Policy and planning for homeless people in Scotland

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Preface: the enquiry

The Scottish Executive established its Homelessness Task Force in August 1999, with the following brief:

> "To review the causes and nature of homelessness in Scotland; to examine current practice in dealing with cases of homelessness; and to make recommendation on how homelessness in Scotland can best be prevented and, where it does occur, tackled effectively."

In December 1999 the Task Force undertook a review of the strategies which local authorities in Scotland had prepared to deal with homelessness. 30 Scottish local authorities, out of 32, replied: the exceptions were Orkney and Shetland. The information which came in response to this review, mainly dated between February and April 2000, is very disparate, and it did not lend itself to a systematic analysis. Shelter (Scotland) asked if it would be possible to view the responses and process them further, and in June 2000 I was given access to the material on that basis. I received supplementary material from three local authorities: Dundee, North Lanarkshire and Fife.

Thanks are due to Gavin Corbett, and to Kenny Simpson of COSLA for comments.

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1. The problems of homelessness

Homelessness is a complex problem; it affects people in a wide range of different circumstances, and generalisations can be difficult. At root, though, there are only three main reasons for homelessness. The first is a shortage of decent housing. If there are more people seeking accommodation than there are places to house them, some people will be homeless. Housing is mainly allocated through the market. People on higher incomes are generally able to pay more for housing, which means that the people who are least well situated are also those who are poorest. When there is not enough housing, people are forced to manage as best they can. Some people will have to live in unsatisfactory housing (including housing which is sub-tolerable or in serious disrepair; marginal housing, like mobile homes; and insecure housing, like hotel accommodation). Others will have nowhere to live. They will have to live with relatives or friends if they can, or they become roofless.

The second reason for homelessness is not so much a shortage of housing, as a lack of entitlement to the housing which is there. Part of entitlement relates to people's financial circumstances. Poverty is central to the experience of homeless people: Glasgow's housing plan comments that "the main causes of homelessness in Glasgow relate to poverty". On one hand, poverty helps to bring about conditions which lead people to become homeless - like debt and family breakdown. On the other, some of the conditions in which people become homeless - like unemployment and mental illness - are also conditions in which people are likely to be poor. Poverty is central, though, not because it lurks in the background, but because ultimately whether or not a person is homeless depends on resources. People do not become homeless just because they are unemployed or divorced; they become vulnerable to homelessness if they are unemployed or divorced and do not have the money to pay for alternatives.

Entitlement does not only depend on financial circumstances, however. Part relates to people's social standing: some private rented places are not available to tenants receiving Housing Benefit, not because the the money would not be available, but because landlords are making a decision about what kind of tenant they want.

If someone lacks the financial capacity to get housing in the private sector, their position comes to depend on whether social housing is available to them. The standards which are applied by local authorities differ, necessarily, because their ability to respond is different. Clackmannanshire's housing stock has been reduced by sales to just over 6,600. It might be reasonable on this basis to expect just over 300 vacancies a year - but they receive more than 500 applications each year from homeless people. If the Council was to accept the same proportion of homeless applicants as, for example, Edinburgh or Falkirk do, they could not

cope. Currently the local authority rehouses only a quarter of these applicants, one of the lowest figures in Scotland. People's entitlement to local authority housing depend on the conditions in the locality where they have become homeless.

The response of local authorities is also conditioned by the policy of councils towards certain groups. When local authority housing was built in Scotland, it was mainly intended for families; most of it (typically 75-80%) has two or three bedrooms. In recent years, many applicants, and most of those on housing lists for long periods, have tended to be single people without children. In many cases in Scotland, single people are not being allowed to use the accommodation which exists.

The third reason for homelessness is the most controversial: it is that some people are liable to homelessness, when others are not. Poor people are obviously liable to be homeless, because of the lack of alternatives; homelessness can be seen as an outcome of social dislocation, though this must be subject to the reservation that social dislocation does not lead to homelessness when people's resources are adequate.

Psychiatric patients, people with drug and alcohol problems, ex-prisoners and young people with family problems are more likely than others to become homeless, and they are treated as being especially vulnerable when it happens. These are important issues, but there has been a tendency to exaggerate them. The reason for the current emphasis on these problems is that the law only protects certain classes of homeless people if they are considered 'vulnerable', and proof of vulnerability is central to access to housing. (The same arguments were used about homeless families in the early 1970s, when the only hope most had was the intervention of Social Work departments.[1] Most of the issues surrounding vulnerability in families disappeared when people with children were given priority in the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. It is not less true that families who are homeless are poor or under stress, but we have stopped claiming that their poverty and stress makes them somehow different from everyone else.) A large part of the problems, then, relate to lack of entitlement rather than the exceptional circumstances of homeless people. At the same time, some recognition of further problems is necessary if adequate provision is to be made.

The balance between the three elements of homelessness has changed over time. In the 1960s, when Shelter was formed, the main reason for homelessness was unquestionably the shortage of housing. If Shelter's campaigns tended to emphasise the rights of homeless people, it was because access to council housing was the best option for homeless people. In recent years, housing shortages have been more localised, and homeless families have gained more effective access to social housing. The character of the problem has changed. Even if there is not always a shortage of family housing, there is a serious shortage of affordable accommodation for single people on low incomes.

This has led to the growth in the numbers of single people who become homeless, and that in turn has emphasised their lack of entitlement.

