



Housing Provision for Vulnerable Young People in Medway



April 2003
Youth and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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INTRODUCTION

This review commenced in October 2002 and follows the work of members of the Youth and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee in reviewing the Council's Youth Justice Plan for 2002 – 2005. That piece of work had highlighted accommodation issues as a major problem for youth offenders leaving custody and a recommendation was made that this review be carried out to further explore the issue.

The Youth Justice Plan review recognised that in Medway there is a shortage of available and affordable supported housing for this client group. In addition it was apparent that there were communication difficulties and overall a lack of general joined - up working between council departments, housing providers and other agencies.

The remit of the group was to explore what housing provision existed for ex - offenders and other vulnerable young people. By speaking to key stakeholders delivering and providing housing services to young people, we hoped to highlight gaps in provision and deficiencies in service delivery.

A number of early officer/member working group meetings were held during the first two months of the review and we would like to thank Caroline Chant (supported housing manager) and Ian Sparling (youth offending team manager) for their excellent support. Following these initial meetings, several evidence sessions were held during late 2002 and early 2003 at which the group spoke to all of the main supported housing providers in Medway, senior council officers, as well as other agencies such as Shelter, the Police and Kent Community Housing Trust. We would like to thank all who have attended evidence sessions for their time and the positive way in which they have engaged in the process.

In addition we would like to thank Bjorn Simpole, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator for his hard work and commitment to the review.

We hope that this report and its recommendations are received favourably by the Cabinet, council directorates and partners. We believe that it should be used to shape, focus and enhance provision and assist those who work with young people in Medway now and in the future.

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHODOLOGY

1. The suggestion that this review was carried out arose during the work of the Youth Justice Plan task group. They had concluded that the draft plan did not sufficiently address the housing needs of young offenders and that young people found it difficult to access accommodation, a problem which was exacerbated if they were an offender.
2. In particular during evidence sessions held in May and June 2002, representations were made to members that the Youth Offending Team's (YOT) relationship with colleagues in the housing department could be difficult at times and that there was also a lack of understanding amongst Youth Offending Team officers of housing allocations and procedures.
3. Following that review, the Youth Justice Plan measure on accommodation was updated with amendments proposed by the task group. Therefore the starting point for this review was this extract: -

Measure twelve: accommodation for young people

Of the current YOT caseload, 7% did not have a stable home in their own right, whilst 3% were disadvantaged because their family home was either in temporary accommodation or at risk of loss because of an eviction notice.

Young people under 18 years cannot obtain tenancies unless they have a guarantor, except those young people leaving care who have an advantage because their tenancy is assured by Social Services.

One voluntary sector provider, Avalon, has entered into an agreement with YOT to make available one bed in their homeless hostel. As well as providing the accommodation, Avalon will arrange a move to other accommodation and act as guarantor for the young person. This is a beneficial service to young people and Youth Justice Board (YJB) funds may be used to expand this provision.

For the group under 16 years local authority accommodation can be accessed. For those 16 or 17 years who meet certain strict eligibility criteria, then supported lodgings becomes available. Where a child is remanded to local authority (LA) care but placed with relatives, then funding is provided by the children & families service to support the placement.

Plan:

- Look for opportunities to increase the number of dedicated beds available for young people known to YOT
- To develop working links with the Supporting People Programme (as for Measure 10)

- To investigate the use of "equitable tenancies" for 16 to 18-year-olds by registered social landlords

Performance Measures & National Targets/Accommodation & Summary:

Action	Outcome	Target	Timescale
To work with "supporting people" group to increase the availability of accommodation for 16-18-year-olds, either by better use of current stock or by encouraging RSLs to utilise "equitable tenancies"	Ensure young people on caseload have suitable accommodation	90% of caseload with accommodation	2003
Agree protocols between the YOT team and housing services to jointly address the housing needs of young offenders as a priority group	Improved access to housing services/advice for young people known to YOT	YOT Manager to develop protocols with housing manager	Nov 2002
Increase the range and quantity of suitable accommodation for young offenders	Ensure young people known to YOT have appropriate accommodation	YOT Manager to develop an action plan with key providers to increase the range and volume of accommodation for client group	Mar 2003

4. The group's membership was comprised of four councillors of the Youth and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee. They were Councillors Adcock, Cooper, Purdy and Wildey.
5. Whilst the focus and origin of the review was on clients of the Youth Offending Team, at an early stage members were keen to broaden the scope of their discussions to vulnerable young people in general. They decided to explore ways in which improved accommodation options could act as a preventative measure for youth crime.
6. The main terms of reference for the review were agreed as being: -
"To improve access to housing for young offenders leaving custody and thus decrease the likelihood of re-offending"
7. The group agreed to try to achieve this by focusing on the actions highlighted in the Youth Justice Plan 2002 - 2005 which were to: -
 - Work with the 'supporting people' group to increase the availability of accommodation for 16-18 year olds
 - **Agree protocols between YOT and housing services to jointly address the housing needs of young offenders as a priority group**

- Increase the range and quantity of suitable accommodation for young offenders
8. Through initial discussions with the Youth Offending Team Manager and Supported Housing Manager, the review group sought to identify information, witnesses and potential areas for exploration.
 9. From November 2002 onwards oral evidence was heard from eleven different individuals, housing providers, council officers and other key agencies. Some written representations were also taken into account in producing this report.
 10. The full programme of evidence gathering was as follows (these were oral evidence sessions unless otherwise stated): -

9 October 2002	Initial scoping meeting held to discuss review. Discussions held involving Caroline Chant, Supported Housing Manager, and Ian Sparling (youth offending team manager)
25 October 2002	Ian Sparling, Youth Offending Team Manager
11 November 2002	Sherrie – young person at YOT offices
2 December 2002	Caroline Chant, Supported Housing Manager Ian Sparling, Youth Offending Team Manager
18 December 2002	Mary Whitfield, AVALON housing society David Mottley, English Churches Housing Group Noleen Beedle, Hope Housing Society Andy James and Arthur Kitson, MHS Ltd
12 February 2003	E mail correspondence from Malcolm Dodds, North Kent Magistrates Court
13 February 2003	Jeff Matthews, Orbit Housing Association Lyndsey Woolmore, Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator Karen Bays, Assistant Director (Children and Families)
18 February 2003	Alison Breese, Assistant Director (Community Services) Dean Cooke, Shelter Paul Spreadbridge and Alan Willetts, Medway Police

Breda Joyce – Kent Community Housing
Trust

27 February 2003

Written evidence received from Sue Sears –
Medway Cyrenians

CHAPTER ONE

YOUTH OFFENDERS AS A PRIORITY GROUP

1. A fundamental reason this review was established was due to concerns councillors had about communication between different council departments responsible for housing youth offenders when they leave custody. They did not feel that it was an appropriate use of a YOT officer's time to be waiting for long periods of time at the housing offices for an assessment of the young person's accommodation needs. There was also a degree of concern about a lack of planning in making accommodation arrangements prior to the release of a young offender from secure custody.
2. At the initial meetings of the group, Ian Sparling (Youth Offending Team Manager) and Caroline Chant (Supported Housing Manager) were questioned about current arrangements and progress made in addressing the youth justice action plan associated with accommodation.
3. They informed the group that work had commenced to improve access so a young person leaving custody can be registered for housing prior to their release date. Previously an individual could only go on the housing list once they had been released. This is to be welcomed, as in many cases release dates are known well in advance and this provides more chance to secure appropriate accommodation rather than hoping for a vacancy on the day of release.
4. Ian Sparling, the Youth Offending Team Manager, provided the group with a breakdown of his team's caseload during 2001 in terms of housing this group. During 2001, 43 young people were released from custody. Of these: -
 - 8 were non Medway residents released from secure training centres and housed elsewhere
 - 6 were under 16 and became the responsibility of social services
 - 2 were over 16 and went into local authority care
5. This left 27 young people being released from custody and of these 15 required some form of accommodation (56%) without any prior arrangements having been made. Current arrangements were felt to be extremely ad-hoc and unsatisfactory and any prior planning that could take place is welcomed.
6. Clearly what the YOT are unable to anticipate is a young person being released unexpectedly early from custody. Ian Sparling, the Youth Offending Team Manager, explained that there was often a challenge on a Friday afternoon to find accommodation for someone who had

been released from Feltham Youth offenders institution in the morning. This often resulted in the young person being placed in temporary accommodation which was not necessarily suitable and did little to encourage the young person to end their offending behaviour.

Establishment of protocols

7. In line with the targets highlighted in the Youth Justice Plan, protocols have been established about accommodation for young offenders leaving custody. It has been agreed that the YOT and homeless teams would share more information on a regular basis and that an appointment time would be arranged for a YOT client to see a homelessness officer. Work has been carried out and is continuing to create better understanding of each other's working practices in order to serve the needs of this client group more effectively.
8. The group applauds the way in which better joined-up working is taking place in this area. Mutual understanding of each other's respective roles and responsibilities is viewed as being essential in resolving problems in finding suitable accommodation. More work should be carried out by investigating approaches at other local authorities (see below) to ultimately establish multi-agency protocols that ensure that youth offenders are treated as a priority group (**recommendation 1**).

Comparative information

9. Early in their discussions, the group were keen to explore the measures employed by other youth offending teams at other local authorities to secure suitable accommodation for youth offenders leaving custody. The council's partner sixteen unitary authorities in consultation exercises, as well as London boroughs were asked for the relevant section of their youth justice plan. In total eighteen YOTs replied with this information.
10. A summary of some of the innovative approaches employed by other YOTs is attached to this report as appendix B. This highlights many interesting initiatives being carried out to improve the likelihood of finding suitable accommodation, including facilitating temporary accommodation projects, representation for the YOT on homelessness forums, partnership with other local authorities to deliver joint services and formulating housing strategies for young people.
11. We would urge officers, particularly the Youth Offending Team Manager, to use this information to identify instances of best practice elsewhere and to develop ways in which the council can improve accommodation opportunities for young people in the future (**recommendation 2**).

Representation from Malcolm Dodds – North Kent Magistrates Court

12. The area director of legal services for the magistrates court in Medway was unable to attend an evidence session but instead forwarded some views in writing. He was of the view that lack of suitable accommodation was not a significant factor in rates of re-offending. He felt that of significant importance were: -
- association with offending peers
 - dysfunctional family
 - truanting/exclusion from school and lack of alternative education provision
 - drug/alcohol abuse
13. He also made the point that most young people at the Medway Secure Training Centre are from outside the Medway towns and on leaving the facility become the responsibility of the YOT in their home area.
14. At the Youth and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 20 March 2003, members expressed some concern that advice being given to magistrates was not consistent with findings of national studies that highlight the importance of permanent accommodation. Whilst there is no doubt that many of the reasons highlighted by Mr Dodds for re-offending are significant factors, the role that appropriate accommodation plays in the rehabilitation process should not be devalued. Therefore members would like to write to magistrates, enclosing the findings of this review for their information.

