

Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All

"far-reaching, visionary, joined-up, person-centred"

Crisis' response to the Housing Green Paper

SUMMARY

The Housing Green Paper, *Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All*, is a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform the way we house ourselves. This Policy paper – the first in a series – is Crisis’ response.

On each major issue, we will outline the current situation, the case for reform and the case for further reform. We begin with the ‘clear wins’ (which still, however, need to be guaranteed) – priority need, blanket exclusions and the removal of the two-year limit on temporary accommodation.

Next, we will seek to fight for further measures on the provision of emergency accommodation for those on the streets and the Single Room Rent. Finally, we will explore some major themes which are key to Crisis’ work and have a significance wider than any forthcoming Housing Bill – linking housing and support, the choice agenda and joined-up strategies:

- ✓ **Crisis** unreservedly welcomes the widening of the homelessness safety net (page 1)
- ✓ **Crisis** unreservedly welcomes the abolition of permanent exclusions and the timely return to the original understanding of ‘intentionality’ (page 5)
- ✓ **Crisis** welcomes the lifting of the two-year limit on temporary housing but to remove confusion, we would wish to see England & Wales follow Scotland’s example by restoring the right to permanent housing for all unintentionally homeless people in priority need (page 6)
- x **Crisis** believes that no-one should have to sleep rough. Emergency accommodation and advice for anyone coming forward as homeless is a must if this is to be achieved, and we are disappointed that this is not explicitly addressed in *Quality and Choice* (page 8)
- x **Crisis** strongly supports any change which alleviates the privations caused by the Single Room Rent restriction. However, as SRR is flawed, rather than tinkering with it, we would urge that it be abolished (page 9)
- ✓ **Crisis** has a long-term goal of linking of housing and support. We would like to see greater clarity as to how this is to be achieved and call on the Government to incorporate the principles of evidence-based good practice into resettlement guidance (page 10)
- ✓ **Crisis** has been pushing the choice agenda as part of our campaign to view single homelessness ‘in the round’. We welcome the commitment to putting choice at the centre of any housing system but want clarification as to how it will apply to homeless people (page 13)
- ✓ **Crisis** is a strong advocate of coordinated, multi-agency local responses to homelessness and therefore welcomes these proposals. We would, however, like to see more pressure brought to bear on local authorities to set up such strategic teams (page 19)

FAR-REACHING, VISIONARY, JOINED-UP, PERSON-CENTRED

Crisis, the national charity for single homeless people, is delighted that the Government is putting quality services and the extension of choice at the top of its housing agenda, because only with these priorities can we begin to deliver a decent home for all.

We wholeheartedly welcome the first comprehensive review of housing in a generation, as it goes a long way to deliver on Labour's 1997 manifesto pledge, "to increase the protection for unintentionally homeless people in priority need".

Quality and Choice breaks the mould of homelessness legislation, with proposals to overhaul or scrap a whole host of concepts we have grown up with ('intentionality', 'priority need', 'local connection', 'blanket exclusions' – even the 'points-based system'). Social housing itself is also transformed by 'choice' into a meta-estate agent, managing 'lettings schemes'.

As such, it is a highly significant document, with proposals which would substantially improve not only the current legislation but the original 1977 Housing Act too. The potential to prevent homelessness among certain key groups of vulnerable people should not be lost, and we hope that the Government will not be sidetracked away from these opportunities.

It is a large document of which homelessness forms only one part. It is also very much a consultation document, with many of the ideas contained within it only sketched out. Crisis, therefore, would not wish or expect to comment on its entirety. Instead, we will focus on the handful of issues which are key to single homeless people and to the work which Crisis undertakes.

We can, however, be pleased that many of the issues we have raised over the past year have found their way into *Quality and Choice*. In particular, last year, as part of our New Solutions to Homelessness programme, Crisis published the pamphlet *Leaving Homelessness Behind*. This sought to change the climate of opinion within the sector and set out a 'manifesto' for change:

- "No-one should have to sleep rough
- All homeless people should have access to appropriate housing and the support they need to sustain it
- Barriers to that housing and support need to be removed
- The benefits system must be streamlined so that socially excluded people can access it

And above all:

- We need measures to ensure that homeless people's needs are assessed and that they are offered appropriate housing and support
- Local partnership strategies must be in place as part of an overarching target-led national strategy."

Quality and Choice has taken up many of these challenges. This response seeks to bank the gains already made and continue to push the boundaries of debate.



Shaks Ghosh
Crisis Chief Executive

PRIORITY NEED

What *Quality and Choice* says:

“We believe that the current priority need categories should be retained. However, we propose to extend these categories to include homeless people who are vulnerable because:

- they have an institutionalised or care background (such as care-leavers, those leaving prison and ex-servicemen)
- or they are fleeing harassment or domestic violence.

It will be for local authorities to determine vulnerability on an individual basis.

We will also ensure that all unintentionally homeless 16 and 17 year olds are treated as being in priority need, and that there is appropriate liaison between housing and social services.”

✓ **Crisis unreservedly welcomes this widening of the homelessness safety net**

THE CURRENT LEGAL POSITION

“189(1) The following have a priority need for accommodation:

- (a) a pregnant woman or a person with whom she resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- (b) a person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- (c) a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- (d) a person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster.

(2) The Secretary of State may by order:

- (a) specify further descriptions of persons as having a priority need for accommodation, and
- (b) amend or repeal any part of subsection (1).

(3) Before making such an order the Secretary of State shall consult such associations representing relevant authorities, and such other persons, as he considers appropriate.

(4) No such order shall be made unless a draft of it has been approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.”

THE CASE FOR REFORM

According to the 1999 local authority HIP returns, in 1998/9, 104499 homeless acceptances in England (96 per cent of all homeless acceptances) were in priority need. Clearly, being identified as ‘in priority need’ is a key to accessing social housing.

Even more striking are the figures for London. Over 99 per cent of acceptances were in priority need – only 241 cases not being so. As for single people, only 46 non-priority cases were accepted in the capital (0.7 per cent of all London’s single people accepted onto the register).

➤ A ‘priority need’ designation, therefore, is effectively the only way to access social housing.

The categories of people which *Quality and Choice* proposes including within the 'priority need' safety net are widely recognised as some of those most at risk of homelessness. The 1998 Social Exclusion Unit report on rough sleeping explicitly singled out these groups:

“Homelessness agencies report that physical or sexual abuse lie behind a significant minority of family conflicts, and one study found that 40 per cent of young women who become homeless had experienced sexual abuse in childhood or adolescence . . .

A disproportionate number of rough sleepers have experience of some kind of institutional life . . . Between a quarter and a third of rough sleepers have been looked after by local authorities as children . . . Unlike other young people leaving home, many care leavers lack any sort of on-going parental support which can act as a back up when a first attempt at independent living goes wrong . . .