2. Developing strategies for homelessness

The academic literature on planning relies heavily on a 'rational' model. Rational decision-making follows a process which allows the examination of each stage in a policy, and feedback from results into further decision making. The model is stated differently in different places, but the basic stages are as follows:

1. *Evaluation of the environment.* Decisions have to be taken in the light of existing situations.
2. *The identification of aims and objectives.* Aims and values have to be identified and established as criteria by which decisions can subsequently be evaluated.
3. *Consideration of the alternative methods which are available.* This is a question of what is possible.
4. *Examination of the consequences.* The possible consequences are judged against the aims and objectives in order to decide their likely effectiveness.
5. *Selection of methods.* The selection of particular methods of working is guided by consideration of efficiency and practical constraints.
6. *Implementation.*
7. *Re-evaluation.* The consequences of policy are monitored, and fed back into a re-assessment of the environment - at which point the process begins again.[2]

This model has been heavily criticised.[3] The first problem is that it is likely to gloss over problems; there are conflicts in values and intentions, and conflicts relating to administrative method, have to be negotiated and compromises arrived at. Second, it demands more of policy-makers than may be practical or feasible; the examination of alternative approaches and their consequences is time-consuming, expensive and often speculative. Third, it ignores the practical difficulties of implementation. In the real world, the process of working with problems has a way of changing what is happening. Policy is not just made in policy documents, but by people working in offices trying to interpret a fog of rules and guidelines.

      The main argument for the rational model is a simple one: it is better than the alternatives. It helps to make policy explicit, it helps policy-makers set standards by which their actions can be judged, and it puts the onus on officers to explain why things have had to be done differently.

      The approach has become broadly familiar to local government officers in recent years. Local government in Scotland has been producing formal planning documents for many years now - the Housing Plan was one of the first models, corporate plans are widely used, and the development of community care plans

has had a large effect on practice. Many of the local authorities, even if they did not have a homelessness strategy, had adopted a similar approach in some of the related documents sent to the Homeless Review.

At the most basic level, a strategy document needs to have three elements. It needs to have a statement of aims. Most homeless strategies will identify the basic aim of policy as meeting the needs of homeless people, but there may be other, collateral aims - such as managing the housing stock and promoting social inclusion. These aims have to be 'operationalised', or translated into practical terms: services need to have not only aims, but objectives and goals to reach.

The second element is a consideration of methods: what is being done to meet the aims now, and what else needs to be done. Local authorities are required by law to provide or secure the provision of alternative accommodation for homeless people. The allocation of local authority housing is often central, though securing provision also calls for consideration of the contribution of independent providers. There are other issues to consider, including prevention, advice systems and aftercare.

Third, there has to be an action plan. There are two parts to this: an implementation strategy, where the local authority says what is going to be done, when and by whom, and the setting of standards by which performance can be assessed, which implies the adoption of targets and indicators. It is possible to have an action plan without a strategy - in the replies to the review of homelessness, Falkirk had one - but a strategy without an action plan is deficient.

Some of the homeless strategies currently adopted in Scotland already meet these basic criteria - amongst others, they include the policies adapted in East Lothian, Clackmannanshire and Angus, and the draft policies in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Some authorities had constructed plans for aspects of the issues: Dundee and Perth and Kinross had single homeless strategies. Most authorities, however, did not have a strategic document, and a handful were not able to offer anything more than the minimum indicators they are required to produce for audit.

3. The aims of policy

The legislation

One of the central aims of policy is to implement the law. Because the law is described in terms of needs, it overlaps with a more general consideration of need, though the law is rather more narrowly defined. The main law on homelessness is contained in part 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. People are homeless either if they have no accommodation, or if there is nowhere where people can live together with those who normally live with them as members of their family. People are threatened with homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within 28 days.

What happens depends on whether or not the applicant is considered to be in 'priority need'. Homeless people have a priority need for accommodation if

- there are children, or a woman is pregnant
- there has been a disaster, like fire or flood
- a person is specially vulnerable through age, disability, illness etc.

People who have a priority need are entitled to accommodation. If their homelessness is 'intentional', the local authority must ensure that temporary accommodation is available. If the homelessness is unintentional, the local authority must ensure that permanent accommodation is available: the Homelessness Task Force has argued here for strengthening the legislation to clarify that the accommodation should be both adequate and secure.[4] People who do not have a priority need, whether or not their homelessness is intentional, are entitled to advice and assistance, but not to accommodation.

Whatever the cause of homelessness, then, there are duties to the homeless person; they include people not in priority need, and people who are intentionally homeless. At the other end of the scale, the rights of people who are accepted as homeless, and who meet all the criteria for rehousing, are limited: local authorities do not have to provide housing, but only to ensure that some is available.

The other main law is the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, which states:
"a local authority shall provide accommodation for any child who, residing or having been found within their area, appears to them to require such provision because ... the person who has been caring for him is prevented whether or not permanently and for whatever reason from providing him with suitable accommodation or care."

One response saw this as potentially in 'conflict' with the Housing Act. There is an additional duty, but that is not the same thing as a no conflict: an authority which respects this law will not be failing to respect the conditions of the Housing

Act. This section imposes an unequivocal, unqualified residual duty to provide accommodation. It effectively restores the position which applied to all homeless families after the National Assistance Act 1948.[5] The Children Act was not often mentioned in the review, and most councils confined their comments to the situation of children over 16; Falkirk was the only council which acknowledged a clear general duty under the Act.