Youth homelessness and crime

15. National studies have illustrated that there is a clear correlation between the lack of permanent accommodation and persistent offending (recidivism). For this review, the YOT carried out an exercise where they analysed links between housing needs and referrals to them. The results showed that there is a massively increased likelihood of someone being referred to them for criminal behaviour if their accommodation needs are not being met.
16. The ASSET system used by the YOT ranks housing need on a scale of one to four (one being the lowest level of need, four the highest). The system showed that: -
- On an ASSET score of three - 16 young people have been responsible for 200 referrals to YOT in 2002
 - On an ASSET score of four - 8 young people have been responsible for 152 referrals to YOT in 2002

17. These figures strikingly illustrate that a relatively small number of young people who have accommodation needs are responsible for a large proportion of YOT referrals during 2002. Clearly we recognise that accommodation would probably not be the overriding factor that is causing young people to commit crime, there will be other factors involved too. However decision makers should take note that by solving accommodation problems there is a likelihood that there will be a reduction in youth crime.
18. Police representatives in particular highlighted to the group that in their view in Medway: -

“A number of young people live in ‘bedsit land’ and they get by through committing crime. Often many who are housed in such areas are there temporarily after being bailed following offences”.
19. This highlights that the problem cannot be summarised as being lack of accommodation, but a lack of good and suitable affordable housing for young people. In particular, the police felt that appropriate housing would be one less factor that may lead a young person back to crime and that a package of support is important (**recommendation 3**). Chapter Two outlines the availability of such accommodation and the role of statutory agencies in detail.
20. Little work has been carried out locally to assess how successful supported housing schemes have been in helping ex-youth offenders to rehabilitate. The police representatives were keen to see such work carried out in the future and the group supports this view (**recommendation 4**).
21. A crucial piece of evidence which the police highlighted was that: -

“The hardcore of young offenders in Medway are largely made up of those permanently excluded from school”
22. The group are aware that Medway’s rate of permanent exclusions from school is significantly above the national average. Therefore it is of huge concern to hear the police suggest that it is this group that make up the vast proportion of persistent young offenders. We are aware that the Education and Leisure Directorate is working hard with schools to reverse this trend and reduce the number of exclusions. It is crucial that these efforts prove successful so one of the root causes of offending behaviour is removed (**recommendation 5**).

CHAPTER TWO

YOUTH HOUSING PROVISION IN MEDWAY

Evidence sessions

1. Between December 2002 and February 2003 evidence sessions were held with representatives from the main providers of supported (and non-supported) housing in Medway. A summary of the individual sessions can be found at appendix A where key points made to the group are detailed. The main objectives of these sessions were to assess the extent of provision available to young people, its appropriateness and to seek providers' views on their relationship with the local authority.

Youth Offending Team clients

2. Currently youth offenders leaving custody are found accommodation by the Youth Offending Team (YOT). As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is often inappropriate to their needs due to the lack of other alternatives. For example whilst many have been referred to supported schemes run by providers such as AVALON, Cyrenians and English Churches, others have had to be accommodated temporarily in bed and breakfast accommodation. This report talks more about the inappropriateness of bed and breakfast accommodation below. For a young offender leaving custody where there are strict controls in place, the group does not believe that such a bed and breakfast environment is appropriate or helpful in terms of helping an individual to rehabilitate. Clearly there is a dilemma that the only alternative would be the street which leaves the council with often no option but to place a vulnerable young person in completely inappropriate accommodation.

Sherrie's views

3. A meeting was arranged with 'Sherrie' a young person who was a care leaver, had been involved in youth crime and experienced difficulties in finding suitable accommodation. She informed members of problems she had experienced in accessing accommodation. After making a homeless persons application, it took six months before the council provided accommodation. In the meantime, she and her boyfriend had stayed at an acquaintance's one bedroom flat in his living room. Her perception of the local authority was of a bureaucratic organisation where clients were referred from one department to another with little progress being made in resolving housing needs.

4. Ian Sparling, the Youth Offending Team Manager, informed the group that YOT officers provide significant support to clients in terms of housing needs, ie. accessing accommodation, helping them understand housing benefits etc. The group is of the view that the YOT should be focusing on preventing young people becoming involved in crime, not acting as an advisory service to young people on housing issues.

Young Persons Housing Officer

5. At an early stage during the course of the review, the group identified a gap in support provided by the council's housing department to young people. The group felt that a clear point of contact for clients both in terms of those seeking accommodation and housing providers themselves would be useful.
6. All witnesses who attended evidence sessions were asked whether they supported the concept of an officer dedicated to young persons issues. Feedback from housing providers was overwhelmingly supportive of this idea (**recommendation 6**) and other witnesses also thought this post would be particularly beneficial if funding could be identified.
7. The representative of AVALON Housing Society best summed up the views of providers stating that: -

"A dedicated young persons housing officer would be an asset as all referrals could be channelled through to one person who understands the client groups needs. This person could act as a link to different agencies which has the potential to greatly improve partnership working. A main advantage would be that one point of contact would be established for client and other agencies. Currently the association would speak to several officers to resolve a clients situation"

Young persons foyers and supported housing

8. Medway has a number of foyers that provide a supported housing environment for vulnerable young people. Medway Cyrenians and English Churches Housing Group in particular provide facilities that the YOT accesses for its clients. News that the 'Springboard Project', a new nine bed facility for care leavers in Rochester that is being provided by MHS was welcomed. MHS also highlighted that they were interested in increasing their range of supported housing for young people, recognising that there was a clear gap of provision in Gillingham and in the east of Medway.
9. The group visited the Endeavour Foyer, Chatham on 7 February 2003. This twenty-seven bed foyer provides a supported housing environment for young people aged 16– 24. At the evidence session with MHS representatives, they highlighted that they had received 288

applications for tenancies at the Endeavour Foyer since it had opened in May 2000 of which they were only able to accommodate 79. This indicates the high level of demand for places at this foyer and suggests that there is considerable amount of unmet need in Medway.

10. The visit to the Endeavour Foyer gave the group an opportunity to see how the foyer was run and to meet many of its residents. The foyer manager explained that although some of the residents may have had a history of offending behaviour, it was not a facility that provided extensive support to residents. Therefore it was not suitable for those young people with drug problems, current criminal behaviour or mental health difficulties.

11. The group felt that the foyer is an excellent environment for young people who are fortunate enough to be accommodated there. Each resident has their own self contained flat with shower, WC, bed and kitchen. Flats, common rooms and corridors are decorated to a high standard with bright colours and the emphasis is on the residents being able to really feel like it is their home. Much is expected of residents in return. Any involvement in criminal behaviour or failure to continue in an agreed programme of education, training or employment would result in them forfeiting their tenancy. This contract sets out the parameters clearly in terms of what is expected of them during their time at the foyer. Feedback in discussions with young residents was extremely positive :-

"I wouldn't do anything that might jeopardise my tenancy, I love living here, we all get on well and it really feels like home"

"It's a happy place to be, living in this environment has given me a great deal of confidence due to support that everyone provides"

12. The group considered the Endeavour Foyer to be a fantastic facility but it is important to recognise that it was only possible to become a reality due to capital investment funding by MHS Ltd. In addition, a great deal of sponsorship has been obtained to extend facilities. More foyers such as the Endeavour are required to provide a secure supported environment to young people, who for many different reasons are unable to live with their families. There is no simple answer as to how more foyers of this nature can be provided but we urge supported housing providers to view young people's needs as a priority and urge the council to work closely with them in the future (**recommendation 7**).

13. There should also be a focus on considering provision for young people with more complex needs than those currently provided for by the Endeavour Foyer. The council, when referring a young person to a provider, has very few options if that individual is a drug user. Very few providers will accept such referrals, so again there is little option other than placing such an individual in an environment (ie temporary accommodation in a bedsit) that will do little to help them solve their problems, whether they be drug misuse or persistent offending.

Therefore, there is a clear need to provide more supported housing for this client group - in conjunction with specialist providers **(recommendation 8)**.

14. In conclusion, there is good supported housing in Medway for young people but demand outstrips supply. It is yet to become clear how the supporting people programme can improve the range and quality of appropriate accommodation. More needs to be done in partnership with housing providers, to ensure that Medway is able to provide vulnerable young people with effective supported accommodation **(recommendation 9)**.

Direct access hostels

15. A massive gap in current provision is the availability of a direct access hostel. Current supported housing is allocated through referral processes and with the possible exception of 'Winter Warmers' there is nowhere for an individual who walks in from the street to stay. Breda Joyce of the Kent Community Housing Trust (KCHT) in her evidence to the group emphasised that: -

"A 'crash pad' direct access facility for those who leave the police station at 2am or have been evicted from their accommodation is required – somewhere that isn't the street. If we can get the support, KCHT is willing to be involved in this".

16. The group believes that some form of direct access needs to be available and urges the housing department to urgently progress this with KCHT **(recommendation 10)**.

Floating support and advisory information

17. Where it is not possible to place a vulnerable young person in supported housing, it is important that some form of floating support is provided to help the young person sustain their tenancy. Too often the scenario will arise where a young person leaves a secure environment (whether that be a secure facility or a care home), is placed in a flat and finds themselves evicted within a short space of time because they have broken the terms of their tenancy agreement. The group anticipates that the supporting people programme is likely to increase the availability of floating support and we would urge that young people be viewed as a priority. A sense of isolation will often contribute towards the likelihood that a young person becomes involved in misbehaviour and any form of support, from whatever agency it is delivered by, is to be welcomed. The group was interested to hear the views of Karen Bays - assistant director (children and families) that there may a role for supported accommodation officers to help young people sustain their tenancies and that there are a number of sources of potential funding **(recommendation 11)**.

18. Advisory information seemed to often be lacking when a young person started a tenancy. It is felt to be a role for the housing department to be more pro-active in offering guidance and support to a young person commencing a tenancy. Equally this could be provided by a housing association from whom the tenant is renting a property, although it is recognised that some work in this area does exist. Information could be provided at this time about behaviour that is expected of the tenant, so clear boundaries are set in terms of what is expected of them. The development of advisory information could possibly be a task that is undertaken by the proposed post of youth housing officer **(recommendation 12)**.

Links with private landlords

19. The group recognise that the vast majority of private landlords in Medway do not wish to let their properties to vulnerable young people. We feel there is more that could be done to work in partnership with the private sector in encouraging landlords to be more willing to let their properties to vulnerable young people. Alison Breese, Assistant Director (Community Services) in her evidence to the group explained that: -

“There are lots of existing links with private landlords that we have, and the YOT have their own arrangements too. They have a role to play and there is a mixture of options available for client groups including young vulnerable people”.

20. Whilst it is true that these links are there, through the examination of other local authorities Youth Justice Plans, the group have identified YOTs that have established more concrete arrangements with the private sector (appendix B). Both the housing department and YOT should do more to establish good relationships with private landlords, in particular to access good quality houses of multiple occupancy that would be suitable for referrals from the council and housing providers **(recommendation 13)**. Vulnerable young people living in private sector accommodation would require some form of floating support to enable them to successfully maintain their tenancies.

21. The Kent Community Housing Trust (KCHT) informed the group about problems which the supporting people programme was creating for the funding of their services. Breda Joyce explained that: -

“Funding is becoming more difficult because supporting people is diverting funding away from us. There is work to be done with landlords to make them clear that clients are still coming to the project and some contribution is required”.

22. This is clearly a problem in that clients are still approaching KCHT for support services when other organisations are receiving funding. We understand that discussions are on-going between KCHT and the local authority regarding ways to resolve this issue and suggest that they be given an opportunity to highlight the issue at a meeting of the Landlords Forum (**recommendation 14**).

Housing corporation funding

23. All the providers confirmed that they were able to access funding from the Housing Corporation for capital projects. The availability of centrally held funds for supported housing involves significant amounts of funding and the challenge for Medway is to state its case for the need of more supported housing loudly and clearly. Providers need to be persuaded that Medway is an area where demand outstrips supply and we hope that this report goes some way towards emphasising the growing needs of young Medway residents that are not being met (**recommendation 15**).

Council relationship with housing associations

24. Housing providers were asked about their relationship with the council and to highlight any particular problems that they felt required consideration. Whilst most of the witnesses stated that they had a good relationship with Medway Council there were a few concerns about communication problems. In particular the representatives from MHS Ltd raised a number of concerns when they gave evidence to the group on 18 December 2002. They stated that communication difficulties were a significant problem, that they often had to act in the role of the local authority in assessing a young person's housing needs and that they were generally "viewed with suspicion by council officers".
25. The group obviously had some concerns about these views from MHS Ltd and sought clarification from Alison Breese, Assistant Director (Community Services) about these issues. Following correspondence with the chief executive of MHS Ltd about their relationship, she informed the group that: -
- "I believe that the working relationship with them is quite good with significant improvements being made in recent times. We are working together to try and resolve the bed and breakfast issue and are liaising to make move on easier as people tended to get stuck in the system".*
26. Members were pleased to hear that the relationship between Medway Council and MHS Ltd was far more positive than was perhaps earlier suggested. There are many areas in which the council and MHS Ltd need to work closely and we would urge them to continue the progress that has been made in improving housing services (**recommendation 16**).