Around half of rough sleepers have been in prison or a remand centre at some time. Those who have been in prison typically experience serious problems obtaining both housing and jobs, frequently exacerbated by the problems of relationship breakdown, drugs etc. Research in prisons showed that 40 per cent of prisoners were homeless on release . . .

Repeated studies have found that between a quarter and one fifth of rough sleepers have been in the Services at some stage.”

This was further reinforced by the Rough Sleepers Unit strategy, *Coming in from the Cold* which stated:

“The root causes of rough sleeping are well known: prison, mental illness, being in care as a child, the armed forces, abuse, dysfunctional family background, alcohol/drug misuse and family or relationships breakdown. Often rough sleeping is the result of a number of factors.”

The rationale for the inclusion of these groups within the legislation is well-rehearsed, especially when it comes to sections of society which are excluded from many of the benefits the rest of us enjoy (such as 16 and 17 year olds, who are literally excluded from such Benefits). That is why we welcome the proposals and that is why the Welsh Assembly has already voted in the changes.

Crisis' own research has been instrumental in raising the profile of some of these groups.

In 1994, *Falling Out* was one of the first reports to put a figure on the proportion of homeless people who have a background of service in the Armed Forces. By analysing raw data collected for the Department of the Environment, it found that:

“Around one quarter of all single homeless people have served in the forces (excluding National Service). Ex-service homeless people are even more disadvantaged than other homeless people.

They are more likely to sleep rough, spend long periods of time in temporary accommodation, and to have been homeless for many years. They are also more likely to have been unemployed for many years. In addition, homeless ex-service people are on average older.”

In the years since *Falling Out*, much has been done by the Ministry of Defence and other agencies to put safeguards in place which guarantee a full resettlement package to currently serving personnel with over five years in the Forces.

However, significant numbers of service personnel do not qualify for this entitlement while many more have completed their service prior to these improvements. Therefore, there are still people coming through the doors of housing departments and homelessness agencies who have not benefited from the new schemes.

In our search for solutions to homelessness, Crisis commissioned the Institute for Public Policy Research to explore further ways to reduce homelessness among ex-service personnel.

- This research, *Lest We Forget*, will be published later in the year and it is hoped that many of its common-sense recommendations can readily be taken up by homelessness agencies, ex-service organisations and the Armed Forces themselves.

Crisis has also sought to highlight the vulnerability of women who are faced with homelessness. Pregnant women are already covered by the legislation, but domestic violence – or the threat of such violence – is a major factor which pushes women onto the streets. The existing legislation does at least recognise this pressure:

“177(1) It is not reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation if it is probable that this will lead to domestic violence against him, or against:

- (a) a person who normally resides with him as a member of his family, or
- (b) any other person who might reasonably be expected to reside with him.”

However, this legal recognition does not qualify those at the receiving end of domestic violence as being in priority need. This particular *Quality and Choice* proposal is, therefore, extremely welcome as it ties up this legal loose-end.

Crisis’ publication, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind? Homeless Women Speak Out*, all too clearly points up the unique forces which are brought to bear on many women threatened with homelessness:

“When I first became homeless a pupil’s father and my boss were ‘kind’ to me, offered me somewhere to stay. I was raped by one and the other tried to rape me. They thought they never had a chance before because I was decent, I had a job and I had a flat.”

We have also recently published *Homeless Young Women and Pregnancy*. This found that nearly one in four young female hostel residents had been pregnant in the past year:

“It’s never an accident – they will rarely articulate the real reasons and will usually say ‘It was an accident, I’m against abortion, therefore I’m going to have the baby’. The feeling among the staff team here is that it is about having something of your own, something that people can’t take away from you, something that is going to love you.”

Whatever the motivation, pregnant women are at least defined as being in priority need. However, the practice does not always follow the theory. The Code of Guidance says that a local authority’s duty to house starts at the beginning of a pregnancy – but some London councils explicitly state that they will not accept someone until they are 24 weeks pregnant. Other authorities will only take action once a hostel has served a notice to quit, a notice seeking possession and taken the woman to court. The upshot helps no-one:

“The difficulty in successfully housing the young women meant that workers in more than one third of the agencies reported women still living there once their baby had arrived and for several months afterwards. This was often seen as illegitimate, inappropriate, inconvenient for other tenants and contravening the policy of the agency, but it continued to happen because of the difficulty of persuading local authorities to take responsibility and not wanting to put young women in even more stressful circumstances.”

- Crisis is pleased that the Government will be revising the Code of Guidance to ensure that parents under 18 years old will be able to access supportive housing, but we would also like the Government to take this opportunity to ensure that the Guidance and the letter of the law are both being respected when it comes to placing pregnant women – of whatever age – in the priority need category.

THE CASE FOR FURTHER REFORM

While Crisis wholeheartedly supports the extensions to the priority need categories, we feel that the financial implications should not be ducked either. There is no point in extending priority need if it is simply a paper commitment. To do it well, to stop people sliding into homelessness, recidivism and drug misuse, money must be spent on services. Ultimately, the additional duties may well require central funding for more supportive and supported housing.

There are a few other areas in which we would hope to see further reform.

- In particular, we are not persuaded that it should “be for local authorities to determine vulnerability *on an individual basis*” [emphasis added] for those with “an institutionalised or care background” or who “are fleeing harassment or domestic violence”.

It is instructive to note that an individual determination of vulnerability is not proposed for 16 and 17 year olds nor is it enshrined in the current ‘priority need’ categories. While we accept that local authorities often need the flexibility which discretion allows them, case-by-case decisions on vulnerability fly in the face of the substantive reform. As the Social Exclusion Unit’s *Rough Sleeping* report points out:

“Under the homelessness legislation a local authority has a duty to accommodate someone who is unintentionally homeless and has a priority need. Most care leavers would have a priority need because of their vulnerability. However, because the assessment rests with each local authority, different practice has evolved in different areas, and the homelessness safety net works less well in some places than others.”

The same argument can be extended to groups leaving other institutions or escaping fear.

- In the absence of a mandatory definition of vulnerability, Crisis would therefore be looking for an extension of priority need status to all of those who qualify as having “an institutionalised or care background” as well as all those who “are fleeing harassment or domestic violence”.

Of course, some qualifying parameters may have to be set, based not only on time spent in an institution but also on time elapsed since leaving it. Otherwise, people who have served a one week prison sentence or who spent a month in care 30 years ago would be seen to be ‘leapfrogging the housing register’. Such definitions, however, would not be difficult to come by and we strongly believe that the evidence is so overwhelming that those with an institutionalised background are at a high risk of homelessness that only a near-universal extension of priority need to these groups would achieve the aim of this proposed reform.

