support for ex-offenders (Lincoln)
- ASBOs may lead to homelessness (Skegness)

ii) Quality of services

- B&B not regarded by homeless people as suitable temporary accommodation (Spalding)
- Failure of some services to provide adequate support (Lincoln/Skegness)
- Accommodation not always suitable (e.g. 1-bed flats)
- Good support from NOMAD, YMCA, LEAP and Salvation Army (Lincoln/Skegness)
- Good advice and support (Spalding)

iii) Quality of advice and assistance

- Homeless Officers need to display more sympathetic attitude (Spalding)

- Homeless officers to be responsible for specific cases? (Spalding)
- Better assistance to vulnerable groups (Skegness)
- Stigma attached to being homeless (Spalding)
- Minimal information and advice (Spalding)
- Homeless people not always know what services are available (Skegness)

Section 6: SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countywide commitment to improving support to vulnerable homeless people • Active voluntary sector • Some successful joint working between local authorities, and statutory and voluntary sectors • Supporting People funding providing financial stability to some organisations and better targeted • Increasing emphasis on floating support services and outreach workers • Numerous examples of good practice (e.g. mediation services, mobile information centres, rent bond schemes, homelessness information aimed at young people, choice-based letting schemes) • Well developed allocation procedures between LAs and RSLs 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Countywide protocols • Uneven provision of homelessness services (fewer homeless services in south of County) • Reliance on official homelessness statistics (difficult to determine extent of hidden homelessness) • Limited evidence of joint working in some areas • Shortage of suitable temporary accommodation for all Supporting People groups • Lack of semi-supported accommodation • No women's refuge in East Lindsey • Some Supporting People protocols unclear • Use of B&B accommodation in some areas still too high • Over-reliance on some voluntary sector organisations • Fewer homeless services for private sector tenants • Homelessness staff sometimes seen as unsympathetic • Insufficient emphasis on preventive policies • Need for greater provision of floating support and outreach workers
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further liaison between statutory and voluntary agencies • Further Supporting People funding • Sharing good practice • Further development of floating support and outreach services 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing migrant worker population (especially in south of County) • Increasing demands on under-funded voluntary sector • Increasing asylum seeker population • Housing affordability continues to decrease • Economic recession increases homelessness • Increasing demand for retirement and holiday homes (especially in coastal areas) • Increasing population growth and in-migration placing further strain on statutory and voluntary homeless provisions

Section 7: Recommendations

General

- Development of countywide protocols in relation to all Supporting People Groups (Supporting People have now developed a five-year strategy);
- Greater provision of supported housing across the County to all Supporting People Groups;
- RSLs to make better use of existing housing stock;
- Adherence to homeless people benchmarking and protocols;
- Increased provision of single-person accommodation;
- Adherence of all District Councils to target of expanding of rent deposit and bond schemes;
- More emphasis on preventative policies;
- More affordable and appropriate 'semi-supported' and 'move-on' accommodation;
- Better development of generic floating support and outreach services;
- More flexibility regarding support protocols (services need to better reflect people's needs);
- Greater provision of direct access emergency accommodation (especially in Boston);
- More financial support to furniture schemes in all Districts;
- All District Councils to meet target of eliminating use of B&B temporary accommodation.

Information & Advice

- Lincolnshire Housing Forum to establish a countywide homelessness information service;
- Higher quality of advice to homeless clients;
- Improve communications with people staying in temporary accommodation;
- Emboldening and strengthening forms of communication between the statutory and voluntary sectors.

- Greater investment in ‘one-stop-shop’ services to provide holistic support and advice;
- Better liaison with organisations outside of County with regards to supporting vulnerable people;
- More mobile information centres and better links with existing information centres e.g. GP surgeries.

Young People

- More affordable and appropriate provision of accommodation for 16/17 year-olds leaving care;
- Better homelessness information for young people throughout the County;
- Better assessment of the needs of young people;
- More support services for young people;
- Greater emphasis on preventative policies (e.g. mediation services).

Older People

- More suitable accommodation for older people;
- Clarify Supporting People protocols.

People with Mental Health or Learning Disability Issues

- Better coordination of services;
- Lead organisations to develop joint training sessions;
- More sensitive evaluation tools;
- Named key worker and lead agency to coordinate to provide a coordinating role.

Victims of Domestic Violence

- Improved support for victims of domestic violence (especially in East Lindsey);

- More outreach services (especially in coastal area);
- Semi-supported temporary accommodation (especially in Lincoln).

Substance Misusers

- More supported and specialist needs accommodation;
- Development of a Countywide protocol;
- More substance misuse outreach workers and services.