Referral processes

27. A major concern of several housing providers that attended evidence sessions was the quality of information about potential tenants contained in referrals. In particular the major area that was felt to be lacking was the sharing of information by the housing department that they have received from other agencies such as social services. Two generally representative views were: -

“We’re often given a referral with very little information, so we have no idea about the person’s history. This is extremely worrying for our officers as they are not aware about clients who might pose a risk to their safety”. (MHS Ltd)

“A network of support for clients should be established, where agencies trust each other and feel confident about sharing information. We find that agencies in London Boroughs are far more willing to share information, perhaps because problems are more acute, but if they can why can’t we”? (English Churches Housing Group)

28. The two council officers responsible for the services involved (Housing/Social Services) were questioned about the sharing of information. The position as they see it is that the local authority does pass on information with referrals ‘on a need to know basis’ to providers but that a judgement needs to be made on what can be passed on as there is a need to maintain client confidentiality and be aware of the Data Protection Act.
29. Whilst the intention is to provide housing associations with relevant information about a client ‘on a need to know basis’, in light of the strong views held by witnesses, the group must question whether this actually happens in practice. In particular the English Churches Housing Group representative suggested that co-operation between agencies and their organisation in terms of information attached to referrals was better in many other areas, particularly London Boroughs where problems are more acute. We would urge the council to ensure that housing officers share information with housing providers wherever possible (**recommendation 17**).
30. Alison Breese, Assistant Director (Community Services) informed the group about measures that are undertaken at the referral stage that ask the provider to contact the council for further details. She explained there were protocols in place for schedule one offenders (ie those with a history of committing violent crime) but for others, where there is particular information which the housing department wants to share but does not wish to place on file (as this could prejudice a nomination application), advice is given to contact the relevant officer for further details. This is usually done by putting a reference on the file that is understood by the person receiving the referral.

31. It is welcomed that a system is in place that asks a provider to seek further information about a client that cannot be placed in writing on the file. However, the group would wish to be sure that adequate systems are in place in terms of training for council housing officers and housing association employees so that they are able to understand references that ask them to contact the council for further information **(recommendation 18)**.

Cross boundary agreements

32. A key concern the group has is that Medway may pick up the bill for housing a young person who is the responsibility of another local authority. In particular, with a secure training centre being located in Medway, there is a concern that some of those being released from custody choose to stay in the local area which has a cost implication for the local authority. We are not aware of any cross boundary agreements being in place and would suggest that these would be a useful mechanism for recharging costs to other local authorities **(recommendation 19)**.

Use of bed and breakfast accommodation

33. As at 18 February 2003 there were: -

Fifty five cases in bed and breakfast accommodation, forty one are either couples or single young people – with only a small number of families.

34. There is a general perception that bed and breakfast accommodation is an unsuitable environment for a young person to be in. Karen Bays, Assistant Director (Children And Families) highlighted some important views about such accommodation arguing that: -

“Bed and breakfast accommodation is not ideal if not supported by additional support, there is concern about isolation for young people. This concern can also exist in any form of accommodation where no support is provided at all. Good bed and breakfast accommodation can in some circumstances be better than a flat with no support. How you support the young person is more important than the type of housing”.

35. Highlighting the importance of effective support rather than the type of accommodation is an important point. Whilst the group does not believe that bed and breakfast accommodation should be used unless absolutely necessary and welcomes recent moves by the council to restrict its use for housing the homeless, the degree of isolation should be an important factor in assessing the suitability of temporary accommodation. If a young person is housed temporarily in bed and breakfast accommodation it is crucial that an appropriate package of support is provided **(recommendation 20)**.

Waiting times

36. The group heard anecdotal evidence from 'Sherrie' about the long period of time that she had to wait before permanent accommodation was provided. In addition Alison Breese, Assistant Director (Community Services) informed us that it was not unusual for priority homeless applicants to wait eight weeks for permanent accommodation. This does seem a very long time to wait for those categorised as being most in need and indicates the considerable length of time that non-priority cases will be on a waiting list before being re-housed. The lack of available appropriate accommodation in Medway is undoubtedly the major factor behind the lengthy periods of time that applicants wait for permanent accommodation. We would urge the portfolio holder and officers to make the reduction in time for homeless applicants spent in temporary accommodation a key priority (**recommendation 21**).

Trial tenancy schemes

37. The MHS representatives informed the group that their organisation has run trial tenancy schemes for two years and that these are available to young people. They explained that: -
- “Tenants get regular visits and this has allowed us to house many who we would have refused tenancies to in the past”.*
38. Such an initiative appears ideal in that it offers a degree of support by the association to the tenant and allows them to provide housing to individuals who previously would not have been considered. The group is not aware of similar schemes being run by the council in its own housing stock and would suggest that this is another option worth pursuing as a means of improving the range of options available to vulnerable young people (**recommendation 22**).

Black and ethnic minority community housing needs

39. The final housing provider the group received evidence from highlighted an area that he felt was neglected by the council and other agencies – the needs of black and ethnic minority communities. Jeff Matthews from Orbit Housing Association explained that: -
- “The local authority are unaware of the scale of the housing problem due to many members of ethnic minority communities not coming forward. There are a number of stereotypes around such as Asians being looked after by extended families whereas they are less forthcoming in registering themselves as homeless. Young British born ethnic minorities have a very different outlook to parents who migrated here and this can create tension in households”.*

40. He provided the example he knew of a young Asian female who had slept on friends' floors and in cars when she was made homeless rather than approaching the council for assistance. Agencies need to be aware that ethnic minority communities, for many reasons, may not be registering themselves homeless when they do require help. This is huge area where there is very little knowledge or accurate data. We believe that the housing department should explore the specific needs of Medway's black and ethnic minority community in partnership with organisations such as the Medway Race Equality Council and Ethnic Minority Forum (**recommendation 23**).

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND OTHER AGENCIES

1. In addition to statutory organisations that provide housing services to young people in Medway, there are a host of other public sector and voluntary organisations that play an important role in providing support. This chapter outlines what is provided in addition to that delivered by housing providers and the housing department of Medway Council and makes conclusions about the importance of ensuring that such support is not lost.

Kent Community Housing Trust

2. Breda Joyce of the Kent Community Housing Trust (KCHT) gave the group a detailed breakdown of the work the organisation carries out with young people in need of support through the 'Moving Forward' project. This provides housing assistance and advice to care leavers aged 16 – 21. They deal with approximately 30 – 40 young people at any one time and they see themselves as a :-

“One stop shop for young homeless people, we’re not a provider but get young people in touch with providers after assessing their needs. We run workshops (budgeting/sexual health/cooking etc) for them, things that they require which will help them gain the life skills to move into independent living”.

3. We understand that negotiations are on-going with Medway social services to secure funding that would protect the future of the project. Under the Leaving Care Act, the local authority now has a duty to provide such support to care-leavers. The group would hope that the future of 'Moving Forward' could be secured by continuing to support financially the excellent work KCHT does (**recommendation 24**).
4. The following case study illustrates the plight of one young man known to KCHT. It highlights the importance of intervention at an early stage and the consequences of agencies such as social services refusing to take responsibility for an individual: -

"A young man was accommodated in a children's home and following a falling out he was kicked out at the age of 15 and a half. He went to the social services department only to be told that his social worker was on long term sick leave. He walked out of the office and was not heard of until he came to the moving forward project when he was 16. Social services had assumed that he had been living with his grandmother, when in fact he had been sleeping at friends, breaking into vans to sleep in the back etc. Because he was not in care on his 16th

birthday social services said that they did not have responsibility for him. Eventually he got a B & B placement, but was evicted from there and slept rough on the streets for several months from where the drug dealers got him hooked by giving him free heroin. This led him to start stealing to feed his habit. From this stage prison for him was the only way out – so he committed crime deliberately to give him a chance to get off the drugs and have a roof over his head."

Housing aid and advice centre

5. The charity Shelter run the Housing Aid and Advice Centre which is located in Ordnance Street, Chatham. They provided the group with figures on enquiries during 2002 from 16 – 24 year olds and these are attached as appendix C. In total there were 89 enquiries from Medway residents of which 25 were from 16 or 17 year olds. In his evidence to the group Dean Cooke explained that they felt that: -

"There is a range of supported schemes but there are gaps in terms of joined-up move-on accommodation. Affordability of rents is a real problem. Supported schemes are great but they are only temporary and the real challenge is to have affordable move-on accommodation. The single room rent restriction means that young people find it incredibly difficult to afford appropriate housing. After having high level of support – young people are expected to move on and they need a smooth transition which in reality is difficult to achieve".

6. The issue of having affordable accommodation to move into following a supported housing tenancy is a crucial one. Several providers also highlighted lack of availability of 'move-on' accommodation as a problem and this often meant that tenants had to stay longer than necessary in their properties. This then obviously creates the problem that spaces are not being freed up for those in real need of supported accommodation. There are no immediate easy solutions to the lack of affordable housing, in the South East of England in particular, this has been a problem for a long time.
7. One issue the Shelter representative highlighted which was of concern to the group was about a lack of consistency of information being provided to themselves and clients about available accommodation. He explained that: -

"We find that clients are given information about properties that are not available. We are often told one thing by the housing department about availability and another thing by the housing benefits section".

8. There clearly needs to be better consistency about information the council is providing. In particular, information being given by the housing benefits Department should be up to date and accurate **(recommendation 25)**.

9. The important work carried out by voluntary organisations such as Shelter and KCHT needs to be recognised. Without their valuable services more young people might be persuaded to turn to crime **(recommendation 26)**

Teenage mothers

10. At her request, Medway Council's Teenage Pregnancy Co-Ordinator, Lyndsey Woolmore, asked to give evidence to the group about the work being carried out to improve housing support being provided to teenage mothers. She highlighted recent government guidance that had been issued on 'good practice in supported housing for young mothers'. She explained that she was currently seeking to identify where all teenage mothers are housed in Medway, to ensure that they had appropriate support as the local authority had a commitment to house all under-18 lone parents.
11. In total there are approximately 300 under-18's young mothers in Medway – 48 per 1000, which is higher than the national and Kent average. She highlighted that: -

“Teenage mothers require a care package to improve parenting skills and try to break cycles where children of young single mums are also becoming pregnant at a young age. A system is required for housing associations to let the council know about individuals who fall into this client group”.

12. The group suggests that information held by the housing benefits section would be of use in seeking to identify the whereabouts of all teenage mothers in Medway. It is hoped that this information could be made available to the teenage pregnancy co-ordinator **(recommendation 27)**.
13. The teenage pregnancy co-ordinator and Jeff Matthews of Orbit Housing Association also informed the group about a new project that was being run by Stonham Housing Association – Elizabeth Court in Wayfield. This facility has twelve one bedroom flats for vulnerable young women, who have children, are pregnant, care leavers or have other specific needs. The group welcomes this new facility that caters for a group with clear needs that has been funded through the supporting people programme.

Rent guarantee schemes

14. The council acting in the role as a rent guarantor is a controversial issue. The group understands the benefits of social services acting in this role, as it enables 16/17 year olds to be accommodated by housing associations who otherwise would not accept them. However the group heard from various officers of the dangers and problems which have

been experienced in the past that has made YOT in particular reluctant to perform this function.