Needs

The numbers of households who applied as homeless in Scotland rose from 25,000 in 1987-88 to 43,100 in 1997-98.[6] The increase in figures disguises some important trends. First, the variation between local authorities is very wide - certainly sufficiently wide to raise questions about the pattern of recording and reporting. One might reasonably expect differences in the levels of homelessness in different areas: some parts of Scotland are relatively depopulated, while others are experiencing considerable pressure on housing. The numbers of homeless households vary from 0.4% in East Renfrewshire to 2.3% in Stirling and 3.9% in Glasgow (though the Glasgow figure includes hostel residents, which is a different basis for the calculation). What, though, is one to make of the differences in the assessments of homeless people by local authorities? The numbers of people who are classed as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need varies from 11% in Clackmannanshire to 56% in Inverclyde. 51% of the applicants in East Lothian are assessed as not being homeless, or the housing department loses contact; the figure for West Lothian is 5%. This cannot be due solely to differences in the basic conditions authorities face; it must reflect differences in their response.

Second, proportion of single people who are presenting themselves as homeless has risen steeply, and the Scottish average is 60% of homeless applications[7]. Glasgow has been unusual in seeking to ensure that homeless single people have some kind of accommodation, despite having no priority in law, and Glasgow accounts for most of the cases in Scotland where people who are not in priority need have accommodation secured by the local authority.

Third, over a third of homeless people are being defined as priority need on the grounds of vulnerability. There are some reasons to question the use of the idea of "vulnerability", because it does not necessarily imply any need for special support, but what remains true is that each of the categories of vulnerable people present special problems. The main issues are as follows:

Young people This is one of the largest categories of 'vulnerable' people. Young people are likely to be on low incomes, and consequently they are unable to command resources in housing. Young people aged 16-17 are routinely treated as vulnerable by reason of their age (and even if they were not, they would clearly be entitled to rehousing under the Children Act):

2000 applicants were accepted under this category in 1997/8. There have been particular concerns about young people leaving care, an area in which Social Work Departments have residual responsibilities: being in care implies a break in family ties, and housing is an major part of moving on to independent living.

For the purposes of housing applications, however, 'young people' are defined as being aged 18-25. The main reason for the definition is related to benefit entitlement: the benefits reviews of the 1980s argued that independent single householders under the age of 26 were the exception, and replaced the previous distinction between benefits for 'householders' and 'non-householders' with a distinction based on age. The rules do not preclude young people from receiving benefits for housing, but there is an assumption that people aged 25 and under will continue to live with parents or others. That assumption has come to look increasingly questionable over time, and over a quarter of all homeless applications come from single people under the age of 26.[8]

Older people This is a smaller number of people, though with 900 cases accepted a year in Scotland it is as large as the category of people defined as vulnerable on the basis of mental illness or handicap. The principle that older people should be considered vulnerable is relatively uncontroversial, though the same effect could be achieved without referring to vulnerability at all.

Physical disability This accounts for 600 accepted cases a year in Scotland. Physical disability leads to low income, and low income reduces housing choices.

Relationship breakdown Relationship breakdown has long been a major contributing factor to homelessness: it accounts for a third of all cases accepted as homeless in Scotland. More than half of the applicants - 3,600 homeless people - give violence as the reason[9]. Domestic violence remains endemic in Scotland, and it is well established in guidance that the risk of domestic violence is sufficient to render someone homeless. A number of authorities have developed multi-agency approaches to domestic violence: Edinburgh's is an example.

Psychiatric patients In 1997/8, 900 people were accepted as homeless on the basis of mental illness or handicap. (400 more were classed as not homeless, or contact was lost.) A small number of patients are discharged from institutions. In principle, all of them have care plans, but in practice there are some who fall through the net - they move away from the reach of services, their care plan fails, or the family support on which they

depend is removed. (In a few cases, too, the care planning process is aborted, or fails to take housing circumstances into account.)[10] Research in Edinburgh in the 1960s found that none of the mentally ill homeless people they identified was receiving psychiatric care. When the same research was repeated in on the street 1995 found that most of the people interviewed people who were on the street. The researchers identified 12 people who were schizophrenic; 8 of them were receiving psychiatric care. When similar work was undertaken in the 1990s, most of them were.[11]

Discharge from prison Glasgow's detailed study of hostel residents finds that ex-prisoners are prominent among homeless people. Glasgow has particular problems coping with discharge - the Council reckons that between seven and eight thousand prisoners a year are discharged in its catchment area. They are seeking to place a housing support worker in Barlinnie.

Refugees Provision for asylum seekers has achieved a certain prominence in the news media, and some authorities made specific mention of the issue. The regulations and terms under which asylum seekers are accepted are nominally distinct - the legislation for homeless persons still applies, but there are additional rules applied by the immigration authorities.

The issues of 'vulnerability' have a noticeable overlap with another issue, that of social exclusion. Homelessness may be an major aspect of exclusion in its own right, but equally people who are excluded from normal society - examples include people with mental illnesses, drug or alcohol problems, or offenders - are likely to become homeless.[12] Social inclusion has become a key priority in many aspects of Scottish policy[13], and responding to some of the difficult aspects of homelessness is a key element in that policy.