Crisis is not blind to the reception which such a reform could receive. Of all the groups to whom the extension of priority need is proposed, ex-offenders pose the most difficulty in the eyes of the public. The image of newly released teenagers jumping the housing queue is a potent one. However, if re-offending is to be kept to a minimum, access to housing is vital.

To quote the Social Exclusion Unit’s report again:

“Another study found that less than half of prisoners were able to return to the address at which they had lived before they entered custody. Some find that tenancies have lapsed or rent arrears built up while they were in prison and that as a result they are deemed to have made themselves intentionally homeless, and will not be rehoused.”

- NACRO has found that over a third of inmates lose their tenancies while in prison. There is a simple way to ensure that ex-offenders do not walk straight onto the street – relax the Housing Benefit restrictions on the period which a tenancy can be kept open while a tenant is in prison (by, for instance, returning them to pre-1995 conditions).

BLANKET EXCLUSIONS

What *Quality and Choice* says:

“We do not believe that anyone should be permanently excluded from social housing, we therefore propose to remove the power to impose ‘blanket’ exclusions from the housing register.”

✓ Crisis unreservedly welcomes this abolition of permanent exclusions

THE CASE FOR REFORM

Crisis strongly believes that housing should not be a vehicle for punishing people – if an individual breaks the law, they should be dealt with by the criminal justice system not the housing system. A permanent bar on the housing options of those who almost by definition have no other choice in their housing is not the way to resolve anti-social behaviour or to solve the problems which it may cause.

- Crisis, therefore, also welcomes the commitment that “people would be given a clear indication of what they needed to do to get the restriction lifted”, as this clearly implies that any temporary restriction could only be made if there was a realistic chance of the individual returning to the register. In other words, that the landlord shares the objective of permanently resolving problems rather than permanently removing ‘problem tenants’.

We are also pleased that *Quality and Choice* states that “we would expect suspensions to be exceptional . . . We propose that decisions should be open to review”. Obviously, there is a temptation to replace permanent exclusions with permanent suspensions, and we hope that ways can be found to ensure that the sentiments expressed can be explicitly set out in any future guidance.

Finally, the removal of blanket exclusions also heralds a timely return to the original understanding of ‘intentionality’: “households who purposefully engineer their housing circumstances to gain a higher priority for re-housing”.

- Crisis welcomes this clarification. For too long, the discretionary powers of local authorities have meant that ‘intentionality’ is applied inconsistently across the country.

REMOVAL OF TWO-YEAR LIMIT ON TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

What *Quality and Choice* says:

“We propose to remove the current restriction that temporary housing need only be provided for two years.”

✓ **Crisis welcomes this lifting of the two-year limit on temporary housing but to remove confusion, we would wish to see England and Wales follow Scotland’s example by restoring the right to permanent housing for all unintentionally homeless people in priority need**

THE CURRENT LEGAL POSITION

“193(2) Unless the authority refer the application to another local housing authority . . . they shall secure that accommodation is available for occupation by the applicant . . .

(3) The authority are subject to the duty under this section for a period of two years (“the minimum period”), subject to the following provisions of this section. After the end of that period the authority may continue to secure that accommodation is available for occupation by the applicant, but are not obliged to do so . . .

194(1) Where a local housing authority have been subject to the duty under section 193 in relation to a person until the end of the minimum period, they may continue to secure that accommodation is available for his occupation.

(2) They shall not do so unless they are satisfied on a review under this section that:

- (a) he has a priority need,
- (b) there is no other suitable accommodation available for occupation by him in their district, and
- (c) he wishes the authority to continue securing that accommodation is available for his occupation;

and they shall not continue to do so for more than two years at a time unless they are satisfied on a further review under this section as to those matters.”

THE CASE FOR REFORM

One of the ultimate goals of any housing policy must be to get people into permanent or settled housing. The proposed lifting of the two-year limit on temporary housing is a welcome move in this direction.

The current legislation not only legitimises and institutionalises the use of temporary accommodation – effectively making it an ‘appropriate’ response to homelessness – but it also places significant restrictions on any individual extension of the two-year minimum period. As priority need is founded on shifting degrees of vulnerability, it is often difficult to prove its continual existence on a biennial basis.

➤ The proposed reform will help streamline this process and, crucially, will begin to make the connections between emergency provision and access to settled housing. Crisis is pleased to see this revolving door slow down.

THE CASE FOR FURTHER REFORM

We would, however, prefer to see that revolving door stop, and are concerned that the final wording of any legislative amendments be crystal clear.

Definitions are urgently needed to address any possible misunderstanding of what is meant by temporary, permanent or settled housing. One extreme reading of the proposal could effectively see *all* forms of social housing become 'temporary' ("we propose to remove the current restriction that temporary housing need only be provided for two years"). A life spent in housing that was indefinitely 'temporary' would clearly be intolerably unstable. Crisis hopes that, at the very least, this can be addressed in the drafting stages.

- One way of doing so, would simply be to scrap the definition of temporary housing as applied to those in priority need. Crisis therefore unequivocally calls for the restoration of the right to permanent housing for all unintentionally homeless people in priority need. This may seem extreme, but when taken with the proposals for extending 'choice' to the social housing market, it would not be impossible. Scottish legislators are, after all, proposing exactly that.

The Scottish Housing Green Paper, *Investing in Modernisation – An Agenda for Scotland's Housing*, points out that:

"One of the key messages in the [revised Scottish] Code [of Guidance] is the need for local authorities to seek to secure *permanent accommodation with security of tenure* for persons who have been assessed as homeless and in priority need." [emphasis added]

Above and beyond this question is the wider one of the tensions between 'duties' and 'powers', 'entitlements' and 'eligibility'. The power to provide temporary accommodation is not the same as the duty to do so. The Scottish Executive's recently published proposals for a Housing Bill, *Better Homes for Scotland's Communities*, expands on this theme:

"Where a homeless person has been assessed as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need . . . we will alter the legislation to make clear that this accommodation should be permanent accommodation, not simply short-term provision . . .

The new duty to secure permanent accommodation will . . . allow for interim accommodation to be secured in circumstances when the local authority considers temporary accommodation to be more suitable for the applicant's needs. This interim action will not however constitute the discharge of the local authority's duty."

- Crisis strongly recommends that the progress these proposals make through the Scottish legislature be closely monitored and the outcomes incorporated into any legislation for England and Wales.

EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

What *Quality and Choice* says:

“We therefore propose to allow local authorities a power to provide temporary accommodation for homeless people who . . . would not fall within a priority group . . . An alternative would be to require authorities to provide temporary accommodation for all non-priority homeless people where such accommodation was available in their area and was not required by other people in urgent housing need . . . If local authorities are not required to secure temporary housing . . . we propose to extend the homelessness prevention duty on authorities to cover advice on debt, budgeting, tenants’ rights, helping people to remain in their own homes through adaptation or improvement of the property, as well as options for re-housing.”