15. Certainly the providers spoken to were keen for social services to act as a rent guarantor. A number informed the group that other local authorities were more forthcoming in providing rent guarantees than Medway was. Karen Bays, Assistant Director (Children And Families) informed us that: -

“We have been caught out with significant bills for damage in the past. Previously the authority did tend to throw money in this direction, to get the young person set up in a flat without any support. Perhaps this is the wrong approach as it tends to set up a young person to fail, as they’ll have a party etc and breach the terms of their tenancy. Legal advice has been to discourage us from performing this role due to past experience and the liability it places us in”.

16. The general shift appears to be away from providing accommodation that does not have any form of support whatsoever. In respect of care leavers there are plans to provide rent guarantees for some individuals leaving local authority care. This is welcomed, as are instances where the local authority can persuade a young person’s parents to act as a rent guarantor. Overall, the approach of the council on this issue is supported (**recommendation 28**).

Social Services support to social landlords

17. The group believes that social services and other council departments should recognise that a supported housing provider is far more than just a landlord. Evidence heard by the group from David Mottley of English Churches Housing Group highlighted that in his view: -

“We get a lack of support from other agencies particularly social services. We understand that they’re extremely busy but it’s extremely difficult to support a person without the help of other agencies”.

18. Assurances were given to the group that there is currently a very low vacancy rate in the teams that deliver services to vulnerable young people. It is clear that whatever support is provided to young people with acute needs such as mental health problems, there is always more that could be done. Within the resources available, services should be targeted at those in need and the concerns of landlords about support being provided to their tenants should be taken notice of.
19. In discussions held with Councillor Angela Prodger, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, prior to the production of this report, she highlighted the important links that existed with the health sector in ensuring that effective support was given to young people with mental health problems. This is one of the most common reasons that leads to youth

homelessness and the group is happy to support such a recommendation (**recommendation 29**).

Remand foster schemes

20. In late 2002, the government announced via the Youth Justice Board that they would like local authorities to explore the provision of remand foster care schemes. This would act as another potential option for a young offender leaving custody. Karen Bays, Assistant Director (Children And Families) is very keen to develop such schemes and the group would welcome the introduction of such initiatives (**recommendation 30**). She indicated that funding could be accessed through the Supporting People programme for this purpose.

Family mediation

21. A key measure to prevent the circumstances in which cases of youth homelessness arise is to work with families to resolve problems that might result in a young person leaving the family home. During the course of the review the group were pleased to hear that a bid had been successful for a project that would provide support to parents in their homes.
22. This is an area that the group are keen for the council to expand its work in and were interested to hear that 25% of Children's Fund (which targets 5–13 year olds) funding now had to be directed into initiatives that would prevent offending behaviour in later life. If more support could be offered to families to enable them to stay together as a unit, this is much better than the children becoming the responsibility of the local authority care system. In purely financial terms, it makes an enormous amount of sense to invest in preventative measures early on. By looking beyond short term prevention, the local authority and society at large could be reaping huge savings in a reduced number of individuals who require some form of state intervention.
23. Lyndsey Woolmore, Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator, added the additional dynamic in that there are particular circumstances in which young mothers feel they have to leave the parental home. She highlighted that: -

"Young mothers will often want to move out of their family home because their parents are trying to act as a mother/father to that child. Mediation needs to be a high priority to resolve family problems".
24. This should be an urgent priority for the council over the next few years. The group urge officers to build on existing mediation work and increase the range of provision in this area over the next few years (**recommendation 31**).

Connexions

25. The Connexions service is in its early stages of implementation across Medway. The service offers greater support to 13–19 year olds through personal advisors and it is important to recognise that it is this age group that the review has largely focused on. Connexions has the potential to increase access to sources of funding for preventative work. Outreach youth work should be focused on helping young people resolve accommodation problems as well as generally playing an important role in crime prevention. Kent Community Housing Trust certainly would welcome any additional support that could be provided via Connexions funding. The group would urge those delivering the service to be aware of the positive impact that outreach youth work could have in improving housing support to young people in Medway (**recommendation 32**).

The Laming Report

26. During the course of the review, the report into the Victoria Climbié inquiry chaired by Lord Laming was issued. Whilst the majority of the recommendations focused on the inadequacies of current child protection arrangements at a number of agencies, one recommendation was relevant to this review. Recommendation 40 of that review refers to the need for local authorities to assess the suitability of temporary accommodation for children. It is widely expected that a government white paper will soon be issued on child protection and whilst this is awaited, it is important that the council responds positively to this recommendation and ensures that children are not placed in accommodation that has not been assessed for its suitability (**recommendation 33**). The white paper is expected to strengthen the YOT agenda generally, in recognising its important role in preventative and interventionist action.

Young asylum seekers

27. Breda Joyce of the Kent Community Housing Trust (KCHT) informed the group of the work her organisation carries out in Medway in supporting young asylum seekers through the 'Finding your Feet' project. They assist 220 sixteen or seventeen year old asylum seekers (all male) in the Medway area providing crucial supported help for these young people. The majority are accommodated within local communities in houses of multiple occupancy.
28. She highlighted how they also support 60 or so asylum seekers aged eighteen or above. Currently, funding for this purpose is being provided by the Home Office but there is a possibility that this could be withdrawn in the near future. The group is concerned about the prospect that these young people would effectively be made homeless by the withdrawal of support. We would urge the Home Office to recognise that removing vital support could lead to increased criminal activity.

29. The importance of providing support in terms of education was also discussed with the Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator. She carries out work with KCHT to help young asylum seekers understand the differences in values between their host community and this society. In particular, important work is carried out with this group in the area of sexual health through preventative strategies.
30. Young asylum seekers have particular needs that need to be addressed. Failure by agencies in these support mechanisms could result in increased criminal activity by a group who may see this as their only means of survival. The group applauds the work being carried out to prevent this from happening (**recommendation 34**).

CONCLUSION

It is a big challenge to find appropriate accommodation for vulnerable young people, especially in the south east of England where demand tends to outstrip supply and affordability is a real problem. We have taken a broad look at the availability of supported housing and concluded that whilst there is a great deal of best practice in terms of individual projects that cater for particular client groups, the overall picture is one where most schemes are full and receive far more referrals than there are places.

David Mottley of the English Churches Housing Group summed up what needs to happen, saying that: -

“A planned approach is required to address young people's accommodation needs, with a range of agencies involved. Things fail when organisations are not working together, and someone is required to lead this process. In my view leadership would ideally come from the local authority. More sharing of best practice in relation to approaches to youth housing are required”.

Whilst the group saw evidence of many different agencies working hard to increase the range of quality accommodation options available to vulnerable young people, in a number of areas there is felt to be a lack of a ‘joined up approach’. Many of the recommendations deal with working practices and the need to be aware of potential funding opportunities that may be currently under-utilised. The most important recommendation to come out of this review, is the need for a young person’s housing officer to be based within the housing department. Currently there is no central point of contact for clients or housing providers in dealing with the specific needs that young people have.

The thirty four recommendations in the report are the result of many hours of discussions with the key players that deliver housing services and offer support to vulnerable young people in Medway. They cover a vast range of subjects including the quality and range of supported housing, links between persistent offending and lack of permanent accommodation, the needs of specific groups, referral processes and the role of social services and voluntary organisations.

Support is the key word. A young person is left isolated and vulnerable in unsuitable temporary accommodation there is an increased likelihood that they will turn to crime. A number of housing providers indicated that they are keen to expand their supported housing provision for young people in Medway. We would urge council officers to work with them to make these intentions a reality in the form of an increased range of high quality accommodation that vulnerable young people will want to live in.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REVIEW

1. The housing department and youth offending team are urged to continue to develop protocols to improve services for vulnerable young people and to investigate whether multi-agency protocols on the housing of priority groups can be developed.
2. Officers are urged to use the information contained at appendix B on approaches at other local authorities, to inform the development of best practice at Medway in relation to the housing of offenders leaving custody.
 - 2a. A letter be sent to the North Kent Magistrates Court asking magistrates to be aware of the importance of suitable accommodation when dealing with young offenders.
3. All statutory agencies should recognise the clear correlation between homelessness and youth crime and be committed to improving the availability of supported housing, which according to police representatives and other witnesses, provides the young person with a better chance to break criminal habits.
4. We believe there is merit in the council carrying out further work to examine rates of recidivist behaviour amongst individuals who are provided with supported housing in contrast with those who are not.
5. In light of evidence heard from police representatives that a large proportion of young offenders have been permanently excluded from school, we would urge the Education and Leisure Directorate to make a priority the work being carried out to reduce the number of permanent exclusions in Medway, which are currently well above the national average.
6. Officers are requested to investigate potential sources of funding for a 'young persons housing officer' post to be located within the housing department. This post is to act as the central point for young persons issues for both clients and council partners.
7. The Endeavour Foyer is an excellent facility for young people requiring supported housing. More foyers of this nature are required as demand clearly outstrips supply in this area
8. In addition, foyers that cater for more demanding young people (such as those with drugs/mental health problems) are also required.
9. There are insufficient supported housing places available to young people in Medway. The council should work closely with providers who have shown an interest in increasing the range of high quality supported accommodation.

10. A clear need has been identified for a direct access hostel or 'crash pad facility', which can provide temporary shelter to those with nowhere else to go who have been evicted from their home or released from secure custody.
11. All statutory agencies should recognise that vulnerable people in non-supported housing require some form of floating support to assist them in living independent lives.
12. Advisory information for young people should be produced and provided to them when they start a tenancy. This should cover their responsibilities as a tenant as well as what is provided by the council and housing association.
13. Closer links should be established with private landlords to increase the likelihood that they will accommodate vulnerable young people, particularly in houses of multiple occupancy.

14. The Assistant Director (Community Services) is requested to invite the Kent Community Housing Trust to attend a meeting of the Landlords Forum, so they can outline floating support they provide and attempt to resolve funding difficulties they are currently experiencing.

15. The availability of Housing Corporation capital funding is welcomed and providers are encouraged to increase their range of provision in Medway through centrally held funding pots.
 16. The group notes the latest position concerning arrangements the council has in place with MHS homes and urges both parties to continue to work closely in the future in order to offer Medway residents effective and efficient housing services.
 17. Referral processes should be smooth and providers should be given as much information about clients 'on a need to know basis' as is permitted under current legislation. This should also include referrals from outside Medway.
 18. There are concerns regarding systems in place to notify housing associations of information about non-schedule one tenants. We would wish to ensure that all staff and providers understand indications on referral reports which ask the housing association to seek further information about the tenant.
 19. Cross boundary agreements with neighbouring authorities should be established so costs involved in housing young people from other areas can be recharged and effective communication established.
 20. Bed and breakfast accommodation offers a short-term accommodation solution for homeless young people if an appropriate package of support is provided.
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21. The group is concerned about the length of time that category A priority homeless applicants had to wait to be housed in permanent accommodation. It urges officers and the portfolio holder for health and community to reduce the periods that such cases are placed in temporary accommodation.
22. The Assistant Director (Community Services) is requested to examine whether trial tenancy schemes similar to those run by MHS Homes are being delivered by the council and if they are, that work is carried out to measure the effectiveness of such schemes.
23. The housing department is urged to work closely with the Medway Race Equality Council and Ethnic Minority Forum to identify housing needs of ethnic minorities that may not currently be addressed.
24. We would urge Medway social services to continue to support financially the excellent work being delivered by the Kent Community Housing Trust through their various schemes such as 'Moving Forward' and 'Finding your Feet'.
25. Information being provided to clients on available accommodation should be consistent, up to date and accurate at all times.
26. The crucial role that voluntary sector organisations have in providing housing advice and support should be recognised. Non-statutory services play an important role in helping young people access accommodation and lead a life free of crime.
27. The Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator should request information from the housing benefits section that would help her with the task of locating the whereabouts of teenage mothers across Medway.
28. The group recognises the difficulties associated with the council acting as a rent guarantor for a young person, but welcomes proposals being developed by the Assistant Director (Children And Families) that will enable the local authority to act as a guarantor for young people leaving its care.
29. The council should work closely with the Medway primary care trust to ensure that effective support for young people with mental health problems is in place, as this constitutes one of the most important contributory factors that leads to homelessness.
30. The review welcomes the development of remand foster schemes as another option for ex offenders leaving custody.
31. Focus should be concentrated on reducing the number of children going into care following the breakdown of family relationships. Social Services and Education are urged to carry out more mediation work in

parental homes to reduce the number of potentially homeless young people in the future.