Housing management

Although the role of local authorities has shifted away from direct provision towards planning and enabling, the allocation and management of the stock remains central to the role and function of many housing departments. Apart from the needs of homeless people, they have to consider the needs of other groups in unsatisfactory housing, in competition for scarce resources; the needs of the communities where people will live; and the constraints of the stock.

The claims of competing groups There are many, including some housing officers, who would take the view that homelessness overrides all other kinds of housing need, but the point is not self-evident. Competing groups include people living in insanitary or sub-tolerable conditions, people with severe medical needs, and people with needs for support and community

care. The law does not give homeless people an absolute priority; it proposes, rather, a 'reasonable preference'. The issue becomes difficult when the proportion of allocations to homeless people becomes so large that it excludes others in need - or when, as has happened, the numbers of homeless people exceed the capacity of the local authority to house them, requiring choices to be made between different categories of homeless people.

The needs of communities Part of the aims of housing management has been a desire to establish and maintain settled communities. There are occasions when allocations can threaten the balance of a community. Councils in Dundee and Renfrewshire both drew attention to the particular problems of people with anti-social behaviour - for example, people who had been dealing drugs. Clackmannanshire and the Borders pointed to the special problem of homeless sex offenders. Both these issues are best dealt with through special initiatives, co-ordination and liaison with partner agencies (including the police), and mechanisms of support and control. The examples point, though, to the difficulty to treating the rights of homeless people without considering other issues.

The management of the housing stock Several local authorities, including East Dunbarton, South Ayrshire and the Borders, pointed to the problems of people with previous rent arrears. In some cases, people become homeless because of arrears; in others, they may have a record of arrears prior to application. This has to be expected: homelessness is closely linked with poverty. (People with money have other options, and do not have to be homeless.) South Ayrshire Council commented in its return that homeless people were not receiving the housing benefit they were entitled to, and they have put procedures in place to try to improve takeup.

This is one of the main areas in which there is scope to strengthen the rights of homeless people. Rent arrears are not evidence of voluntary homelessness; they are evidence of poverty. Local authorities have a duty to try to recover money, and many officers feel that sanctions against non-payers are essential. People who have been evicted for arrears have not been 'let off'; they have lost their home, and they remain fully liable for the debt in the future. There is no strong argument for penalising them further.

4. Methods

The methods by which homelessness can be responded to are complex. The wide range of problems which are being dealt with, and the difficult circumstances which are being addressed, have led to a bewildering array of initiatives, often small-scale and based on partnerships between a range of agencies.

Edinburgh used a classificatory scheme which offers a useful start to thinking about methods. They distinguish three levels of support:

Level 1 is concerned with outreach and reception - initial contacts with homeless people.

Level 2 is concerned with temporary and mid-range responses, including move-on accommodation and provision for medium stay.

Level 3 is concerned with independent living, including permanent housing.

This helps to clarify the tasks to be undertaken and to help a systematic review of action. Its main limitation is that it does not distinguish preventive work from the response to individual cases of homelessness. I propose, then, to add a preliminary stage, which is preventive action.

Preventive action

The most basic form of prevention which can be undertaken is to ensure that people have access to decent secure housing at a price they can afford. There is a limit to what any local authority can do about this, but they are still able to make a substantial direct contribution in two respects: the provision of housing, and the provision of finance for housing, in the form of benefit.

One of the principal sources of homelessness is the situation of single homeless people, and the provision of accommodation for single people has to be a priority for many local authorities. Many social housing providers continue to take the view, though, that their housing is not for single people. An example in the Homelessness Task Force papers is given of one authority where "52% of their waiting list wants a 2 apartment house, but this type of accommodation represents only 9% of their stock, and applicants to each property ratio of 8:1." This uses 'want' in the rather specialised sense of lacking such accommodation, rather than having any particular desire to have only this kind of accommodation. Single people do not necessarily want or need "accommodation for single people"; they need accommodation. In the private rented sector, people often rent rooms, rather than whole properties. The calculations differ from one authority to the next, but the council in the example has a large enough housing

stock to allow some flexibility. If some of their three bedroom houses were used for single sharers, it would be possible to house more than half the single people on the housing list in about one-sixth of one year's lettings. It would not clear the housing list altogether - not everyone wants to live in a shared house - but it would take a very large bite out of it. It would have a significant impact on access to housing and homelessness. Single sharers schemes desrve further investigation by local authorities, and there would be a case for funded pilot schemes to encourage their development.

The availability of social security benefits is fundamental to the income of many applicants, and so to their housing options. Several local authorities recognised the place of Housing Benefit the prevention of arrears, and have tried to gear advice and assistance to ensuring full takeup. It is not only Housing Benefit which matters: all forms of money advice are potentially relevant. It is more than 25 years since the first welfare rights office was started in a housing department, but the division of labour in local authorities means that welfare rights tends to fall outside their remit. Edinburgh's initiative of one-stop advice centre, covering all the principal areas, is an example of the kind of provision which can help to make a difference.

