

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**HOUSING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING
CABINET MEMBER**

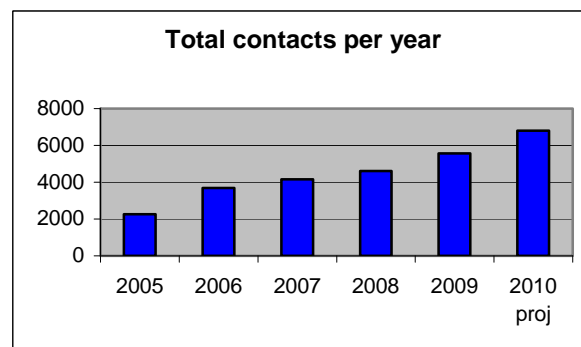
QUARTERLY UPDATE ON HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING ADVICE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on trends in the work carried out by the council's Housing Advice Team and its partner agencies in dealing with people with housing problems.

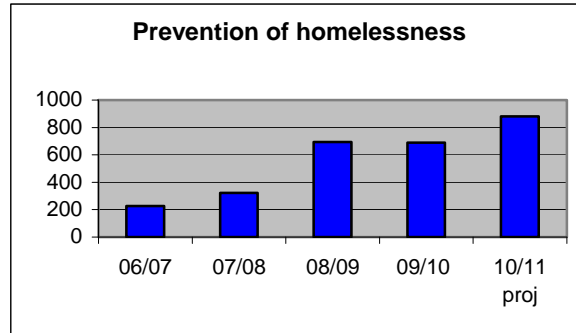
2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The number of contacts the Housing Advice Team has with people with housing problems has increased each year from 3,681 in 2006 to a projected total of 6,700 in 2010. This is partly due to increased awareness of the advice and assistance that is available but also, particularly in the current year that has seen the largest percentage increase, to the effects of the recession.

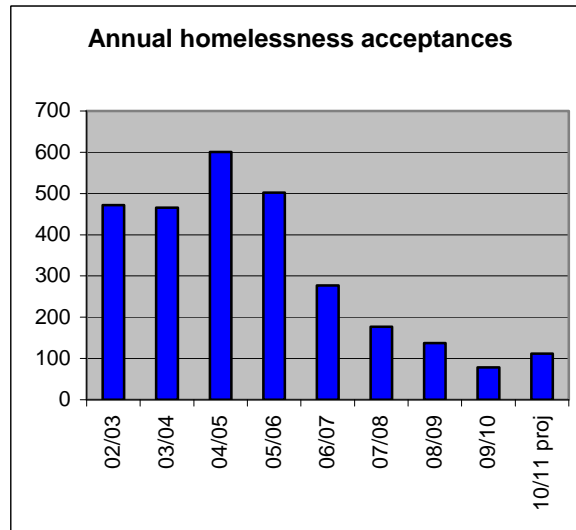


- 2.2 The council's aim is to prevent homelessness whenever possible and this has been achieved in increasing numbers. We use a wide variety of means, in conjunction with partners, to prevent homelessness including:
- Negotiation with people including parents, relatives, friends, landlords, and lenders
 - Advocacy, including attending court with clients
 - Helping people to access private rented accommodation by the council's bond scheme

This year, the council expects to help nearly 900 people in these ways.



2.3 Mainly because of this prevention work the council has, until the current year, managed to reduce significantly each year the number of households for whom there is no alternative but to accept a legal duty to house them as homeless.



2.4 The above graph shows that the number of homelessness acceptances fell from 601 in 2004/05 to 78 last year. This year, however, we are expecting that number to rise to between 100 and 120. The increase is mainly caused by:

- Eviction by parents, friends or relatives
- Evictions from private rented accommodation for all reasons including rent arrears
- Relationship breakdown

Each of these is probably at least partly a consequence of the current financial situation and the government's measures to address it.

2.5 Mainly by acquiring other forms of temporary accommodation, including properties leased from North Lincolnshire Homes, the council has reduced its use of bed and breakfast accommodation (B&B) for homeless households. Both the number of households in B&B and the average time spent there have fallen significantly in the last two years.

Year	Average number (households)	Average time (days)
2008/09	21.8	37.8
2009/10	11.7	26.1
2010/11 to date	4.3	9.9

- 2.6 The recent increase in homelessness acceptances is expected to continue. Various measures taken and proposed by the government to deal with the current financial situation, and consequences arising from those measures, are expected to result in an increase in the number of people experiencing housing problems and likely to approach the council for assistance. Those measures and consequences include:
- Rising unemployment and reduced earnings
 - The reduction, from 1/10/2010, in Support for Mortgage Interest payments
 - Proposed changes to Local Housing Allowance calculations and caps
 - Proposed major reform of the benefit system
- 2.7 The government has, however, announced certain measures which should, to some extent, assist in dealing with the expected increase in demand, including:
- The continuation of (and perhaps increase in) the Prevention of Homelessness Grant
 - The continuation of funding of the Mortgage Rescue Scheme, although there may be changes to the criteria of the scheme
 - An increase in grant towards Discretionary Housing Benefits, although amounts have not yet been announced
 - Provision for a further round of Hostel Improvement capital funding
- 2.8 The most common factor in the current and anticipated increase in the number of people approaching the council for help is financial difficulty, which can lead to rent or mortgage arrears. Some time ago the council set up the Debt and Housing Advice Network which continues to meet to co-ordinate the debt advice and counselling offered by a variety of agencies in this area, and will closely monitor demand for these services.
- 2.9 In 2008, the council published its Prevention of Homelessness Strategy (and Action Plan) for the period up to and including 2013, and most of its targets and objectives have been met or exceeded. However, as was anticipated when it was written, much has changed since then, including the recession. As a result, the Action Plan will be reviewed and revised, in consultation with all the council's relevant partners and agencies, and with service users, by May 2011.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 That the Cabinet Member notes the content of this report.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 This report is for information only.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 There are no financial, staffing, property or IT implications directly arising from this report.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 There are no other implications arising directly as a consequence of this report, but any increase in homelessness disproportionately affects vulnerable people, and could have an adverse effect on crime and disorder.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

7.1 There has been no consultation in relation to this report, but there will be widespread consultation, including service users, in the review of the Prevention of Homelessness Action Plan.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That the Cabinet Member notes the information contained in this report.

SERVICE DIRECTOR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report – N/a