32. Those responsible for delivering the Connexions service should investigate whether there is potential to provide outreach youth workers that could complement existing housing advisory services available to young people.
33. The council should urgently address recommendation 40 of the Laming report into the Victoria Climbié inquiry that relates to the assessment of the suitability of temporary accommodation.
34. It is important for the council to work closely with statutory and voluntary groups that provide housing services to young asylum seekers.

Appendix A

Review of youth housing provision in Medway – evidence session summaries

Summary of evidence from session with ‘Sherrie’ – 11 November 2002

1. The following is a summary of the evidence heard by the group during a session with a 20 year old individual called Sherrie on 11 November 2002. This was arranged so members could hear the views of a young person who was a care leaver, had been involved in youth crime and had experienced difficulties in finding suitable accommodation.
 2. She highlighted that in her experience it was very difficult to get problems sorted out by the council and that the housing department do not address the needs of young people. After being forced to leave her boyfriend's family home, she had approached the housing department for accommodation and had been added to the homelessness register. However, no accommodation was forthcoming and for a six month period, she and her boyfriend stayed with an acquaintance in his one bedroom flat. The onus was on them to sort things out and put pressure on the council to provide accommodation for them.
 3. She felt that a Young Persons Housing Officer would be an asset to young people in Medway, as it is perceived that this individual would be able to address problems quicker and act as a central point of contact, rather than being passed from department to department. Her experience, as well as that of her peers, in dealing with the council was highlighted as difficult, with everything taking a long time to resolve, copious amounts of forms to fill in etc. Housing benefit was a problematic area as young people often did not understand the rules and regulations surrounding benefit payments.
 4. Friends have had similar problems in getting help from the council. One had been placed in a bedsit with lots of drug takers. The general experience is that it takes a long time for action to be taken to re-house or do something about such activity. She felt it was a good idea if an initiative such as a behaviour contract was introduced – where the provision of accommodation was dependent on a young person not getting involved in crime.
 5. Choice based lettings are welcomed, because it might give a young person more options rather than simply being allocated a place to live. However the sheer lack of accommodation was a concern, with right to buy legislation resulting in the loss of council housing stock that is usually not replaced.
 6. Ian Sparling outlined the support that is provided to those who come into contact with the YOT. What is clear is that young people who have
-

not committed a crime, don't receive this level of support from the council. The authority should be providing better support in terms of advice on housing issues to young people before they become known to YOT.

7. The group is of the view that the YOT should be focusing on preventing young people becoming involved in crime, not acting as an advisory service to young people on housing issues. Sherrie highlighted that when she moved into her current accommodation, a housing officer from Orbit went through the tenancy agreement with her. The group will wish to explore the extent of support provided by the council in its own properties.

Evidence received from Mary Whitfield – Head of Operations – AVALON Housing Society on 18 December 2002

AVALON Community Enterprise is a member of the Novas-Ouvertures group which comprises 14 organisations, which cover a range of services including direct access hostels, those fleeing domestic violence, ex-offenders, floating support and opportunities for social enterprise.

Their work in Medway includes the Swallow Project in Strood, which has involved the establishment of a community centre on a housing estate, which provides mother and toddler groups, after school clubs and courses for local people. Provision of housing for young people in Medway involves three projects: -

- An 11 bed unit for families -- Marlborough House which receives referrals directly from Medway Council.
- A 4 bed shared house 'The Base' – one place is reserved for a referral from the Youth Offending Team (16+)
- A 22 bed foyer scheme (not exclusively for young people) – Crescent House. These are self contained units for 18 – 35 year olds. Three flats are wheelchair accessible and these may be allocated to a parent and child if no referrals are received from clients with a physical disability.

Key issues highlighted by the witness: -

- They are hoping to establish a new supported housing unit for young people in conjunction with the Youth Offending Team and Supporting People Team in Medway.
- Crescent House – receive relatively few referrals from the housing department (3–4 per year), lots of self referrals and also referrals from other housing associations such as Stonham – as this is viewed very much as a second stage by some referral agencies as the flats are self contained and provide a stepping stone to fully independent living.
- In respect of the Base there are lots of self referrals, who have to be referred elsewhere due to lack of capacity. Moving people on from this facility can prove to be difficult. Tenants staying longer than absolutely necessary mean that a vacancy isn't freed up for those that are in particular need of it.
- Residents do have a 24 hour call-out facility should this be required
- Avalon also provide a tenancy sustainment scheme for young offenders in Medway.
- People tend to stay in their properties for 18 months to 2 years on the whole.

- Referrals from the council's housing department tend to operate smoothly. Problems are often experienced when dealing with other agencies such as Social Services who are reluctant to pass on information about referrals. This meant that AVALON had very little information about the needs of a person being referred to them.
- Initial discussions have been held with the YOT to explore the possibility of expanding accommodation provided to the 16 + group. It's recognised that the current provision of one bed space for the YOT was inadequate. This would involve a 24 hour scheme along similar lines to the Base project. Potential properties were currently being examined. Funding was available via Supporting People from the Housing Corporation to expand provision in this area. The Safer Communities Fund also can provide funding for support to young people, which is illustrated by the current tenancy sustainment scheme.
- She felt that a dedicated young persons housing officer would be an asset as all referrals could be channelled through to one person who understands the client groups needs. This person could act as a link to different agencies which had the potential to greatly improve partnership working. A main advantage would be that one point of contact would be established for client and other agencies. Currently the association would speak to several officers to resolve a clients situation.
- They would like to develop more supported housing in Medway. In Margate, they have an 8 flat scheme which houses referrals from the Probation service. This is a good positive scheme, something that they would like to replicate in Medway. In terms of funding, it's felt that the Probation Service should contribute towards such schemes. Only through close partnership working can a greater range of accommodation options be offered.
- In Lewisham they have a good range of accommodation available. They work closely with this local authority and provide a direct access hostel. The association also provides employment opportunities and training for residents. Novas operate a hostel trainee scheme for to which current and ex-service users can apply. This currently operates in London but Avalon are hoping the scheme may be extended to Kent in 12 – 18 months time.

Evidence received from David Mottley – Manager, The Quays, Sittingbourne –
English Churches Housing Group on 18 December 2002

English Churches Housing Group is a large housing association. They have lots of sheltered homes and general needs housing as well as a cold weather shelter in Rochester.

Main facility of interest to the group is Towers Point, The Esplanade, Rochester. This is a 15 bed scheme for 18 – 65 year olds, targeting vulnerable people, although at the moment most residents tend to have mental health problems. Short hold tenancies are provided, although there are some longer term residents which in a way is problematic. There are 2 full time staff who offer key working on a one to one basis – so the scheme does provide a high level of personal support from 9am – 5pm.

Key issues highlighted by the witness: -

- The group have had referrals in the past from Social Services. No 16/17 year olds have been referred and the group would consider housing them if some form of rent guarantee could be provided by the council. There is also an issue with damage, as rent guarantees would not cover this and these are self contained flats where the cost of repairs could be considerable.
- Rent guarantees would be useful for the group to house referrals from social services, as if an application for housing benefit was refused, then Social Services would cover the rent. At the end of the day, we need to be sure that we will receive the rent owed.
- The Quays is a 84 bed 24 hour hostel in Sittingbourne. Residents are aged between 16 and 65 from all sorts of backgrounds, including ex-offenders. Twenty flats are included in the hostel which act as accommodation from which people can get used to living independently again and then move into the local community.
- 16/17 year olds have been housed at the Quays, but this group poses particular challenges. A big hostel is not an appropriate form of accommodation for this age group as they are hard to manage and likely to cause the neighbourhood more problems. In my experience many agencies recognised that this age group had more needs.
- A planned approach is required to address young people's accommodation needs, with a range of agencies involved. The potential post of young person's housing officer could be the driver to deliver a more joined up approach. Things fail when organisations are not working together, and someone is required to lead this process. In my view leadership would ideally come from the local authority. More sharing of best practice in relation to approaches to youth housing are required.

- ECHG currently does not have a policy on housing 16/17 year olds although this was an area recognised as needed. A project established by the group in Bromley for this age group had been a failure for a variety of reasons (lack of planning, inappropriate location, no CCTV). They are trying to learn from these mistakes and take forward a corporate approach to this age group in future. Locally the group does house 16/17 year olds however.
- We find that we get a lack of support from other agencies particularly social services. Understand that they're extremely busy but it's extremely difficult to support a person without the help of other agencies. A problem they experienced was a lack of information sharing. Whilst understanding the need for confidentiality, social services should be able to supply more details on a need to know basis. We are not just a landlord and this needs to be recognised by other agencies.
- Supporting People is likely to give ECHG more income to recruit staff that are required.
- There is a need to move towards providing supported accommodation in units much smaller than the Quays. Obviously if they are too small they are unviable – but it's important to recognise that people can get institutionalised in large hostels. We are currently looking at providing a supported scheme at the old cinema, Chatham. This would be a 30 bed direct access hostel.
- We feel that for the Youth Offending group – some form of direct access is required. It's no good asking people to come back in a few weeks – these individuals need to be able to access provision immediately.
- The ECHG executive is keen to take forward youth provision and housing corporation funding is available. Research carried out by us shows high levels of youth homelessness in the local area.
- Our relationship with Medway Council is good. It's incredibly important for them to recognise that only by working together can we achieve solutions.
- Important to recognise that it is often not a good idea to put a 16 year old with a 25 year old in accommodation. A 16 year old has specific needs – and many referred to us we are unable to house. They end up in bed and breakfast accommodation and this is clearly an unacceptable situation. A network of support for clients should be established, where agencies trust each other and feel confident about sharing information. We find that agencies in London Boroughs are far more willing to share information, perhaps because problems are more acute, but if they can why can't we?

Evidence received from Noeleen Beedle – Project Manager, HOPE Housing Society
on 18 December 2002

HOPE is a charitable organisation which provides supported accommodation to homeless ex offenders in Kent. They work in partnership with the Probation Service and accept referrals of those leaving custody from 18– 80.

It is not a direct access facility and referrals must come via the Probation Service. In total there are 18 bed spaces in Medway and Maidstone, accommodation is of a high standard being well furnished and support is minimal with staff available between 9am – 5pm (although officers are contactable outside hours).

The organisation offers emotional support as well as practical help with filling forms and generally helping the client reintegrate into society. They have links with Kent guidance and Fairbridge. The maximum period clients will stay is 12 months and 25% of residents are in their early 20's. Many referrals are often under a probation period of eight weeks – which if successful is followed by a 6 month tenancy.

Key issues highlighted by the witness: -

- HOPE do not specialise in young people's housing and rarely (if ever) accommodate 16/17 year olds. The contract now agreed with the Probation Service means that only over 18's can be accommodated.
- They take risks on a number of referrals by housing some very high risk individuals. Close working with the Probation Service is crucial in being able to accept these individuals – HOPE does not cherry pick those with the least challenging behaviour.
- HOPE cannot take self – referrals. People do approach us and if they do not have a probation officer they are referred elsewhere. The scheme does not provide a high degree of support so clients with huge needs (ie mentally ill) are not suitable. The main purpose of this project is to help offenders reintegrate into the local community.
- If YOT wanted to refer a 17 year old to HOPE – they could consider it, but a decision would rest with the association's management. Normally they would refer such a case to others who specialise in this area. There is a capacity issue, with insufficient places for the number of referrals made.
- We have helped lots of young people move on and have a good relationship with MHS Homes for clients to access their properties following the completion of their tenancies with HOPE.
- There are grants available from the Housing Corporation for HOPE to develop more housing provision in Medway.