Level 1: Outreach and reception

Information and advice. At the individual level, the main method of preventing homelessness is to ensure that people who are threatened with homelessness do not become homeless. Fife Council comments that "a great number of people who experience homelessness also experience other forms of crisis, and often at the same time"[14]. People who are homeless often have financial problems - which is why they cannot deal with their housing problems without help. Often there are associated domestic crises. Examples are the provision of advice about benefit entitlements, negotiation with private landlords, and housing advice. Beyond housing advice, there may also be the provision of housing aid services, which offer not only advice but personal support and advocacy. There is a particular advantage in offering independent services, because people who are in debt may be reluctant to seek help from, or make a full disclosure to, a service which may have its own interests in the case. East Lothian offers, in conjunction with other services,
- mediation
- a rent deposit guarantee scheme
- a mortgage rescue scheme
- legal advice
- financial and monetary advice
- direct negotiations with landlords or lenders, and
- a 'home club' to help people secure accommodation.

The Homelessness Task Force argues that the current duty to give advice and assistance offers too little to homeless people without priority, and proposes a new duty to provide advice to people who are at risk of homelessness, with specifications about the level of advice and assistance which should be provided.

Outreach. The principle of outreach is based on the experience of homelessness not as an event, but a process. People whose house burns down do not need outreach; they need a direct response, and the provision of accommodation. For many people, and particularly for some single homeless people, homelessness is a persistent, constantly changing problem. It is relatively unusual to sleep rough every night; much more typical is that people spend a night in a hostel, a night with friends, a night on the street, another night in a hostel, and so forth. The various initiatives intended to deal with Rough Sleepers are often focused around the hostels, because this is often the most effective way of intercepting homeless people in practice. RSI schemes of this type are reported in Dundee, Stirling, North Lanarkshire and Moray. South Lanarkshire has a rural outreach project.

The outreach services in Glasgow and Edinburgh go further. Edinburgh's outreach team is also committed to "services which engage and work with homeless people where they are" - streetwork with young people, people with drink and drugs problems and people with mental health problems. In Glasgow streetwork is undertaken by several voluntary organisations.

Reception. A number of authorities emphasised very basic issues - ensuring that offices are accessible, ensuring that there is some cover outside normal office hours, interviewing people in private, not dismissing cases at reception, making sure staff have guidance manuals and training. The fact that such points have to be mentioned at all suggests that there are times when the opposite may have been true. Some local authorities emphasised the need to use same sex interviewers and providing interpreters.

Some authorities mentioned joint initiatives to introduce 'one-stop shops' for advice and help. Edinburgh is in the process of establishing an 'access point', bringing together housing, resettlement, social work and primary health facilities in the same place.

Level 2: Mid-range responses

Typically local authorities have provided a limited amount of hostel accommodation, with staffed support; this provision was made for about a quarter of everyone accepted as homeless. About a quarter more went into Bed and Breakfast accommodation. This has been one of the most notorious consequences of the legislation - notorious because it is unsatisfactory as housing and very, very expensive. The reasons for using B & B varied: some authorities had no choice, but others opted for B & B as a deterrent and a way of delaying rehousing rather than giving preference to homeless people. Six councils did not use Bed and Breakfast accommodation at all in 1998/9, and five more used it in only a handful of cases: by contrast, ten used B and B for hundreds of homeless people. The heaviest use was made in Glasgow, Fife and Edinburgh, the three authorities with the largest absolute numbers of homeless people in Scotland. 12 councils account for 91% of the use of B & B. Fife plans to phase out its use.

Several local authorities have sought to provide furnished accommodation, the largest use being in Glasgow. This is not necessarily temporary or mid-range housing, though in its nature it caters for a less settled population. It offers flexibility to the local authorities in their role as landlords.

Some of the mid-range provision, and particularly that provided by the voluntary sector, is aimed at young people. Different combinations of accommodation and support are made through a wide range of different initiatives. Examples include

- Foyers, which provide accommodation with support for young people as a stepping stone to independent living; examples were mentioned in Cumbernauld and Kirkcaldy
- Paisley Threads, a project that supports young people into housing, including advice, befriending and advocacy; or
- Broad Horizons, a scheme in Clackmannanshire to provide accommodation with support for young people aged 16-20.

This can be seen as a recognition of the special vulnerability and need for support - though it probably also reflects the availability of funds for this age group.

By contrast, mid-range initiatives for other groups are mentioned more rarely. Examples are

- The Shelter Families Project in South Lanarkshire, aimed at the resettlement of families;
- provision in Perth by Rowan Alba, for women with mental health problems;
- the Chanonry Centre in Moray, which provides eight beds for homeless men with alcohol-related problems.

Glasgow's voluntary sector is more developed in this field. Even there, though, the council's presentation of good practice dpends on only a handful of voluntary

organisations - the City Mission, the Simon Community, the Wayside Centre, the Salvation Army, Turning Point, Glasgow Association for Mental Health and Glasgow Council for Single Homeless - which cope with a wide variety of disparate problems, through a range of projects.

Level 3: Independent living

By subtracting the numbers housed in temporary accommodation from those housed altogether, it appears that more than 40% of homeless people are found permanent accommodation. About a quarter of these are return to their previous accommodation, which leaves nearly a third who are housed directly into permanent accommodation. In one sense, this is not ideal - moving house is always stressful and difficult, and rehousing into unfurnished accommodation leaves the homeless person with a short period of difficulty without power, furniture, bedding or household equipment. On the other hand, it is often the best option in practice, offering immediate security and leading to minimum disruption over a longer period of time. East Lothian and East Dunbartonshire both apply a policy called 'homeless at home' which means that they negotiate to use existing accommodation temporarily, so as to minimise disruption to homeless people.