Ex-offenders

- Improved liaison between organisations regarding the needs of ex-offenders.

Alan Rust-Ryan & Prof. Peter Somerville,
PSRC, University of Lincoln,
October 2004.

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Appendix 1: Transcript of Focus Groups

Transcript of the focus group held at the South Holland Centre, Spalding, 7 April 2004.

The group consisted of three respondents, all female and aged between 25 and 60: Michelle, May and Sarah.

Michelle

Michelle, her husband and four children (two girls and two boys) moved from Buckinghamshire to Lincolnshire in 1997. They were living in private rented accommodation when they were given three months notice to quit as the property had been sold. They immediately decided to pre-empt their homeless situation by registering with the Council. Three months later, the Council told them that no suitable accommodation was available so they decided to buy a small caravan for £750. According to Sarah, the caravan was a good temporary solution during the summer months, but not the winter. It was cramped for a family of six, and had limited cooking and washing facilities — ‘everyone had to share a toilet which was really unhygienic and the nearest water pipe was 100 yards away’. Another problem was the distance between the caravan site and the children’s schools. They had to travel by bus between 7.30 am and 8.45 am in the morning, and 3.30 pm and 5 pm each evening. Michelle stated that South Holland DC recommended changing the children’s school although she ‘didn’t want to uproot them again’. Also, Michelle’s children began to experience bullying: ‘they would call them names like ‘Pikey’ or ‘Gypo’. It wasn’t their fault that they were living in a caravan. It wasn’t like we were in rent arrears or anything like that. We were a working family who just happened to become homeless through no fault of our own’. However, the family hoped that their situation was temporary and that the Council would soon find them alternative accommodation.

After three months living in the caravan the family complained to the Council that they had yet to receive an offer of alternative accommodation. Michelle said that the Homeless Officer who was initially dealing with their case ‘*had done nothing for us. I was so angry that I wanted to hit her. I felt as though I was banging my head against a brick wall. In the end I made an official complaint*’.

In response to the family’s complaint a second Homeless Officer told the family that he would ‘*see what he could do*’. Three months later and the family had still not received an offer from the Council. They were also upset at receiving a Council Tax bill: ‘*it was £500 for eight months Council Tax and the caravan only cost us £750 to buy. The Council said it was worth £40,000. How could they know this when they hadn’t even visited the caravan site?*’ Michelle believed that the only reason they had received the bill was because they were registered on the Council’s homeless list.

Again, they decided to visit the Council’s Homeless Section. The Homeless Officer told them that the only alternative accommodation was available on Risegate Road,

Gosberton. Michelle stated that this house *'was nice, but it was too far away from work'*. Also, *'we didn't have any furniture — we had sold it all because we couldn't afford to put it into storage'*. They were then offered B&B accommodation in Peterborough, but again, Michelle stated that *'she had heard some bad stories about living in a B&B, and anyway, it was still too far from work'*. According to Michelle, *'there are too many private houses being built in this area, and not enough Council houses. We did see some boarded up Council houses in Spalding, but the Council told us that they had already been allocated. There are too many older, single people living in large houses while a lot of younger families have to cope with small houses'*. Michelle also believed that the private rents had increased considerably over the last few years: *'they've really jumped up in the last four or five years while wages haven't gone up half as much. Also, they usually want one month's rent in advance and a month's deposit. We just can't afford to rent privately any more'*. In the meantime, Michelle's family approached Longhurst HA for help. However, *'they couldn't house us as we need four bedrooms. They didn't want two 15 and 19 year old girls to share a room'*. Michelle and her family are hoping to be re-housed soon by either by South Holland DC or Longhurst HA.

May

May is aged 60. She lived with her husband in a bungalow near Spalding. However, in April 2003, after suffering domestic violence for a number of years, she *'just walked out and left — I was dreading my husband coming back from work every day, so I just had to get out'*. Between April 2003 and January 2004 May *'stayed with friends and family — in over 20 different beds and places'*. As soon as she turned 60 in October 2003 she visited South Holland DC. She was classed as *'homeless and vulnerable because my husband was violent. They gave me extra points and in January 2004 I was given a bungalow. They even gave me a voucher to put towards decorating the place'*. May stated that she was *'quite happy with the way that the Council had helped me. I may have been lucky, but the Council have always got things done quite quickly'*. May's only problem was that she could no longer afford to buy property in the area: *'I've been offered £58,000 from my husband for my half of the bungalow, but it just isn't enough to buy anything in this area.'*