Evidence received from Andy James (Director of Youth Housing) and Arthur Kitson (Interim Head of Housing) – MHS Homes Ltd on 18 December 2002

MHS Homes Ltd has approximately 7000 properties, 21 sheltered schemes (including a young persons foyer) and is in the process of building another Foyer in Rochester – which is opening in the spring.

The Endeavour Foyer is a 27 bed facility which opened in May 2000. It has received 288 applications since it opened and has housed 79 of them. One third of these have been young offenders or young people at risk of being offenders.

Key issues highlighted by the witnesses: -

- Young offenders need more extensive support than can be provided at a conventional foyer. The Endeavour does not provide extensive support to this group.
- The Springboard project opening in May will concentrate on provision for care leavers. It will be a pre-foyer focusing on this group. In future MHS is interested in developing a scheme for young offenders.
- We aren't convinced that a model has been found which really addresses the needs of young people. The Foyer approach does provide education and life skills for residents.
- The Endeavour Foyer has been funded through SEED English Partnerships who have provided a great deal of the capital – while the whole cost of the facility has been underwritten by MHS. Financial support has also been provided by the Bank of England and local firms. Posts are funded from various sources, the lottery and other trusts and this has enabled us to provide intensive support to these young people. There are a total of 7 members of staff who cover the Foyer 24 hours and the project breaks even without any financial support from the local authority.
- Our philosophy in running the foyer is to offer more of a carrot than a stick. Main problems experienced have been linked to drugs and very little vandalism occurs despite rooms being well furnished and maintained. There is no cut off period for when residents have to leave the Foyer and the average stay is between 9 and 18 months. Importance is attached to the foyer not resembling an institution.
- We've had successes in young people going to university. One young person has a space held open for him at the Foyer to come back to during holidays. Flexibility in your approach is important.
- MHS would like to open a Foyer in Gillingham, as we recognise that there is a distinct lack of supported housing schemes in this part of

Medway. A lot of young people approach us who would like to live in Gillingham and there is a clear gap in provision here.

- We tend to find that under 25s in MHS housing stock have experienced problems and feel that this group tend to require more support. Through Supporting People we anticipate that funding will be available for floating support.
- MHS would expect the local authority to act a guarantor. We'd like this to be available more often than is currently provided.
- MHS has run a trial tenancy scheme for two years. Tenants get regular visits and this has allowed us to house many who we would have refused tenancies to in the past.
- Provision of housing for young people in Medway is generally poor.
- Problems with the council's Housing Department are largely with communication. MHS have young people turning up at its offices and we have to act in the role of the local authority in assessing a young persons options – particularly for 16/17 year olds. We are often the last port of call after the young person has been to the council. Another issue is Social Services who will ring on a Friday afternoon wanting a client housed on that day – this creates difficult pressures to deal with.
- There is a feeling that MHS are viewed with suspicion by council officers and it's felt that this is due to historic reasons. Our main complaint is that we're often given a referral with very little information, so we have no idea about the persons history. This is extremely worrying for our officers as they are not aware about clients who might pose a risk to their safety.
- The charitable arm of the organisation does a lot in terms of youth housing provision. The business side does allow under 25s to be tenants but this group is viewed as having more needs which need addressing.
- We are supposed to be getting a computer link in place with the council soon. This has been delayed and it's not clear when it will be implemented. MHS has also been trying to get an agreement on homelessness for the last six or seven years. We do not feel it's a level playing field as the council requests that MHS makes available 50% of its properties to the homeless waiting list, whilst the council will only make 25% available to the homeless.
- A key concern is that social landlords receive funding from the council towards new buildings, whilst MHS effectively pay the authority a 'fine' as a result of covenants on land. We do not feel this is fair when MHS is paying 100% of the costs to house individuals on the homeless waiting list. This is crazy, surely council officers can resolve this situation and treat MHS in an equitable way.

- Under Choice Based Lettings – MHS is happy to make its properties available, but we are not prepared to effectively hand over all vacancies to be filled from the homeless waiting list. This is a real problem for us we do not know the background of individuals and are not prepared to allow all our properties being filled by many who MHS has had problems with in the past. We find that individuals who have been evicted by MHS are still referred to us by the Council. This is not acceptable.
- In respect of young offenders, we do get some referred and have housed them. Our housing officers provide a degree of support to them – particularly to ensure that they are able to keep their tenancy.
- Young offenders need a package of support not just appropriate housing. We'd like to provide a range of accommodation options to young people – a bridge to our normal stock is important, as it is not productive to simply give the young person the keys and let them get on with it.
- General referral notes from the Housing department are good, but we require more information when a person with specific needs known to the Social Services is referred to us.
- Our perception is that officers of the council often don't feel empowered to provide information to us. Data protection is an important consideration, but elsewhere we are treated more like partners and provided with more details.

Evidence received from Jeff Matthews – Operations Manager for Kent – Orbit Housing Association on 13 February 2003

Orbit has 92 homes for people making homeless applications in Medway. It is a general needs provider which does not have a great deal of specialist provision due to the limited size of the association. There are around 600 rented homes owned by the association in Medway.

A new scheme at Elizabeth Court, Wayfield has commenced. This provides twelve one bedroom flats for vulnerable young women, who have either been thrown out of home, pregnant and care leavers. Stonham have been selected to provide support funding for which is provided by the supporting people programme.

Key issues highlighted by the witness: -

- Orbit will not grant tenancies to anyone under the age of 18 unless a rent guarantor comes forward (either an individual or institution). Would be happy to work with any organisations that could come forward to act as a guarantor. Normally under 18's would be referred to supported schemes – where Orbit is currently stronger in the Midlands than in Kent.
- It is a national association and there is experience in other areas of social services acting as a guarantor in more cases than in Medway.
- A real concern is that young people are housed at a time when they have a package of support provided by social services. This will then often evaporate when they are perceived to be settled in permanent accommodation. Orbit is aware of history of many young people whose tenancies fail due to lack of on-going support.
- Focus needed to be concentrated on move on accommodation from supported schemes such as Elizabeth Court. Orbit works closely with the council (with quarterly meetings) to assess the needs of this client group.
- Orbit don't see the specific need for an officer focusing on young peoples needs, however what would of great assistance is a single point of contact of referral for clients.
- There is insufficient move on accommodation available in Medway. For young and single people to be considered vulnerable, care needs to be taken not to place large numbers of individuals with particular problems, otherwise there could be a tinderbox effect. Supported housing support for young people needs to be far more intensive than we can provide.
- There is no such thing as a standard young person. Their needs are extremely varied and trying to find a scheme that fits all is incredibly difficult.

- There is concern that a scheme such as Elizabeth Court can be a 'honeypot'. Therefore a physical presence is required to ensure that problems do not arise from unwanted visitors etc.
- The Housing Corporation funds new developments and it is possible for us to embark upon new schemes in Medway. The process involves talking to Medway Council about needs, then a site needs to be identified and a bid is put together which requires the local authorities support. Unfortunately, in recent years bids from other associations have been favoured above ours, such as replacing the housing at Carpeaux Close, Chatham.
- We get a lot of people who want housing advice (approximately 4/5 per day) – they are directed towards statutory authorities. In the south, Orbit effectively operates as a gatekeeper because demand is high and no waiting lists are kept for properties.
- We have a direct IT link with the local authority, so when there is a vacancy Orbit can look at the council waiting list and fill it from there.
- Future provision is worrying. With the total pot for supported housing being ring-fenced, there is a worry that agencies will not invest in support at an earlier age to prevent problems in later life.
- Behaviour contracts are a potentially useful means to help young people be successful in their own tenancies. We work well with social services – but services for young people are difficult and bureaucracy is an issue.
- If the council can get into the homes of young people and help them deal with problems before they are thrown onto the streets, it will be cheaper in the long run.
- Orbit work closely with the Race Equality Council on black and ethnic minority housing needs. There are a number of stereotypes around such as Asians being looked after by extended families and in his experience they are less forthcoming in registering themselves as homeless. Young British born ethnic minorities have a very different outlook to parents who migrated here and this can create tension in households.
- Need to assess whether the council offices are culturally welcoming and accessible to ethnic minorities. This is a massive area which the local authority are unaware of the scale of the problem due to many members of the ethnic minority communities not coming forward.

Evidence received from Lyndsey Woolmore – Teenage Pregnancy
Co-ordinator on 13 February 2003

Key issues highlighted by the witness: -

- The council is finding it difficult to keep track of the number of young mothers in housing association accommodation. Research is being undertaken to identify where they are and ensure that they are being provided with sufficient support. They require a care package to improve parenting skills and try to break cycles where children of young single mums are also becoming pregnant at a young age. A system is required for housing associations to let the council know about individuals who fall into this client group.
- A policy has been issued by the DETR on housing teenage lone parents. As a local authority we have a commitment to house all under 18 lone parents.
- There are approximately 300 under 18's young mothers in Medway – 48 per 1000, which is higher than the national and Kent average.
- Elizabeth Court project is targeted mainly at the 16 – 19 age group, but they do accept up to 25 year olds.
- Work with finding your feet project which helps young asylum seekers. Rates of teenage pregnancy are higher in areas where large numbers of asylum seekers are housed. There is a need to educate these young men about differences between British society and where they originate.
- Also need to deliver effective sex education in schools. There is a real disparity of quality being delivered in schools and I am working hard to improve standards.
- Move on is extremely difficult due to the lack of accommodation available to move on to in Medway.
- They are aware of a few 13/14 year olds – who tend to stay with the family. If in care the mother will receive the required support.
- Young mothers will often want to move out of their family home because their parents are trying to act as a mother/father to that child. Mediation needs to be a high priority to resolve family problems, prior to a homeless situation arising.
- A dedicated young persons housing officer would be fantastic. Issues could be addressed far easier, when Elizabeth Court is fully up and running there will be high demand for places which will need to be managed.

- My role is to implement the teenage pregnancy strategy, responsibility rests with the housing department for addressing housing needs of young mothers.
- It is a myth that young people get pregnant deliberately to obtain housing from the local authority. This happens very rarely and no research shows a clear indication that this takes place in many cases.