The issue of the quality of lets is not addressed in the documentation. Most local authorities have limited supplies of accommodation (there are surpluses in some locations, but they are unusual). The properties which are likely to be vacant are also the properties which are most difficult to let: these properties become vacant more often than others, and stand empty for longer. Social landlords have a financial duty, and a moral one, to make the best use of their houses; the houses have to be let to someone. Homeless people have no choice, which is why they are homeless; if they are offered accommodation, the local authority has met its obligations to them. This has tended to exacerbate the disadvantage and exclusion of homeless people. It is unrealistic, however, to argue that homeless people should only be offered better quality accommodation; if that argument was taken to its conclusion, no-one would ever have lower-quality housing. There is an argument to say, though, that accommodation which is unsuitable for some people may well be suitable for others - high-rise accommodation is the classic example, largely unsatisfactory for families with children but potentially popular for single adults. The issue has to be reviewed strategically, in a local context, to see how the best use can be made of the stock for the benefit of the full range of applicants.

5. Planning implementation

Several local authorities control the implementation of policy through 'homelessness policies': examples were submitted by Fife, East Ayrshire, Angus, East Lothian, Borders and Highland. Policy is a generic term, but most usually it outlines explicitly the rules by which homeless people will be treated. This helps to ensure that policy is implemented consistently and fairly; the existence of guidance in writing helps officers, applicants and advisers to understand what the criteria are and how they will be dealt with.

Homelessness policies cover, in some detail, many of the issues which are covered in action plans, and more; they offer detailed guidance to officers on each stage of the process of dealing with homeless people. Most local authorities only refer to a selection of issues: the fullest coverage is given by East Lothian (which has the highest rate of homelessness for its population in Scotland) and Angus. The main elements of homelessness policies are:

- *aims and principles* This usually consists of a general statement of principle, though it also offers the opportunity to tie the specific aims of a service to strategic objectives. Fife, for example, lays out six main aims, including the reduction of inequality and social exclusion, the adoption of good practice, widening the opportunities of homeless people, sensitivity to individual and community needs, providing a reliable and efficient service and raising awareness about homelessness. Some authorities also incorporate equal opportunities statements.
- *access.* The first stage of reception is to ensure that people can make contact: the Hamish Allen Centre in Glasgow is permanently open; East Lothian undertakes to provide its service "24 hours a day, 365 days a year". Borders comments, in bold type, that "applicants must never be 'screened' or 'filtered out' by reception staff at public counters.
- *interviews.* There are several issues about interviews - that they should be done in private, that interpreters should be available, that women should have the opportunity to talk about domestic violence, and so forth.
- *assessments relevant to the implementation of the legislation.* The practice of most authorities is dominated by the legislation, often to the exclusion of other considerations. The legislation provides the basis for the assessment of priority need, and guidance is given on such issues as intentionality and the establishment of a local connection.
- *administration of applications* There are rules applying to the determination of decisions, including investigation and inquiries, speed and internal review, and formal notification (which is required by law). Some

authorities specified the detail of staff training on these issues; the training can be fairly legalistic.

- *advice and assistance* The minimum requirement made by the law is that homeless people should receive advice and assistance, and some local authorities have sought to provide basic information in a pack, including e.g. names and contact numbers, so that every member of staff will be able to provide the information directly.

- *temporary accommodation* Councils specify not only the conditions under which temporary accommodation will be provided, and where, but charging arrangements, the suitability of the accommodation for the homeless household and procedures for moving people on. The law also provides for protection of property, and there may be rules applying to this. East Lothian outlines standards for the acceptability of bed and breakfast accommodation, covering physical condition, amenities and access during the day.

- *the availability of permanent accommodation* In general a desire is expressed to move to permanent housing as soon as possible. Fife allows for one (and only one) 'fair' offer of housing, based on the household's needs in terms of house size, educational and health requirements, family support and 'other reasons', such as distance from the home area and vulnerability to violence.

- *support and aftercare* Support and aftercare is often the responsibility of other agencies, and because the homelessness policies are directed to housing offices, this is not much considered. East Ayrshire's provisions note that while people are in temporary accommodation, they will be visited by housing staff, but that liaison with other bodies is necessary to ensure they receive continuing support, and the subsequently formal agreements for support are needed as well as permanent housing.

- *appeals* Some authorities mentioned appeal systems, though they are rarely used - a homeless person who is turned away is not often able to wait in a specified location for several weeks while an appeal is resolved.

- *monitoring and evaluation of services* Monitoring is usually undertaken through performance indicators, the favourites being those required by the Accounts Commission. These, unfortunately, do not yield much information on the issues.

Action plans

Many local authorities routinely make action plans, covering the basic details of implementation - who is responsible for the task and when it will be done. Some local authorities include, further, statements of the resources available for the task, and the criteria by which the task can be judged, in terms of targets. This is helpful, because it requires departments to think about the issues more clearly, but most officers know that this kind of planning has to be treated very flexibly: resources are hardly ever held at the figure that is first thought of, and adhering too closely to targets (one of the vices of central government monitoring) can often lead to a distortion in priorities. The main indicators which were referred to were those required for audit - the number of households in priority need, and the number of households provided with different forms of temporary accommodation, and the time it took to resolve issues. Angus records re-presentations by applicants, vulnerability and, creditably, "the number of circumstances of applicants for whom we failed to provide appropriate solutions". The Homelessness Task Force may wish to commission work to identify appropriate and useful performance indicators.