Sarah

Sarah, her husband and their daughter became homeless in August 2003. She immediately approached South Holland DC. Initially, the Council offered the family a house in Donnington. However, the family declined this offer, as *'they wanted to stay near friends'*. The Council then offered to provide temporary accommodation in B&B in Peterborough, but this wasn't suitable as *'my daughter is diabetic and she has to eat at the right time. And anyway, I'd heard really bad stories about the B&Bs in Peterborough'*. Instead, they were put onto the Council's waiting list, although they were told that it could take up to two years to be allocated a property. In the meantime, a friend who ran a B&B offered to put them up. Over the next few months Sarah and her husband visited the Council's *'Homeless Section'* *'many times. Each time we saw a different Homeless Officer, so we had to keep on explaining the same information over and over again'*. On 23 December 2003, the Council contacted the family to tell them that they had been found suitable temporary accommodation.

According to Sarah, although they were settled at the B&B, the Council told them that they had to accept the offer of temporary accommodation or the family would be removed from the waiting list. They are still living in the temporary accommodation waiting to be allocated a permanent property.

Sarah was very critical of the Council's 'Homeless Section': *'They don't understand that when you become homeless. You not only lose your home but your security and everything that goes with it — your child's school, your friends. The Council don't consider the human element of being homeless — they don't realise that you lose everything'*. She also felt that Council Homeless Officers were not sympathetic to their needs: *'the Homeless Officer you saw last time was never available. It was always their day off, and anyway, they didn't really care. You explain your situation to one Housing Officer, and then the next time you visit you have to explain it all over again to someone else. It would be better if you could stick to just one. It would also help if you were able to see the same Officer each time you visited. This may not seem important, but you don't need all the little issues like having to explain yourself when you're feeling under stress. You've got to make the best of a bad situation, but when you go to the Council you get knocked down. They need to show a bit of compassion. Apart from that, the lot of them should go to charm school'*. Sarah also felt that there is a stigma attached to being homeless: *'the Council put you in a box as though you're a certain type of person and then look down their noses at you'*.

She was also critical of the waiting list system: *'They send you a list every week to show you where you're on it, but it's useless — every week you might be in a different position. Even if you're at the top of the list, it doesn't mean that you'll get offered a house. I've decided that it doesn't pay to be honest — I'm going to put it on much stronger next time. You get to the point where you just can't take it any more. That's why I ended up complaining to my local MP'*. Sarah felt that the current system for helping homeless people *'just doesn't work'*. Lastly, she stated that being homeless was *'really expensive — moving twice, paying for storage, paying for a B&B — and then knowing that we've got to do it all over again because we're living in temporary accommodation. They should build a block of flats to house homeless people rather than putting them in B&B. Being homeless is hell. Now that I've been through it, I wouldn't wish it on anyone'*.

Transcript of the focus group held at the NOMAD Trust Centre, Lincoln, 28 January 2004.

The group consisted of five respondents, all male and aged between 25 and 40: Steve, Kevin, Al, Ian and Matthew.

Current Provision

In general, all members of the group felt that the current provision for supporting homeless people in Lincoln did not meet their needs. Although the support they received from NOMAD was good, it was insufficient as *'you can only stay for 28 days, although sometimes they might let you stay a bit longer'*, and *'we have to be out by 8am every morning, and then we can't come back until 8pm'* (Steve). Due of a lack of suitable accommodation during the day, *'we have to sleep in the library'* (Al).

The YMCA or LEAP provides the only alternative temporary accommodation in Lincoln. The YMCA is *'good, although they won't let you in if you're over 35'* (Steve). Similarly, LEAP offered a good service and provided more long-term support than the other organisations (one respondent stayed in LEAP accommodation for one and a half years), although being allocated a place can *'take ages'* (Steve). Also, *'the Salvation Army is good, but the one in Nottingham was always full'* (Ian). In contrast, Kevin stated that *'the Salvation Army in Hull didn't help much. They charged £26 a week, although that did include all my meals'*. A lack of daytime provision for homeless people in Lincoln meant that they had to rely on 'take-away' food. This was a particularly expensive option and *'income support doesn't even begin to cover the basics'* (Steve).

One of the main problems cited was the long waiting lists for suitable accommodation. All the respondents agreed with Steve that *'there's not much housing available in Lincoln. I've been on the waiting lists of NACRO, LEAP and Longhurst for ages'*. Matthew stated that he had *'made an application to Longhurst, but I've been told that I'll probably be on a waiting list for a while. I might try my luck and go back to Essex'*. Although Ian *'had to wait at least 18 months for a flat, once I had one, I got good support from NOMAD. I got things like pans, a bed and bedding, and enough tinned food to last me a week.'* Whilst some of the respondents had been successful in gaining accommodation, they felt that it was not always suitable. For example, Ian stated that the flat allocated to him by Lincoln City Council was not large enough to allow overnight or weekend visits by his children: *'the thing is, they only tend to offer you a one-bed flat, which isn't always big enough'*. Similarly, Al had been *'offered a flat by the council, but I had to turn it down as [Birchwood] is too far away from my friends and the town centre'*.