X Crisis believes that no-one should have to sleep rough. Emergency accommodation and advice for anyone coming forward as homeless is a must if this is to be achieved, and we are disappointed that this is not explicitly addressed in *Quality and Choice*

THE CASE FOR REFORM

In 1994, Crisis adopted the mission to “end street homelessness”. The Government is likewise committed to reducing rough sleeping to near-zero levels, while the Scottish Executive has re-affirmed the pledge: “We will tackle homelessness and ensure that no-one needs to sleep rough”.

The only way to do this is to have enough short-term accommodation available for such emergencies. Once under a roof, people can be quickly assessed and decisions taken as to whether they are intentionally homeless or in priority need. This does sometimes happen currently – but it is not universally applied as there is nothing which explicitly sets out a duty in existing legislation.

- Crisis would therefore like to see a duty placed upon local authorities to ensure that emergency accommodation is made available when anyone approaches them as homeless, even if they are found at a later date to be intentionally homeless with no priority need.

This is already being considered in Scotland, as set out in *Better Homes for Scotland’s Communities*:

“As the law stands at present, the strengthened duty on local authorities with respect to the provision of advice and assistance . . . would apply both to those priority need applicants who have been assessed as becoming homeless intentionally and to those who are assessed as not being in priority need. However, local authorities are also under a duty in respect of the first of these two categories . . . to ensure that accommodation is made available while they discharge their obligation to provide advice and assistance. We will take powers in the Housing Bill to extend this duty to homeless people assessed as not in priority need, so that *all homeless people will be entitled to the same standards of proactive advice and assistance, and the same access to temporary accommodation while this advice and assistance is given.*” [emphasis added]

Scotland will also ensure that “the key elements which should be included in advice and assistance (such as advice on the availability of permanent accommodation, financial matters, legal matters and social problems) are defined in secondary legislation.

In contrast, *Quality and Choice* offers either temporary housing for all non-priority homeless people or an extension of advice and assistance. Having both does not seem to be an option.

- Crisis believes that in the context of widening choice, both options *can* be provided simultaneously. In fact, if they are not, then either the crisis which threw an individual out onto the street is left unaddressed or they themselves are left unaddressed on the street.

SINGLE ROOM RENTS

What *Quality and Choice* says:

“To meet our objective for welfare reform, and for ending rough sleeping, we must make sure that young people have access to accommodation, so that they can concentrate on finding work . . . One option to consider is to broaden the definition of the Single Room Rent so that a range of rents for shared accommodation is used (eg, shared houses, flats and bedsits) instead of the current restrictive one room non-self contained accommodation definition. By doing this the rent that Housing Benefit would pay might better reflect the type of shared accommodation which is available for rent in the private sector. It might help young people obtain and maintain accommodation which can give them a secure base for job search and job security.”

X Crisis strongly supports any change which alleviates the privations caused by the Single Room Rent restriction. However, as SRR is flawed, rather than tinkering with it, we would urge that it be abolished

THE CASE FOR REFORM

The Single Room Rent restriction (SRR) is an anachronism not only within the Housing Benefit system but also within the welfare system as a whole. It discriminates against a section of society which can access virtually all other benefits and it directly compromises other Government schemes such as the New Deal by springing a benefit-activated poverty trap.

- Any changes to SRR which mitigate against this situation are therefore to be welcomed. By broadening the range of rents on which SRR is calculated, it would be hoped that the amount payable by Housing Benefit would effectively increase (as the average rent should rise). This would alleviate the situation in which many young people currently find themselves.

Feedback from Crisis' partner projects shows that SRR restrictions have led to a marked decrease in the availability of private rented accommodation to young people on Housing Benefit. This is because young people whose rent is above the SRR may become homeless if they are unable to meet the shortfall between their benefit and rent. Because of this possibility, landlords – legitimately encouraged by the Association of Residential Landlords – have come to prefer letting rooms to older tenants who are entitled to more benefit.

THE CASE FOR FURTHER REFORM

Crisis believes that reform could and should go further. Come what may, if the proposed reform is to work, it must be on the basis of more than an informed hunch. To ensure that the reform has the desired result – of raising the SRR value – robust rent comparisons must be carried out.

Over and above this, SRR was created in the first place as a piece of social engineering. In theory, young people would see what poor options they were being faced with and choose to stay in the parental home rather than leave it. But the SRR is a blunt instrument. Financial issues are not generally the primary consideration when leaving home. If the real aim was to discourage young people leaving home, there were better ways to achieve that end.

There is a similar danger with the current proposal. As with blanket exclusions, Crisis believes that housing and its associated welfare benefits should not become vehicles for other policies, however convenient that may be. We are concerned that the justification of the SRR as a basis for an employment policy would still obscure the very real weaknesses of the restriction.

- The case is still not made for the effectiveness and efficiency of the SRR. Ultimately, any reformed SRR would still be based on a flawed calculation of self-interest. Without a clear rationale for its existence, Crisis therefore urges the Government to phase out the SRR.

LINKING HOUSING AND SUPPORT

What *Quality and Choice* says:

“Housing and social services authorities should liaise with each other, and both should play an active role in helping the most vulnerable people to exercise their choice of suitable housing, with appropriate support services being provided where necessary . . .

Partnerships can help deliver additional benefits for people living in the area, for example: . . . integrated housing and support services for people with special health or other needs . . .

Many homeless people need additional support services. Housing authorities, in liaison with other agencies, will be required to provide advice and assistance to help them to access these support services. This should help homeless households to make a successful transition to their new home and prevent homelessness from recurring.”

✓ **Crisis has a long-term goal of linking of housing and support. We would like to see greater clarity as to how this is to be achieved and call on the Government to incorporate the principles of evidence-based good practice into any resettlement Code of Guidance**

THE CASE FOR REFORM

It is now widely accepted that homelessness is not simply about housing. Crisis has been in the vanguard of this development – our New Solutions to Homelessness research programme takes this as its central tenet:

- “It is clear that homelessness is about far more than a roof over someone’s head” (Shaks Ghosh, foreword to *Prevention is Better than Cure*)
- “Few, if any, of the homeless people I meet at Crisis became homeless because of a shortage of housing” (Shaks Ghosh, foreword to *A Future Foretold*)
- “We all know that homelessness is not just about bricks and mortar” (Shaks Ghosh, foreword to *Homelessness and Loneliness*)

For too long, it’s been acceptable just to provide housing. Undoubtedly, this works for many people – their housing needs are assessed and met, and they get on with leading their lives. But other people just end up getting thrown out through one revolving door after another. Drink, drugs, mental health, violence, racism – without ‘support’, without care and back-up, these pressures simply mean that tenancies fail and continue to fail.