The creation of action plans does not always mean, though, that specific actions are taken about homelessness. Many services for homeless people are reactive - they wait for people to apply, and work out what to do with them when they do. So, for example, the councils in the former Central Region have developed a contingency plan and protocols with Central Scotland Police to deal with the circumstances when a homeless sex offender applies for housing, including detail of who should be involved in decisions. This does not mean that the councils have the strategic aim of making provision for homeless sex offenders.

Although there are overlaps, there is a big difference between implementing 'homelessness policy' and a strategy for homelessness. The distinction rests in the kind of policy which has to be implemented. Strategies define objectives, what the objectives imply and how they are going to be met. Homelessness policies may be built around objectives, but they may not; they may be concerned only with the detail of how the legislation is to be operated. The definition of a strategic plan draws other issues to attention - issues such as prevention, the provision of housing and the extension of entitlement. Angus's five-year plan covers information and advice, accommodation, support, employment and training initiatives and monitoring and evaluation. For each proposal, it identifies providers, target dates and funding sources. Dundee's Single Homeless strategy identifies a series of key areas - information and advice, needs assessment, accommodation, support services, coordination and monitoring; it identifies gaps in provision in each of those areas; and it considers ways in which those gaps can be filled, with identified responsibilities and a

timetable. The central purpose of rational approaches to planning is that they make issues explicit, and the best action plans were those which were closely linked to strategic issues.

6. Responding to homelessness

Homelessness stems from three basic sources:
- the supply of housing
- lack of entitlement and
- personal circumstances.

It follows that there are three main types of response to homelessness:
- to increase the supply of housing,
- to extend entitlement, and
- to arrange housing with support to meet the needs of homeless people.

Increasing the supply of housing

The supply of housing has to be balanced with need and demand. This is central to the development of housing plans, which all local authorities prepare, as well as to the business plans of housing associations. There is little that can be done to change the total housing stock in the short term, and in the long term, much is dependent on the market and central government policy. There is still some limited room for manoeuvre. The development of social housing has principally been taken forward by housing associations, and several are able to offer supported schemes for groups with particular needs. A second route is conversion: larger properties can sometimes be converted into smaller apartments, which increases the number of households which can be housed. Another way of increasing supply is to bring vacant and empty stock back into use. There is some scope for doing this: for example, unpopular family housing may be suitable for single people and sharers, and rentals to specific groups (like students, in the main cities) can be used to release other housing. This verges into an issue of entitlement, which concerns the use local authorities currently make of their existing stock: the effect of providing rented accommodation (and even furnished rental accommodation, as the private sector did in the past) could make a significant impact on reducing demand.

Entitlement

The second main response is to make housing available for people who otherwise would not have it, and so who would be homeless. The main emphasis in current policy has fallen on the law; several local authorities responded to the query about homelessness strategy solely in terms of their implementation of the Act. The law, however, has serious limitations. Its effects are not available to all, but principally to 'priority groups' - families with children. The long waiting lists for single person's accommodation point to the central

problem with this: many single people on low incomes do not have alternative accommodation. An adequate response to the needs of homeless people, then, has to go beyond the minimal requirements of the law, to consider how other forms of homelessness can be dealt with.

Even within the limits of the existing law, the pressures on local authorities can be considerable. The effect of sales and stock transfers may be to leave local authorities compelled to ration, with insufficient resources to meet needs. It seems essential to extend the responsibility for rehousing homeless people to other registered social landlords: this is one of the key recommendations made by the Homelessness Task Force[15], and it seems likely to be part of the next Housing (Scotland) Act. There is the potential here, though, for adminsitrative confusion, because the responsibility to rehouse people is contained in more than one piece of legislation - not only the Housing Act, but also the Children Act 1995. It has happened before (in England, during the period 1974-77) that housing and social work providers were given different responsibilities, and the situation created major problems for social work, which had duties but no resources to fulfil them. This can only be avoided by ensuring that the responsibilities on registered social landlords go beyond the responsiblities of Housing Act.

Providing for special needs: accommodation and support

People who are homeless are likely to need support - because homelessness is associated with other problems, including poverty and relationship breakdown. Some homeless people will need special, continuing support related to their personal circumstances. Often the response to the range of circumstances requires co-operative arrangements to be made between housing providers and community care agencies, including Social Work and the Health Boards. Although Housing Departments are primarily responsible for homeless policies, there is an increasing emphasis on collaborative work across a range of authorities, and joint working has become a necessary part of strategic planning for homelessness. Glasgow's Interagency Steering Group, for example, includes social work, the health board and the voluntary sector, including Shelter and the Glasgow Council for Single Homelessness.