Evidence received from Karen Bays – Assistant Director (Children and Families) on 13 February 2003

Key issues highlighted by the witness: -

- Improved communication is in place now between the Housing Department and the Youth Offending Team with protocols being developed. Planning takes place prior to a young person leaving custody and there is an appointments system so officer time is not wasted waiting to have an ex-offender's needs assessed. Also impressed that supporting people scheme is addressing more the needs of client groups such as ex-young offenders.
- The task group has been very helpful in facilitating a better working relationship between the housing department and Youth Offending Team.
- Funding of £83,000 will be available under quality protects from 2003/04 to look at supported accommodation or remand foster care. Our leaving care grant (1.5M for 2003/04) could be utilised for the proposed Young Persons Housing Officer – this may be possible. There are also other potential funding opportunities for this post and I am happy to explore with others means to secure resources.
- Bed and breakfast accommodation is not ideal if not supported by additional support, there is concern about isolation for young people. This concern can also exist in any form of accommodation where no support is provided at all. Good bed and breakfast accommodation can in some circumstances be better than a flat with no support. How you support the young person is more important than the type of housing.
- There are some arrangements with private landlords in Medway – we're keen to build on existing support so it's another option.
- I have signed as guarantor for looked after children. We have been caught out with significant bills for damage in the past. Under the leaving care act in the past the authority did tend to throw money in their direction, to get them set up in a flat without any support. Perhaps this is the wrong approach as it tends to set up a young person to fail, as they'll have a party etc and breach the terms of their tenancy. Only for a handful of young people have Social Services acted as a guarantor. Legal advice has been to discourage us from performing this role due to past experience and liability it places us in. We tend not to set young people up in a flat on their own anymore. We have been successful in a few cases in getting the parent to act as a guarantor.
- There would be a role for supported accommodation officers to help young people keep tenancies. Again this is something that can be

investigated by officers for funding options. Possible funding opportunities exist from : -

- Supporting people
 - Leaving care
 - Quality protects
 - Connexions
- I am very interested in thinking ahead and exploring ways to prevent young people becoming involved in crime in the first place. 25% of Children's Fund money now needs to be spent on initiatives designed to prevent offending behaviour in later life.
 - Additional funding through supporting people allows us to build in support for an ex-offenders, possibly in the form of remand fostering schemes.
 - We have under utilised beds at Stonham Housing in the past for ex-offenders and may need to examine the service level agreement.
 - The Climbie inquiry will strengthen the Youth Offending Team agenda, the government is expected to shortly issue a white paper on child protection which will address recommendations such as the need to assess the suitability of temporary accommodation where a child is involved.
 - **Housing needs to be linked with education and employment as this will make a young person far less likely to do anything to jeopardise their tenancy. Accommodation needs to be specifically geared towards the needs of individuals, with floating support provided if this is required. We cannot simply give a young person a key and hope they make a success of their tenancy.**
 - Mental health needs are important to be addressed in this context because this may provide the means for a young person to sustain their tenancy. There has been a significant increase in the grant and we will be looking for a proportion of this to go to help young offenders.
 - SEN invest to save proposals are important for long term prevention strategies. We need to recognise links between providing good locally provided education facilities for such children. Attainment is lower if they are educated out of the county.
 - We have some funding to develop remand fostering. I am interested in exploring ways in which this can be set up – as it is unlikely that the conventional family would be a suitable way of proceeding with this initiative
 - Confusion arises often on information sharing between agencies. Information sharing between council departments has improved. In terms

of passing on details to housing providers, this should be given on 'a need to know basis'. With 16/17 year olds they would need to be consulted before passing information on however. Young people need to have explained to them that it is useful for a provider to be aware of their background and specific needs they have. We are looking to develop a protocol with MHS homes on information sharing with respect to schedule one offenders – this will be discussed at a forthcoming child protection area committee

- We have a low vacancy rate in Children and Families and have a full compliment of staff in the newly established care leaving team dealing with 16+ young people. We have recently strengthened the level of service to these young people since the government made it a requirement to establish this team.
- There were high expectations of Connexions, but in reality those known to social services are not allocated an additional personal advisor. There may be a possibility that this service could provide additional support around the prevention side. Ian Sparling is on the Kent and Medway Connexions Board and is well placed to influence decision-making.

Evidence received from Alison Breese – Assistant Director (Community Services) on
18 February 2003

Key issues highlighted by the witness: -

- If vulnerable, isolated and don't have support the young person could perpetuate their vulnerability whatever that may be. Out of 54 cases currently in bed and breakfast accommodation, 41 are either couples or single young people – only a small number of families. Young people are increasingly presenting themselves as homeless.
- Bed and breakfast accommodation is currently used primarily for people whose homeless applications are being assessed. If they are accepted (40 – 50% success rate), then permanent accommodation is found as soon as possible.
- Changes in homeless legislation mean that young people are automatically a priority group. Since the change we anticipated a 20% increase, but at the moment it has led to a 35 % increase which has had a tremendous impact upon the service. The housing aid and advice centre has been good in providing information to young people, but it has somewhat backfired as they are encouraging everyone to make a homeless application. This is something that will need to be reviewed.
- There are lots of existing links with private landlords that we have, and the YOT have their own arrangements too. They have a role to play and there is a mixture of options available for client groups including young vulnerable people.
- I feel that the real fundamental issue to address is not accommodation, but the support provided. Floating support is very important and should play an increasing role in offering greater assistance to young people. In terms of schemes for ex-offenders, the YOT should identify where support is required and refer potential projects to the housing department.
- I would support the concept of a Young Persons Housing Officer provided it was part of the Housing Department. We have made a bid for a Vulnerable Persons Officer and would suggest that this where the need should be focused as this would cover young people due to older persons needs being addressed separately.
- There are specific protocols for sharing of information with respect to schedule one offenders, these include specific contract arrangements with the police, probation and housing. The sharing of information is on a need to know basis. Where there is particular information which the housing department wants to share but do not wish to place on file (as this could prejudice a nomination application), advice is given to contact

the relevant officer for further details. Officers need to make judgements about what is appropriate to disclose.

- Funded by the Homelessness Department, work is in hand to develop joint protocols that will facilitate improved joint working for vulnerable client groups, which will include young offenders.
- Members of YOT have attended homelessness team meetings and vice versa to improve communications.
- The council can progress supported schemes based on house of multiple occupancy.
- There has been a great deal of progress with MHS Homes since their representatives had spoken to the group in December 2002. I had emailed John Sands for an update on a number of issues. The covenant issue has now been resolved and the signing of the homeless agreement is imminent. The issue of proportions of homeless persons which MHS had to accept was set when the stock transfer took place in the early 1990's.
- In contrast to the message given by a MHS witness, I believe that the working relationship with them is quite good with significant improvements being made in recent times. We are working together to try and resolve the bed and breakfast issue and are liaising to make move on easier as people tended to get stuck in the system. Progress is also being made on choice based lettings and developing similar IT systems, although the latter is proving difficult to achieve.

Evidence received from Dean Cooke – Shelter on 18 February 2003

Key issues highlighted by the witness: -

- Shelter provided figures for the group which showed 89 homeless enquires from 16 – 24 year olds during 2002. Of these 25 were 16 or 17 year olds. Gender breakdown was also of interest to the group.
- Clients had either been referred by the council or other statutory agencies (MHS/Citizens Advice Bureau/Housing Associations) or had heard about the centre through friends/family etc.
- We have open door drop-in surgeries where people come or advice can be given over the telephone. Services are concentrated in Medway and Ashford, so this is where the majority of enquiries come from.
- The Community Legal Services Partnership is funding a telephone advice line for housing advice covering the Thames Gateway. This is a new initiative that is in addition to the current service provided by Shelter.
- Information relating to clients background may be able to show if they have an offending history. We occasionally get referrals from the Youth Offending Team – they are viewed as part of the probation service and due to the close proximity of the organisations.
- There is a range of supported schemes but there are gaps in terms of joined up move on accommodation. Affordability of rents is a real problem. Supported schemes are great but they are only temporary and the real challenge is to have affordable move on accommodation. The single room rent restriction means that young people find it incredibly difficult to afford appropriate housing. After having high level of support – young people are expected to move on and they need a smooth transition which in reality is difficult to achieve.
- Resources are finite – there are only so many places so the tendency can be to place an individual somewhere even if it might not be particularly appropriate. Legislative changes with supporting people – it remains to be seen what effect this is going to have.
- There is a 24-hour help line provided by Shelter nationally and often they get referrals from this line to the centre.
- We have attended court with a young person in the past to get a young person back into a property they have been evicted from. We tend to deal with landlord/tenant disputes, but also deal with on occasion immigration and social services enquiries. Recently have had enquiries from 'finding your feet' project where 18-year-old asylum seekers have to find their own accommodation. We are finding there has been a recent

increase in the numbers of young male asylum seekers requiring housing advice.

- We receive many queries from prisons on behalf of individuals before they are released. Visits to prisons take place and the prison service is encouraged to contact the centre for assistance when they are aware of individuals due to be released who have no accommodation to go to.
- Difficulties are often experienced when individuals seek help who the Housing Department state they have no responsibility to house, finding a solution to these individuals housing need is problematic.
- We have access to information provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau on providers that clients can take away with them. This will include details of private landlords and restrictions in place. One problem is that many private landlords will not even accept individuals who are in employment but are receiving some form of benefits to 'top up' their income.
- It would be useful to have a Young Persons Housing Officer as this would provide a clear single point of contact that they could check if the client had seen. At present we will ask if a client has seen a Homeless Persons Officer and try to get a background picture of their circumstances.
- In an ideal world there would be adequate supported housing available which is affordable. We are often told one thing by the Housing Department about availability and another thing by the Housing Benefits Section. There needs to be better consistency about the information different departments are providing.
- Our relationship with the councils Housing Benefits Section is difficult at times. We have many enquiries about benefit problems and find that clients are given information about properties that are not available. Relationships with landlords are difficult because many are unwilling to rely on being paid housing benefit for rent.
- We tend to get enquiries from individuals who have left council care responsibility and have been found accommodation where the housing benefit will not meet the high cost of the rent. These young people who have to make their own way in life often struggle to make ends meet.
- Several national projects set up around the UK – a young persons housing resource centre is in Merseyside.

Evidence received from PC Paul Spreadbridge and Superintendent Alan Willets –
Medway Police on 18 February 2003

Key issues highlighted by the witnesses: -

- Police are mainly concerned with homelessness when criminal activity is involved. We would like to emphasise that just because someone is homeless this would not necessarily mean they are involved in crime. Each individual needs to be treated separately and not criminalised as belonging to a particular group. Some studies have been carried out at national level on links between lack of housing and crime but it would be wrong to offer a clear link between those who are homeless and particular crimes.
- For a person leaving secure custody it is an easy option to turn back to crime. Peer example pressure can be placed on an ex offender and recidivist behaviour can flourish. This can be seen separately from the housing – but if they have supported housing it is one less factor that may lead them back to crime. They do also require a package of support in addition to housing support and this helps. It would be interesting to examine if when total support is given including supported housing whether recidivist behaviour continues in many cases.
- There is a hardcore of individuals who commit the majority of crime in Medway. Around the young age group the hardcore are largely made up of those permanently excluded from school.
- A large proportion of problem children come from single parent families. The likelihood is that those from more socially deprived backgrounds with experience of poverty are more likely to turn to crime. Criminal activity tends to go in cycles – with children repeating criminal behaviour of their parents. Parental support work provided by the Positive Parenting Network is excellent in helping families.
- The police help to deliver education talks in association with any body that comes forward to us (NACRO/Finding your feet etc). We will co-operate and work closely with other agencies that provide accommodation and help to point people in the right direction. It's not direct intervention work – this should be picked up by the probation service. We are also represented on Connexions and have established relationships with a wide range of partners that have an interest in such issues.
- A number of young people live in 'bedsit land' and they get by through committing crime. Often many are housed in such areas are temporarily housed after being bailed following offences.

- The homeless problem is not on the same scale as in London, there are relatively few young people sleeping rough locally. We get the impression that many sleep on friends settees at night. The Council system does seem to find some form of accommodation for homeless person.
- There are one or two areas which are important for rehabilitation. Programmes are available, ie drug rehabilitation, but young people do need suitable accommodation in order to attend such programmes. If a young person does not have suitable accommodation they are not likely to keep attending a self – help course.
- Supported housing assists in helping to break the cycle of crime. There are very few instances of vandalism at Medway Community College and the White Road estate has been greatly improved.
- Typical caseload for a Youth Crime Officer in a day. Bullying case, two cases of criminal damage, large number of phone calls that included harassment and minor assaults that require follow up work.