That is why not only the provision of support services but also the assessment of people’s support needs is central to Crisis’ vision. We need to ensure that ‘life chances’ are opened up to people, so that everyone has the opportunity to succeed at something which most of us take for granted: maintaining a tenancy and a place to call ‘home’.

THE CASE FOR FURTHER REFORM

As *Quality and Choice* points out:

“No-one has responsibility for assessing the adequacy of the support available for vulnerable people, and funding for such support is complicated, uncoordinated and overlapping.”

This is why we support the setting up of the Rough Sleepers Unit's Contact and Assessment Teams in London as a formal route for such an assessment for people who sleep rough. We would like to see similar coordination for the provision of support to other homeless and ex-homeless people.

- It is only through such coordinated, multi-agency assessments – incorporating housing need, the drawing up of care plans and the exploration of other areas of support – that a truly comprehensive package of housing, care and support can finally be provided to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.

We all need to be very clear why this is the only viable option. One in four currently homeless people have had a tenancy since they were first homeless. In other words, they were homeless, then they weren't, and now they're homeless again. Housing on its own did not work. The overriding reason for these tenancy breakdowns is lack of support, professional or otherwise.

Where resettlement support succeeds, there are a number of clear good practice principles. We are actually now in a position to begin to answer confidently the perennial question 'What works?'. Crisis' ground-breaking report, *Prevention is Better than Cure*, sets out the evidence base succinctly. Successful projects are:

“commissioned by social landlords to provide support services, but it is important to clients that they are independent of the landlord.

Many clients are resistant to engaging with any agencies, particularly statutory services. People are also understandably reluctant to admit they have not been able to cope with the ordinary demands of adult life. It is important that the support agencies are not seen as being part of the 'system' and they have to be very assertive and persistent with some clients to get them to engage and to stay engaged. Simply to offer services, which is the usual statutory pattern, is not sufficient. Some clients only engage after receiving an eviction order from their landlord.

They deal with people with multiple problems and do not exclude clients because for example, they have both mental health and substance abuse problems.

They have realistic objectives and focus on practical ways of maintaining the tenancy, such as reducing arrears, money management and reducing nuisance to neighbours, rather than seeking to solve all the client's complex personal problems. Clients themselves want practical help. Offering counselling, for example, can give mixed messages on the purpose of the service and could add to pressure on people to leave their tenancy. Counselling and other therapy are best offered, where they are wanted by the client, through access to another service.

They provide floating support which offers a flexible service, not tied to particular properties or fixed amounts of input from staff. This can be intensive at times of crisis, when the tenant may be at risk of abandoning their home.

They provide multidisciplinary services without rigid professional boundaries between team members. Many clients have been through many different services and become disillusioned with them. As with services to mentally ill people in contact with the criminal justice system, the critical factor is for one agency to coordinate an integrated service.

They provide relatively short-term interventions, of between approximately three months and two years, averaging around six months. However, tenants have the option of returning to the service if further problems arise.

Where tenants are in need of long-term supported housing, for example because they have learning difficulties, this is arranged as a direct transfer, before they lose their tenancy.”

Supporting People could go a long way to encouraging the adoption of these principles both on the local and national levels.

- Crisis strongly urges the Government to ensure that this evidence base is drawn upon in any Code of Guidance as the bedrock of successful support, and that where the evidence is still limited, to invest in innovative service Research and Development.

Support, however, does not stop with the professionals. In a recent Housing Services Agency survey of people whose resettlement had failed, loneliness, isolation and a lack of choice about where to live came out as the main factors in this failure. Just as the breakdown of social networks is a major cause of homelessness (with family disputes and relationship breakdown consistently heading the list of flashpoints) so too is the continuing absence of those networks a barrier to escaping homelessness. As *Homelessness and Loneliness* asks:

“How to get back in touch with people you fell out with? How to make new friends? Homeless people need to answer these questions alongside the more prosaic ones of how to find a home, kick drugs, get a job. Doing this at the best of times is difficult. Doing this alone is often nigh impossible, and so the new flat will often be abandoned for the hostel or the street.”

As with the provision and coordination of formal support, there is an important role here for the voluntary sector in terms of befriending, mentoring and family mediation. As with the more formal support, helpers who are only tangentially linked to the ‘system’ appear to have higher levels of success with the client group – in other words, volunteers should be at the heart of any informal support service.

- With over 85 million hours being spent every week on volunteering in Britain (Crisis itself estimates that the hidden donation from volunteers at its London Open Christmas shelters effectively amounts to £580,000) there is a strong argument for greater coordination between the voluntary sector, the DETR and the Active Community Unit. Crisis would like to see such a partnership running alongside the formal support which *Supporting People* will encourage.

CHOICE AND THE MARKET

What *Quality and Choice* says:

“We wish to encourage social landlords to see themselves more as providers of a lettings service which is responsive to the needs and wishes of individuals, rather than purely as housing ‘allocators’ . . . We are keen to develop these ideas further in order to put applicants at the heart of the decision-making process.”

✓ **Crisis has been pushing the choice agenda as part of our campaign to view single homelessness ‘in the round’. We welcome the commitment to put choice at the centre of any housing system but want clarification as to how it applies to homeless people**

THE CURRENT LEGAL POSITION (as applied to homeless people)

“193(5) The local housing authority shall cease to be subject to the duty under this section [to house for the minimum period of two years] if the applicant, having been informed by the authority of the possible consequence of refusal, refuses an offer of accommodation which the authority are satisfied is suitable for him.”

THE CASE FOR REFORM

It is highly significant that the proposals relating to homelessness are part of the Green Paper’s *Choice in Social Housing* chapter. Crisis believes that the lack of choice in housing options is a major contributing factor in the UK’s inability to bring down the levels of homelessness year-on-year. It is a factor as significant as the need for more affordable housing.

- Until we learn to make the link between buildings and those who live in them, we will always be running to stand still when it comes to preventing homelessness.

Housing in Britain is founded upon one fatally flawed assumption – but an assumption which runs through all we do: that there is an insatiable demand for social housing and that access to that housing must therefore be rigorously rationed. This is the case behind *A Future Foretold*:

“An enormous amount of data about the persistence of homelessness reflecting an even more enormous amount of need and a great sum of human misery is constantly called into evidence to support the belief in never-ending shortage . . . That conviction, only ever partially supported by the facts, has governed the actions of every Government since the war.”

Those who are felt to have no option but the social housing route become subject to a whole new world of rules and regulations – a world which shifts and changes depending on where and who you are.

Many are defeated by the hurdles they have to leap over to get into even this most circumscribed of options – with the rest left in often unending queues. If they do manage to navigate the system, there is still little or no choice about where people can live, with restrictions even on how much space they can actually live in. And all because there isn’t enough housing.