This represents a significant shift in policy. Homelessness was the responsibility of welfare departments from 1948, and subsequently of Social Work. It became the responsibility of housing departments only in the 1970s, following government advice later confirmed in the legislation. The move to joint working indicates a change in philosophy. "Homelessness", the Homelessness Task Force has stated, "is not just a housing problem".[16]

Planning for homelessness

The Homelessness Task Force has proposed that local authorities should be required to make strategic plans to deal with homelessness. This proposal may not be greeted with great enthusiasm. Housing authorities spend a great deal of time making plans, and there are relevant aspects of homelessness strategies in the Housing Plan, the strategies of Scottish Homes, bids for the Rough Sleeper's Initiative, the business plans of Housing Associations (which, like housing authorities, are required to make statements about needs), and community care plans, many of which deal with aspects of homelessness. Homeless strategies, however, would be doing something different from existing plans. The main purpose of planning strategically is to identify gaps in provision and service, and to take action to fill them. Some authorities have made positive moves in the direction of homeless strategies, and there are some notably competent and well-thought out strategies in several authorities. The argument for developing strategy further is to not to create further burdens for the authorities with good practice, but to ensure that other authorities are required to do likewise.

The shift to joint working emphasises the central role of the planning process. The formation of a strategy helps to form an overview of a range of provision, to identify gaps and signal directions for new initiatives. This process has to engage other agencies than housing departments; their partnership is essential to further development. This implies, however, significant limitations on the housing authority which is leading the process; planning cannot be done simply on housing criteria. In some areas, the planning process has formed a constructive relationship with a number of partnership agencies; several RSI bids have been formed by partnerships, some strategies have focused on single homeless people, and some councils have formed youth housing strategies. There is an argument for protecting and developing existing partnerships. It should not be assumed that there must be a single general strategy for all homeless people, or that a strategy must be the responsibility of the housing authority. The appropriate pattern for legislation is for local authorities to submit schemes for the development of strategies; the pattern of schemes will vary with local arrangements.

7. Summary and recommendations

Homelessness stems from three basic sources:
- the supply of housing
- lack of entitlement and
- personal circumstances.

It follows that there are three main types of response to homelessness:
- to increase the supply of housing,
  - to extend entitlement, and
- to arrange housing with support to meet the needs of homeless people.

Access to social housing is crucial to deal with lack of entitlement. More of the social housing stock needs to be made available for the groups most vulnerable to homelessness. In particular, single people must be allowed to use the accommodation which exists, either through more flexible lettings policies or through the development of single sharers schemes.

A strategy document needs at least three elements
- a statement of aims, which have to be translated into practical objectives.
- consideration of methods: what is being done to meet the aims now, and what else needs to be done.
- an action plan, including both an implementation strategy, and the setting of standards by which performance can be assessed.

The main purpose of planning strategically is to identify gaps in provision and service, and to take action to fill them.

The argument for developing strategy further is to promote the best practice in a wider range of authorities. However, homelessness strategies are not only the responsibility of housing departments, and some flexibility in the form and structure of strategies is necessary to take account of the interests of partner agencies.

The aims of strategies are mainly concerned with the needs of homeless people and the operation of the law, though there may be other collateral aims.

Local authorities have further obligations under the 1995 Children Act. In extending the responsibility for rehousing homeless people to other registered social landlords, the duties cannot stop with the Housing Act.

The main methods are

- prevention
- outreach and reception, including information and advice;
- mid-range responses, including temporary accommodation and various forms of support;
- permanent rehousing.

General welfare rights advice has an important preventative role. There is an argument for expanding independent housing aid services.

Homeless people should, where possible, be rehoused directly to permanent housing.

Implementation plans sometimes co-exist with a detailed 'homelessness policy'.

Implementation plans can usefully be tied to strategic aims and objectives. The range of indicators used needs to be expanded. The Homelessness Task Force might consider commissioning work to identify appropriate performance indicators.

Notes

1. See R Minns, 1972, Homeless families and some organisational determinants of deviancy, Policy and Politics 1(1).
2. See e.g. A Faludi, 1973, Planning Theory, Oxford: Pergamon; N Gilbert, H Specht (eds) 1977, Planning for social welfare, Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, part 2; S Leach, 1982, In defence of the rational model, in S Leach, J Stewart, Approaches in public policy, London: George Allen and Unwin.
3. See A Faludi, 1973, A reader in planning theory, Oxford: Pergamon.
4. Homelessness Task Force, 2000, Helping homeless people: legislative proposals on homelessness.
5. See R Bailey, J Ruddock, 1971, The Grief Report, London: Shelter.
6. Scottish Executive, Statistical Bulletin: Housing Series, HSG /1999/3.
7. Statistical Bulletin, p.31
8. Statistical Bulletin, p 33.
9. Scottish Executive, 1999, Statistical Bulletin: Housing Series, p.34.
10. N Crockett, P Spicker, 1994, Discharged: homelessness among psychiatric patients in Scotland, Edinburgh: Shelter (Scotland).
11. J Geddes, R Newton, G Young, S Bailey, C Freeman, R Priest, 1993. The Edinburgh homeless revisited: prevalence of psychiatric disorder, previous psychiatric contact and time trends, Unpublished working paper: Royal Edinburgh Hospital.
12. See N Pleace, 1998, Single homelessness as social exclusion, Social Policy and Administration 32(1) 1998 pp 46-59.
13. See P Spicker, 1998, Housing and social exclusion, Shelter Scotland.
14. Fife Council, n.d., A homelessness strategy for Fife: Report by the Homelessness Strategy Working Group, p.11.
15. Homelessness Task Force, 2000.
16. Homeless Task Force, 1999, Review of Homelessness: Assessment of the Extent and Nature of Homelessness in Local Authority Areas, Circular DD/19/1999.

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