Another important issue noted by the respondents was a lack of support services. Steve was allocated a flat by Hull City Council but suffered from mental health problems. He then *'had a nervous breakdown and I had to move out. When I was on the streets, the police just saw me as a problem- they kept moving me on'*. Similarly, Ian had begun to drink heavily after his marriage broke down. He had recently spent some time in prison and felt that he did not receive sufficient support from the probation service on release: *'My wife left me and I started drinking. I've been in prison for a while. You get no help at all when you leave. If you've served less than four years, all you get when you're discharged is £53 and nothing else. You can't get*

a job if you tell them you've got a criminal record, and if you lie, they can sack you. The probation service is just a waste of time- they just told me where the YMCA is'. Steve believed that not being local prejudiced his chances of gaining support: 'there can be a problem with local people. I'm from the northeast, and when people find out that you're not local, they Don't want to help'.

In terms of future provision, the respondents agreed that *'there needs to be one central place with a person that could help you with everything. You know, give you full support and advice'* (Steve). Ian stated that *'we need somewhere like the YMCA for older people'*, whereas Al felt that although *'it would be better if there was somewhere apart from NOMAD you could go to, even if there was another place, it still probably wouldn't be enough'*. Lastly, Matthew stated that homeless people in Lincoln: *'need a day-centre- and one that's not just a café! Even one that just gives you a cup of tea and a sandwich if you've got no money. There used to be one in Lincoln, but it closed down. We need one where there's things to do- talks and drama and so on. People might say that it would cost too much money, but if we had one, I'd work there for nothing!'* (Matthew)

Transcript of the focus group held at Witham Lodge (YMCA), Skegness, 26 May 2004.

The group consisted of 10 respondents (8 males and 2 females) aged between 20 and 60.

Robert

Robert became homeless about a year ago when his parents asked him to leave. He stated he was diagnosed as a '*paranoid schizophrenic*', which meant that he was '*sometimes difficult to handle*'. He spent a couple of months living on the streets and a few weeks in a squat before being referred to Witham Lodge by Boston BC. Robert has been living at the Lodge for six months and is seeking permanent accommodation in the Skegness area.

Sean

Sean has a neurological disorder that requires specialist treatment. His medical problem depresses him, which occasionally leads to bouts of heavy drinking: '*I turn to drink to stop the boredom, but then it makes me even more depressed*'. Sean had been living at the Lodge for three months but was soon to relocate to a specialist neurological Unit in Wigan. Staying at the Unit will be '*a bit like being in prison*'. The Unit will provide specialist medical treatment and help him to develop life skills. For example, one of his present problems is that he '*can't handle money*'. Sean stated that once his treatment at the Unit is complete, he will be resettled to an area of his choice. He has received '*a good care package. The only problem is that what's Wigan isn't available in Lincoln. There is a Lincoln Unit that deals with brain injuries, but not general neurological disorders*'. He also stated that whilst '*it takes ages to get support, it's usually good when you do get it*'. Sean stated that one of the main problems about being homeless is not always knowing what services are available. Also, '*there are a lot of people out there who need support but aren't capable of getting it for themselves*'.

Josh

Josh has a history of self-harm and alcoholism. He has been intermittently homeless for a number of years and had been residing at the Lodge for the two months. He described being homeless as a '*vicious cycle*': he would get depressed, start drinking, and end up in trouble. The police had arrested him for being drunk and disorderly and referred him to the Lodge. Josh felt that there was no support network in Lincolnshire: '*you can go into counselling, but they don't really know how you feel – you need to be able to relate to the person who's helping you*'. In particular, there are few services in Lincolnshire that offer one-to-one support: '*being homeless makes you feel that you're living in a box, so you turn to drink or drugs*'. Josh had been hospitalised for around one-and-a-half years because of his self-harm problem. Despite this treatment, when he came out he felt that he was '*back to square one. There was no one to talk to and no one to turn to get support. So, I got around my problems by slashing myself. I was also taking a lot of medication. When I was in hospital I started to get frustrated, so I smashed the place up. There needs to be more support out there. There's Addiction in*

Lincoln but they don't help homeless people. There's no one in Boston – there's more support here [in Skegness]. He further stated that *'someone coming to your house once a week would really help – like a CPN. When you do get support, it only lasts for about three months which isn't long enough. You need a group of people that you can call on for help if you need it. There aren't enough CPNs in this area. Being able to talk to a volunteer would be better than nothing. I've asked for a Community Support Worker but they never respond'*. Josh is hoping to be re-housed by the Council or Linx Homes soon.