The events of the last year should disabuse us all of this notion. Dozens of housing associations and local authorities have begun to demolish their housing stocks. There are 111,000 local authority and Registered Social Landlord empty properties in England – and seven empty properties for every household officially accepted as homeless. With an official survey finding that almost two in three social landlords have low demand problems, we should perhaps begin to look at the causes of ‘low-and-no-demand’.

Even some housing projections should perhaps be re-examined. One of the main reasons put forward for increasing the housing stock is that we live in a society of more fluid relationships – family breakdown means more one person households. But a study of households rehoused as a result of relationship breakdown in Newcastle (coincidentally, an area of low demand) actually found a *net reduction* in households.

Ultimately, we need to realise that we cannot build ourselves out of a cycle of low demand. Bricks and mortar are not the answer – people are. Fundamentally, rather than demolishing stock, we should be looking at how best to regenerate the neighbourhoods and the communities which live in and around low demand areas.

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal goes a long way down this route. The major investment which it requires will also let us begin the process of allowing people to make their own decisions, their own choices about where and how they want to live. Because we come back to the same starting point: we do not need to control people's access to social housing.

➤ It is time to consider how homeless people can begin to access social housing more effectively.

This point is made forcefully by *Quality and Choice*:

“In the private sector, people cannot always live exactly where they would like. They must make choices. Choice implies a trade-off between people's needs and aspirations on the one hand, and the availability of housing they can afford on the other. Those who cannot afford housing in one area may have to look elsewhere, and are free to do so. But the more opportunity people have to decide these things for themselves, the more likely they're to feel ownership of the decision and to be satisfied with the outcome . . . We believe there is scope for applying similar principles in the social rented sector.”

The allocations system is clearly failing to regulate supply and demand. The take-it-or-leave-it system of 'one offer only' forces people to make false choices and undervalues a finite resource. Instead, by opening up local housing registers and allowing for a much greater flow between local authorities, the supply of housing available to each local authority could actually be greatly increased. This is why the extension of priority need and the extension of choice are two sides of same coin – the first cannot be done without the other.

Quality and Choice suggests the alternative of a broad-banding system:

“We do not believe points-based assessment systems are an ideal way of ensuring that social housing lettings meet need in a sustainable way. Assessments take little account of people's 'felt needs' . . . The advantage of this approach [the broad-band] is that it would enable people to balance their own 'felt' need, as measured by the time they felt able to wait, against the availability of the properties they might be able to secure. In effect, waiting time would become the 'currency' that those in the social sector could use to optimise their own decisions about where to live.”

Crisis is pleased to see this recognition that 'needs' and 'wants' are not the same. As *A Future Foretold* puts it:

“If they are to envisage the new place as a home in the contemporary sense, applicants for social housing will consider how it would feel to spend time on their own or to have friends round to visit. Or might it be somewhere they could see their partner moving into at some future hopeful time? Maybe they might want to bring up children there, or perhaps work from home. They will be quietly asking themselves if they can see themselves laughing or loving here, contemplating and discussing. In short, they will be asking how does it *feel*?”

THE CASE FOR FURTHER REFORM

While endorsing a 'person-centred' approach to housing, *Quality and Choice* is less forthcoming on the nuts and bolts of reform. Specifically, the issue of whether that choice is free or limited is left unresolved:

“In areas of high demand for social housing . . . giving homeless people indefinite priority for settled accommodation may not be effective in managing the temporary housing stock . . . We therefore propose that local authorities should have discretion to determine the overall period for which homeless people in temporary accommodation are allowed choice of settled accommodation. Once this period has expired, they would be able to remain in temporary accommodation, and have the right to one single offer of suitable settled social or private sector accommodation (as under the current legislation), before the authority's duty came to an end . . . This will require the active management of choice for homeless people . . . If people knew from the outset that the period allowed for them to exercise free choice could be limited, we believe this would act as a powerful incentive for them to exercise their choice quickly.”

However, this two-tier system of choice directly contradicts the proposal (made only a few lines later) of lifting the two-year restriction on temporary accommodation. On the one hand, *Quality and Choice* would remove many of the distinctions between temporary and settled housing which are currently preserved in the legislation. The ending of the restriction substantially lowers the barrier between the two forms of housing, and could help ease the transition from the short-term homelessness duty towards access to long-term accommodation. Yet on the other hand, that barrier is replaced with an equally discretionary one based on limiting the 'choice' available to homeless people.

We have headed this section 'Choice and the Market' for one overriding reason. *Quality and Choice* itself recognises that the market for social housing is a false one, and that the rationing which is practised limits rather than expands the functioning of that market.

- Crisis therefore believes that if choice is to mean anything, it needs to be full, real, active and transparent. It should be the individual who has that choice – not the lettings agency responsible for the “active management of choice”. Fundamentally, real choice means getting more than one offer of housing at a time.

Clearly, if the social housing market is restricted then choice cannot operate in this way, especially in areas of high demand for popular housing. Free choice does not sit with a rationed market. But if ways can be found to open up the market for social housing, then the expansion of choice can realistically be accommodated.

Quality and Choice goes some way to recognising this possibility:

“Choice should be as wide as possible. Local authorities and registered social landlords should consider the scope for pooling their property and making it available to people from outside their own local area. Vacancies in areas of lower demand should be available to people in areas of higher demand, although priority might continue to be given to people who have a strong local connection with an area or a pressing need to move there . . . A choice of settled accommodation is as important for homeless people as it is for those in urgent need on the waiting list, *although choice may have to be more limited for homeless people in certain circumstances.*” [emphasis added]

Although the reference is made to priority being given to those with a strong local connection, Crisis is not blind to the implicit and welcome suggestion that 'local connection' as currently defined could cease to have any real application. We would, however, go a step further.

- We do not believe that there is any practical reason why the choices of homeless people in priority need should be restricted, given a social housing market in which “vacancies in areas of lower demand should be available to people in areas of higher demand”.

Some people have argued that even with such an open housing register, people will still not choose to live in an area of ‘low-or-no-demand’. Obviously, in areas with a crumbling infrastructure and poor local services, this can be a real concern. However, current experience demonstrates that in the urban context – where people have alternatives to these poor services – people can and do choose to live in low demand properties.

Such is the case with Oldham Council. At the Crisis Innovations Fair 2000, evidence was presented from the first few months of the Council’s *Instant Homes* programme. With void levels of up to eight per cent, Oldham launched a new ‘hard to let’ strategy. A £1500 repairs/decoration investment was made per property, followed by the creation of a new ‘front-end’ service. An ‘estate agent’ shop, a new logo (the Council’s name appearing nowhere), a website and a freephone service have all contributed to a situation in which the programme now has its own waiting list for properties which were previously assumed to be unlettable. The conclusion is stark but obvious – just as in the private market, when people are allowed to exercise free choice in social housing, location is just one among many factors on which they have to make decisions and compromise.