Evidence received from Breda Joyce – Manager – Kent Community Housing Trust on
18 February 2003

Key issues highlighted by the witness: -

- **I manage young peoples projects on behalf of KCHT which involve ‘Moving Forward’ which support 16-21 year old vulnerable young people, ‘Finding your Feet’ which supports 16/17 year old asylum seekers, also a ‘Breakthrough’ service (not currently in Medway) – which is a family mediation service for 8 – 16 years old to stop numbers going into care.**
- Moving Forward has been running for six years, providing support to young people leaving care. With the leaving care act now in force, negotiations are on-going with Medway social services as to how KCHT can continue to provide its services. Work with all the young people statutory agencies.
- We see ourselves as a one stop shop for young homeless people, we’re not a provider but get young people in touch with providers after assessing their needs. We run workshops (budgeting/sexual health/cooking etc) for them, things that they require which will help them gain the life skills to move into independent living.
- Finding your feet project supports 900 young asylum seekers across Kent (220 living in Medway). They are all young men, not many women come as unaccompanied minors as refugees. Funding is for 16/17 year olds, we also support sixty 16+ also. Whilst at 18 asylum seekers should not receive any support, at the moment they are assisted although the Home Office may shortly withdraw this funding. We do not want to be in the situation where these 18+ individuals are made homeless. Most of them have status to remain in the country.
- Our relationship with statutory agencies in Medway is as good as any. We work well and can obtain advice quickly.
- A dedicated young persons officer would be wonderful. They could be a good point for advice and deal with individual cases. One of the problems we experience is that if a young person has been in care/as been known to YOT – getting support isn’t a problem. However if a young person is not known to be a problem case and has what may be perceived to be a reasonably stable background, then it can be extremely difficult to obtain support, which is required. Our time can be tied up sometimes because we know that a young person won’t wait quite as long at the housing department if our staff accompanies them. Waiting times can be extremely long – especially in the recent run up to Christmas this was the case.

- We have not got an indication whether Connexions could provide half a youth worker for our service. If funding could be available for outreach youth work I would welcome this. We are putting a bid into the community chest to provide life skills courses
- There is a clear referral method from social services for our clients and good working relationships. The relationship with YOT is more informal – we help them to house ex offenders on their behalf. We have frequent problems with finding suitable accommodation for those leaving custody.
- A case study -
 - (i) A young man was accommodated in a children's home and following a falling out he was kicked out at the age of 15 and a half. He went to the Social Services department only to be told that his social worker was on long term sick leave. He walked out of the office and was not heard of until he came to the moving forward project when he was 16. Social services had assumed that he had been living with his grandmother, when in fact he had been sleeping at friends, breaking into vans to sleep in the back etc. Because he was not in care on his 16th birthday social services said that they did have responsibility for him. Eventually he got a B & B placement, but was evicted from there and slept rough on the streets for several months from where the drug dealers got him hooked by giving him free heroin. This lead him to start stealing to feed his habit. From this stage prison for him was the only way out – so he committed crime deliberately to give him a chance to get off the drugs and have a roof over his head.
 - (ii) This young man has only had moving forward to help him. There is concern that statutory agencies do not try to do more for these individuals, as it is in nobody's interests to have these people wanting to go to prison.
- Funding for 'finding your feet' comes from KCC. With moving people on we are concerned about moving people on into independent living without any form of support. Most funding for 'moving forward' has been through social services but also from ESF and other small pots. Funding is becoming more difficult because supporting people is diverting funding away from us. There is work to be done with Landlords to make them clear that clients are still coming to the project and some contribution is required.
- There is a massive gap in provision in Medway in that a 'crash pad' direct access facility for those who leave the police station at 2am or have been evicted from their accommodation – somewhere that isn't the street. If we can get the support KCHT would be willing to go into this. There are currently no solutions for those evicted from supported housing except 'winter warmers' which is not appropriate for young people.

- Young people coming through care, very seldom maintain their first tenancy. Often what happens is that the child suddenly gets somewhere independent to live, they get the 'yippee syndrome' and they cannot cope. Support is needed in such cases to help them not to be evicted.

Written evidence received from Sue Sears – Deputy Manager – Medway Cyrenians
on 27 February 2003

- **Medway Cyrenians house 16/17 year olds and if 16 Social Services are contacted to ask if they have a duty to provide support to the young person. Similarly if a young person has a social worker, they are involved in the development of a support plan and provide required support. A specific problem which is encountered is around benefits. Young people are often unclear as to where they apply for financial support.**
- Under 18's are accommodated, but we are aware that when moving on this is a large problem as other associations will not house without a guarantor.
- Communication is the biggest problem experienced with the council. If this was smoother a better service could be provided to clients.
- A high proportion of tenants are under 25 and a majority would consider themselves to be 'vulnerable'.
- If approached by a young person and there are no vacancies, they are referred to the Council as they are priority group. Details of projects provided by Stonham and MHS homes are also provided.
- There have been some problems experienced with referrals from the Youth Offending Team. YOT have disagreed in some cases that they have referred an individual to them previously. We are concerned that sometimes they do not have a handle on the whereabouts of their clients, when we assume that YOT is the agency tasked with helping offenders change their criminal behaviour.
- Support reduces when the young person finds accommodation which can be problematic. It is often very difficult to arrange a meeting between a YOT officer and social worker with the young person. There are not enough boundaries set for ex offenders and it is too easy for them to slip back into old habits. The relevant agencies need to offer greater opportunities for ex offenders to break their cycle of crime.
- A dedicated young persons officer would be a good idea, but they should be accessible to staff as well as the client. One point of contact could eliminate the problem currently experienced in being told different solutions to one problem by different council officers.
- Housing officers should visit supported housing providers so they are aware about facilities they are referring young people to. This could also improve relationships and improve the current situation where contact from the housing department ends as soon as a client is referred.

Summary of measures undertaken in other local authorities in relation to Youth Justice Plan – Measure Twelve (accommodation)

Bury

- Secured multi-agency protocols to help young people access suitable accommodation. This has been achieved by working closely with partners.
- Temporary Accommodation Project – partnership with Barnados and two housing trusts. Five bed spaces are available to homeless young offenders while suitable permanent accommodation is being arranged.
- Local Housing Association's provide some supported housing for young people
- NCH run a leaving care scheme with Supported Lodgings
- Quality Protects programme provides for two workers concentrating on the needs of homeless young people
- The authority believes that the lack of stable and appropriate accommodation greatly increases the risk of offending and re-offending
- Investigating the provision of a hostel to be run by a housing association in partnership with the local authority for 16– 25 year olds
- Bidding to the Safer Communities Fund and the Housing Corporation for intensive supported accommodation

Darlington

- Stonham Housing – provide semi supported accommodation to 16–25 year olds
- Have a young peoples accommodation group which includes YOT/Social Services and Housing
- Partnership with Tees Valley – to develop project to make sure suitable accommodation is available, this will involve the Voluntary sector, housing associations etc.

Dudley

- Protocols for information sharing are being developed
- Remand foster scheme being developed – this is a target in the Quality Protects Map
- Young Persons Housing Strategy being developed
- Protocols in place with the leaving care service
- Viability of a rent guarantee scheme being investigated

East Sussex

- Rent Guarantee scheme in place – making it possible for private accommodation to be accessed
- YOT using ASSET data to be aware of accommodation and housing support needs

Halton and Warrington

- 'The Way Forward' project provides accommodation to homeless 16/17 year olds including young offenders.
- YOT a participant in the inter-agency Homelessness Forum
- Officers cross-department group set up to examine accommodation issues
- Multi-agency protocols in place to address accommodation needs of young people at risk

London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

- Use acceptable behaviour contracts to tackle anti-social behaviour
- New hostel established in conjunction with a housing association with accommodation for young people aged 16 –18
- Floating support worker – funded by the Youth Justice Board – to support young people living in the community
- YOT acts as a rent guarantor
- In future, a young person leaving custody will have their accommodation needs assessed by a housing officer as a specialist assessment
- New Homelessness bill is expected to strengthen local authority responsibilities to provide accommodation to young people

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

- Have an accommodation service within YOT that has a target to reduce homelessness by 25% by 2005
- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts used to reduce disorder on housing estates
- Ensure that the Supporting People strategy makes fully incorporates the strong links between youth homelessness and crime

London Borough of Barnet

- Accommodation Officer in post since August 2001 – spends one day per week on this task. Acts as the link with local providers
- Strong links established with the leaving care team
- Barnet Community Safety Plan includes a strategic objective for the accommodation needs of 16 – 17 year olds to be met. No specific housing officer yet for this group, but would be desirable so this group could be treated as a priority
- Young peoples housing strategy group being established with YOT seeking representation on the group

Targets for future years

- The accommodation officer to have weekly surgeries for colleagues clients
- Resource directory to be produced
- Establish direct link with housing department
- Have 100% of young offenders is satisfactory accommodation by 2005

London Borough of Bromley

- YOT works closely with the Social Services looked after team who can access three supported housing schemes
- Target was to improve the recording of information so that resources can be targeted at those most at risk

London Borough of Enfield

- Designated through care officer in post to assist those leaving custody and ensure that all are placed in satisfactory accommodation
- Protocol in place with other council agencies on 16/17 year olds

- Bidding for 1.5m to provide a 14 bed secure accommodation facility for clients
- Named accommodation officer attends housing meetings to secure close working relationships
- Housing strategy for 16/17 year olds established – outcome expected that fewer young offenders will be found to have accommodation needs
- **Close working relationship with parenting service, to increase intervention so fewer young people leave the family home**

London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

- YOT HAS A 'Young Persons Housing Advisor', which is half funded by Connexions (other half by housing dept)
- Work closely with the leaving care team who deal with youth offenders leaving custody who are in public care. They have achieved beacon status for their work
- Suitable accommodation is vital to enabling young offenders to rehabilitate. However, the lack of affordable housing and hostel provision in West London often made it extremely difficult to find suitable accommodation
- Training plans for young offenders due to be released include references to accommodation

London Borough of Richmond – upon – Thames

- Youth Offending Team represented on the homelessness forum
- YOT have secured some private tenancies for clients – they receive twice a week support visits
- Partnership with the Housing department and Connexions to focus them on provision for young offenders. Currently looking to establish supported lodgings
- All young people leaving custody have their accommodation needs assessed.
- Seven 16/17 year olds did not have suitable accommodation during 2001 and studies have shown clear correlation between offending and unsuitable housing situations

Targets for future years

- Development of specialist foster placements for young offenders
- Working with the Housing Department to have 16/17 year olds recognised as a priority group
- Developing joint preventative working with Social Services, CAHMS and other agencies to increase range of accommodation options and support for families
- Staff to assist young people in independent living skills

Sefton

- Have an accommodation officer which 'provides a service to case managers, saving them time and this helps us to get a better overview of need, effective demand and supply'.
- Young Homeless Working Party set up which is chaired by Shelter – comprised of representatives of public and voluntary providers and social services
- There is sufficient accommodation in the area, but if behaviour is extremely poor very difficult to access this provision
- YOT accommodation officer is based in the housing department
- Accommodation officer has developed protocols between YOT and Housing department. This sets out policy, procedure, guidance and a communications strategy.
- YOT discussing with voluntary sector potential for additional support for young people at risk of offending
- YOT are to establish a remand fostering scheme

Stockport

- In Stockport the experience there with 16/17 year olds is that: -
'The perception is of vulnerable and homeless young people being passed around different local authority departments, failing to access services appropriate to their needs'.
- A weekly surgery is run in YOT offices on accommodation issues
- Housing Strategy has been amended to include 16/17 year olds as a priority group

Stockton

- There are huge shortcomings of provision for youth offenders in the area
- Made bid to the Housing Approved Development Programme and are carrying out research into the housing needs of young people
- Negotiating referral protocols with Stonham and Endeavour Housing associations
- Referrals from YOT are deemed to be priority homeless cases
- Under the Supporting People programme, the authority and 4 others in the North East are investigating the establishment of a joint supported accommodation programme for young people in receipt of interventions from the Youth Offending Service

Thameside

- Believe that the real extent of young people in unsuitable accommodation is massive – in a study 400 16-25 year olds were found to have experienced accommodation problems over a 12 month period
- A young peoples accommodation strategy was being developed
- Bidding for funding for a supported lodgings scheme
- Basic living skills course delivered by a local foyer, providing 15 hours per week to 5 offenders.

Walsall

- Foyer in Walsall has secured 8 tenancy agreements for under 18 year olds. This was set up through neighbourhood support funding
- Evidence shows that the correlation between homelessness and offending is generally high
- Yot has made referrals to the Family Placement Team, but it is difficult to find appropriate placements when concern about behaviour is paramount