Sarah

Sarah is 24 weeks pregnant and has been living at the Lodge for seven weeks. She worked temporarily at Butlins. Her family live in Pickering, North Yorkshire, but she didn't want to return there because of *'family problems'*. She stated that *'there aren't enough Council properties'*. She also stated that there aren't enough affordable properties in the private sector: *'even if you're working you can't afford to rent a house or a flat'*. One problem with staying at the Lodge was that she would have to find alternative accommodation before her baby was born. She believes that, as she has a high priority, the Council will probably rehouse her. However, by then *'it'll be really stressful. I'll probably have to move after I have the baby and then decorate the new place'*. She stated that the Council have got their priorities wrong: *'they're more concerned about pulling in the tourists than they are about giving people decent houses'*. Also, *'there needs to be a hostel where help is available if you want it, but not if you don't. You know, like NACRO'*. Sarah is hoping to be rehoused by the Council after her baby is born.

Colin

Colin suffers from both epilepsy and diabetes and is an alcoholic. His landlady, who accused him of dealing drugs caught him drinking (*'I drink because I'm bored'*), evicted him from his private rented bedsit. He'd been living at the Lodge for four weeks after being referred by his social worker. Colin had no plans to leave the Lodge in the immediate future.

Alex

Alex has been in trouble with the police on a number of occasions for shoplifting and drug dealing. He was placed in remand in Lincoln prison for two months. On release he decided to return to the coastal area as his family live in Mablethorpe (*'although they didn't want to know me'*). He slept on a beach for three nights and was then referred to the Lodge by his probation worker. Alex had no plans to leave the Lodge in the immediate future.

Shane

Shane used to have a Council flat in Boston. However, a neighbour returned from prison and *'started to make my life really miserable'*. After he had been burgled three times, he became depressed and decided to move out of the flat. He went to live with his Mum for a while, but *'she wasn't able to cope with me'*. He referred himself to the

Lodge and has been living in one their independent living support units for 6 months. Shane is claiming JobSeeker's allowance and had no plans to leave the Lodge in the immediate future.

Kate

The police referred Kate to the Lodge after she became a victim of domestic violence. She had been there for one week. She felt that the Lodge staff had been very helpful and supportive: *'there's always someone if you want to talk – they're really great'*. She had been living in Skegness for one year and may return to her family house in County Durham.

Bill

Bill is aged 63, has brain damage and is an alcoholic. He has been living at the Lodge for two months. He returned from working in Africa to set up a business with his brother in 1979. But, his brother was also an alcoholic and Bill decided to quit the business and move to Lincoln. He lived in Lincoln for around 13 years including 6 years in a private property and 7 years in a Council house on Lincoln's St. Giles' estate. However, he started drinking a lot. This was one of the reasons why he got into a lot of conflict with a neighbour. Finally, the Council evicted him because of anti-social behaviour. Someone from the YMCA referred Bill to the Lodge. He stated that the Lodge had helped him *'no end. Being here gives me good company and the staff are very helpful'*.

Ben

Ben has experienced intermittent homelessness since he was 15 when his parents evicted him. He spent the next few years *'trying not to get involved with crime, but did anyway and ended up in jail'*. His life seemed to settle when he met someone, had a child and got a well-paid job as the manager of a company in Bradford. However, his problems began after he separated from his wife and lost his job. He went to Derby to look for work and spent two or three months living in hostels. Usually, he doesn't have access to his children, which upsets him, although occasionally Ben and his partner attempt to reconcile: *'but it doesn't last long. She gets fed up with me and breaks it off after a couple of weeks. There's no stability in the relationship'* (Ben suggested that his violent behaviour may have caused the relationship breakdown and he is currently seeking anger management counselling). More recently, he decided to stay with friends in Mablethorpe. However, he decided to break the journey by having a drink in Skegness, got drunk and forgot his friends' address. He spent two nights sleeping on the beach and one night sleeping in the porch of a B&B. He then visited the Council's homeless section who referred him to the Lodge, where he'd been staying for two days. He prefers the Lodge to B&B as they only charge £6 per week if in receipt of benefit or £14 per week if employed (c.f. £17.50 per night for the cheapest B&B). He regards his stay at the Lodge as a 'stop-gap' and is hoping to move on soon.