- Crisis believes that there are now enough best practice examples of managing social housing to satisfy *Quality and Choice’s* interest in “promoting more movement across local authority boundaries to make it easier for new applicants and existing tenants in high demand areas to move into properties in areas where demand is lower.”

THE VIABLE ALTERNATIVES

No-one is suggesting an unregulated market for social housing. What is being proposed, however – through the adoption of Delft-type models and a number of other similar projects – is a marrying of choice with the market and a universally understood indexation system. Crucially, if such a system is to work in the real world, mobility has to be factored in at some point.

The Delft system has many champions, and the arguments in favour of it are well-rehearsed. We do not propose expanding on them further here. However, there is one over-riding concern about such systems as piloted in Harborough which could mitigate against their successful take-up among many of the UK’s local authority areas. Namely, that by being locally-based, they rely on a certain amount of slack in the social housing market. Their application in areas of high demand is, as yet, unproven.

Others have attempted to circumvent this problem by developing national allocation models (Westminster Council, for example, have produced one of the most radical proposals). However, while the problem of access to housing in a high demand area is adequately addressed in such a worldview, the issue of choice is not. People are still effectively allocated housing, and the local authority still acts as a gate-keeper rather than as an advocate.

The prescriptive nature of such schemes is unable to accommodate ‘choice’ to any real extent and so once again, choice and mobility are not squared.

- Crisis strongly supports another system which effectively creates an individually-activated national housing register – the ‘homeline’ virtual voucher system.

This draws heavily on the Crisis publication, *A Future Foretold*, which outlines what such a scheme could look like:

“Virtual vouchers for homeless people would facilitate a far greater degree of choice. Once a homeless person had been accepted as being in housing need and a support plan had been drawn up . . . they would be given a virtual voucher. Using this, which in fact would be a password to many computers in council offices around the country, they could seek access to social housing wherever they wanted. They could do this online, where they might find information not only about housing but also about waiting times, local health and leisure facilities, job opportunities and so on. Staff would be available to advise them on these choices. Once they had joined the online system, they could track their own progress regularly, because the system would be transparent and not mediated through a member of staff. They could also change their preference if their circumstances changed . . .

Not only would this approach be more transparent, it would also provide far greater choice and more sensitive, person-centred and joined-up decision-making. The greatest benefit would be empowering single homeless people to take control of their own lives and their own housing choices – and that is the most rehabilitating thing of all. That may do more than any housing allocator ever could.”

The key to the possible future success of such a scheme is that it combines both elements from the other alternatives – real levels of choice coupled with a truly national system. Crucially, it would also be provided in an online format – which has been termed ‘homeline’ by its inventor, Gerard Lemos.

An internet-based allocation system would help provide the first step in raising awareness of ‘product availability’. Already, scores of estate agent websites exist in the private housing sector, giving customers a first impression of what’s available to them within set criteria, such as location, price range and number of bedrooms.

For a social housing allocation model, location and size criteria could be augmented with information on proximity to schools, hospitals and other services. By filling in such a ‘wants’ template, an individual could use the selected criteria to search the national database for suitable properties.

The online possibility to take further action would, of course, need to be incorporated in ‘homeline’ if a client-property match was found. The individual’s information could be uploaded to the relevant housing provider and viewings arranged online.

- As conceded earlier, this is not a proposal for a completely unregulated social housing market. Some form of ‘currency’ would still be required to ensure that those in *Quality and Choice*’s proposed third band do not regularly leapfrog those in the first.

This could be dealt with by an online ‘needs’ template which sits alongside the ‘wants’ template already described. Including areas such as priority need designation, need for support and need to live close to family/work, this template would create the weighting required in areas of high demand for and low supply of social housing.

When an individual wanted to live in such an area and no property was immediately available, they would be able to check their progress regularly and compare theirs against other ‘bids’ for the nearest accommodation match. Such an ‘auctioning’ process has already found a new home on the internet, as it has the advantage not only of freeing people from ‘real time’ but also (which is highly relevant in this case) of giving people a clear indication as to whether a particular bid is worthwhile.

Obviously, if conducted purely online, such a system could be open to abuse. So to eliminate negative incentives, the 'needs' and 'wants' templates would need to form the basis for structured interviews with housing officers to check the accuracy of the information.

In summary, homeline would provide a real alternative to the restrictions of the current points-based allocation system. It would allow:

- for a true national picture
 - for a real element of choice
 - for a real safety net by stratifying not only people's 'wants' but also their 'needs'
 - people to experiment with different options in different parts of the country
 - people to see how realistic their choices were and tailor them accordingly
- Crisis would advise that such a system be piloted across a number of housing providers, allowing for a mix of low and high demand areas.

ADDED VALUE

One of the unique selling points of the virtual voucher scheme is that it carries with it a number of 'democratic wins'.

Firstly, it will finally allow elected representatives – from local councillors to Members of Parliament – to concentrate on constituency issues other than the allocation of housing. Their surgeries and postbags are currently dominated by this issue, largely because people are frustrated by their own inability to exercise the level of choice they expect. The creation of such a transparent and flexible system for social housing would put an end to these circular debates and bring greater efficiency to our democratic system as well.

Secondly, it could improve the strategic functioning of local authorities. With the exception of Council Tax, Housing Benefit is the only benefit administered by local authorities. But as *Quality and Choice* itself states:

“The performance of local authorities is inconsistent . . . The Audit Commission suggests that only 56% of local authorities in England and Wales administer benefits efficiently . . . Benefit claimants should get a consistently high level of service wherever they live, and if our current delivery mechanisms cannot provide this, then we will need to look at other options.”

The logical extension of this sentiment – coupled with the imminent creation of a national rent officers agency and the welcome proposal for a single national benefits claim form – is the creation of a national administration system for Housing Benefit alongside a national housing register.

- Crisis believes that it would be sensible to square this circle. After all, *Quality and Choice* talks of local authorities “shedding their responsibility for day-to-day management of social housing”. If they were also to shed their responsibility for administering Housing Benefit as well, local authorities would be much more able to fulfil their strategic role and coordinate local activity.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

What *Quality and Choice* says:

“We are keen to see local authorities taking a more strategic approach to tackling the causes of homelessness and preventing its recurrence, in partnership with the voluntary sector and other bodies who have a role to play . . . We therefore propose to:

- Require local authorities corporately to carry out an audit of all forms of homelessness and the provisions available for meeting that need
- Consult locally on their findings, indicating the steps which they propose to deal with any problems
- Incorporate their findings and proposed actions in their housing strategy.

In areas where homelessness is a widespread problem, we would encourage local authorities to develop a multi-agency approach to tackle homelessness as part of their overall housing strategy. In particular, it would be important for housing authorities to consult with social services authorities.”

✓ **Crisis is a strong advocate of coordinated, multi-agency local responses to homelessness and therefore welcomes these proposals. We would, however, like to see more pressure brought to bear on local authorities to set up such strategic teams**

THE CASE FOR REFORM

The proposed requirement to be placed on local authorities corporately to audit need and service provision is to be strongly welcomed. Just as local authorities cannot tackle homelessness without involving other agencies, so too with departments within local authorities. If *Quality and Choice* demonstrates anything it is that homelessness can only be tackled ‘holistically’, and so any strategic function must rest not with, for example, the housing department but with the Chief Executive’s office.

- However, we would like to see the corporate requirement extend to the solutions, rather than simply the identification of the scale of the problem. In this regard, we would urge an adoption of the legislative proposals for Scotland:

“We recommend that local authorities should be placed under a statutory duty to produce strategies for preventing and tackling homelessness . . . Such a duty should be placed on the local authority corporately. It should not be seen as the responsibility of the housing department alone.”

THE CASE FOR FURTHER REFORM

Local authorities are the only players on the local level with the infrastructures, resources and leverage to encourage others to work together to tackle homelessness. Crisis has long recognised this fact, with proposals for the creation of some form of local strategic partnerships being promoted in *Leaving Homelessness Behind*:

“At the core of the strategy would be local groups called HEATs (Homelessness and Exclusion Action Teams). These would be led by local authorities, and made up from agencies with a key role in delivering a joined-up strategy. HEATs could include representatives from housing, social services, and the voluntary sector as well as mental health and primary care services.

Drawing on the partnerships already forged with the criminal justice system through Drug Action Teams and community safety partnerships, chief/deputy constables should also sit on HEATs, and it may be advisable for representatives from the probation and prison services to have places at the table.

Each HEAT would be responsible for auditing local services and needs, as well as producing a target-led strategic plan for assessing people's needs and offering appropriate housing or support."

In the same way that these local level partnerships will help to eliminate unnecessary duplication, they can also create economies of scale, which can only help the joint commissioning and purchasing of services. However, this could be taken one step further – by creating regional strategic teams based in the Regional Development Agency. In some parts of the country, this may be felt to be preferable, especially if local audits show that the problem is significant at a regional rather than district level.

As is readily conceded, such a local partnership structure is not new. Reading across from existing Government initiatives, there is ample evidence for the success of such structures. For instance, the Drug Action Teams (DATs) which were set up under the last Government have proved to be highly effective at delivering targeted drug treatment and prevention services at the local level.

There are over 100 DATs around the country, and they are made up of top-level representatives from police, education, health and local authorities, including housing and social services departments. In turn, these strategic bodies are supported by advisory issue- or locality-based Drug Reference Groups, representing the voluntary sector, community groups and academics.

Similarly, Sure Start, the Government's initiative for the Under Fives, has a national framework with programmes delivered through local partnerships. At central government level the initiative is run by an inter-departmental committee overseeing a unit based in the DfEE.

- Crisis would therefore like to see the Government do more than just "encourage local authorities to develop a multi-agency approach". The effectiveness of such approaches – whether on the local or regional level – is already proven: such multi-agency models are the best practice route for delivering coordinated responses to homelessness at the local level and we would want to see such approaches incorporated into the general requirement to develop a strategy.

Ultimately, we would also expect the Government to adopt the same approach across Whitehall. For the first time, we have a major housing document which doesn't focus exclusively on bricks and mortar and often operates outside the DETR's remit. A key test, then, is how far it dovetails with other cross-departmental initiatives.

Clearly, the best opportunity for joined-up solutions lies in marrying *Quality and Choice* with the work on the forthcoming Rural and Urban White Papers and the implementation of the *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*. In particular, there are a number of tensions around the issue of sustainable communities. The national strategy states that "local authorities and registered social landlords should take into account the need to create sustainable communities in forming their housing lettings policies". This could be taken to mean that exclusions, suspensions and bans are valid tools for neighbourhood renewal. *Quality and Choice*, on the other hand, rules out such social engineering.

- Crisis believes that the best chance for cracking homelessness lies in the adoption of a seamless strategy for our built environments. National leadership, set alongside local delivery, could eventually see us consigning homelessness to the last century.

RELEVANT CRISIS PUBLICATIONS

- ❶ Randall G. and Brown S. *Prevention is Better than Cure*. Crisis, 1999.
Recently described by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as “the key study on the prevention of homelessness”, this is the first in Crisis’ New Solutions series. It examines the causes of homelessness, sets out the evidence base and recommends a programme of measures aimed at reducing the risk of vulnerable people ending up on the streets.
- ❷ Lemos G. *A Future Foretold – New Approaches to Meeting the Long-Term Needs of Single Homeless People*. Crisis, 1999.
This highly influential book takes as its starting point the fact that homelessness is a symptom of a multitude of life problems rather than simply being due to not having somewhere to live. As such, for many people, homelessness is ‘a future foretold’ – it is predictable and therefore preventable.
- ❸ Baker O. *Leaving Homelessness Behind – New Solutions for a New Age*. Crisis, 1999.
This pamphlet sets out Crisis’ key proposals to make homelessness a thing of the past. Through empowerment, choice and social reintegration, people can at last begin to climb out of homelessness. Link this with a reinvigorated and coordinated strategic support system, and we could end up leaving homelessness behind in the last century.
- ❹ Ballintyne S. *Unsafe Streets – Street Homelessness and Crime*. IPPR, 1999.
Street homelessness and crime sit at the crossroads of two major strands of public policy – reducing social exclusion and tackling crime and disorder. And yet remarkably little is known about these connections. This report fills a gap in official victim surveys by mapping the scale of victimisation experienced by rough sleepers and the offences they commit. The recommendations contained in this report have already been taken up in their entirety by at least one major police force.
- ❺ Lemos G. *Homelessness and Loneliness – The Want of Conviviality*. Crisis, 2000.
Homelessness is about many things – but it is isolation, loneliness and despair which perhaps leave the most damaging legacy. This report seeks to explore this overlooked area and proposes new ways to rebuild people’s social networks through mentoring, befriending and family mediation. Ultimately, it looks towards the establishment of ‘the convivial life’ as the key to any successful reintegration into society.
- ❻ Gorton S. *Homeless Young Women and Pregnancy – Pregnancy in Hostels for Single Homeless People*. Health Action for Homeless People/Crisis, 2000.
This report – with its shocking ‘one in four’ figure for pregnancies within the hostel system – directly challenges the way homelessness organisations and health promotion agencies offer support to homeless pregnant young women. Most pressingly, it calls for a more holistic approach, where services are geared around the person rather than legislative distinctions.