



Homelessness Strategy 2008-2011

October 2008

Our aim:

'to make the Borough a place where people are proud to live and work'

Our Mission:

'our staff and councillors will work together with the local community to ensure we use our resources effectively, in order to maintain the Borough's economic prosperity, manage its environment, and improve our residents quality of life'

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1. Foreword

Homelessness is an important issue for Melton Borough Council. We recognise it has a negative impact on people's lives and that it can affect our communities in ways that extend beyond those households who experience it first-hand. We believe a decent home is fundamental to people's well being and forms the basis of family life.

For the Council to achieve its aims and mission, we must ensure we are meeting the fundamental needs of our communities so that they may thrive and prosper. We are committed to preventing homelessness wherever possible and finding appropriate interventions to achieve this.

We have developed a robust delivery plan detailing what we intend to do to improve our services between now and 2011. Indeed, we are extremely pleased to have produced our second Homelessness Strategy, in spite of the disruption caused by serious fire devastating the Council Offices at the end of May 2008.

The new strategy sets out what we plan to do in Melton to tackle homelessness and help those facing acute levels of housing need in our area.

As a Council, we recognise we cannot effectively tackle homelessness on our own - we need to work with other agencies and organisations to maximise available resource and target services appropriately.

Our 2008-2011 Homelessness Strategy should not be read in isolation; it has been shaped and influenced by work undertaken as part of the review of homelessness conducted in 2008. The review of homelessness is available at our website www.melton.gov.uk

Over the past 5 years excellent progress has been made by the Council, in partnership with other agencies and organisations, to address homelessness issues locally. It is with this in mind that thanks and appreciation are extended to our service users, staff, elected members and partner organisations for their input and hard work into the delivery of improved and improving services.

2. Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 required local authorities to produce homelessness strategies based on comprehensive reviews of homelessness. In accordance with the 2002 Act, Melton introduced its first Homelessness Strategy in 2003. The strategy produced in 2003 outlined how the Council intended to tackle homelessness for the following five years.

Melton conducted a further review of homelessness in 2008. The study informed the priorities incorporated in this strategy. The 2008 review of homelessness covered the following areas:

- Current and historic levels of homelessness
- Demography & diversity of homelessness in Melton
- Causes of homelessness
- What measures have been effective over the past 5 years in tackling homelessness
- Levels of demand and predictions for the future
- Available accommodation and support for homeless households
- Performance comparisons

The review has provided a holistic understanding of the challenges facing Melton in delivering effective services to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. It is our primary aim to prevent homelessness wherever possible and reduce numbers of households residing in temporary accommodation in Melton.

The life of this strategy has been limited to three years. We hope this will ensure our work remains relevant and that proposed changes to service delivery will always be based on an understanding of the current situation in Melton.

We intend to build on the work of the original Homelessness Strategy and improve the services and support available to people in our District who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

This document outlines the Council's strategy for tackling homelessness in the Borough from 2008-2011. The Delivery Plan establishes how we will meet this challenge.

3. Strategic Links

The Homelessness Strategy should be viewed in the context of its links with other strategies and plans - at local, county, regional and national level. It cannot succeed in isolation and it has been developed with reference to a range of other corporate strategies and plans. These are summarised below:

Local, County & Region:

- *Core Plan*
- *Councils Corporate Plan*
- *Housing Strategy*
- *Community Plan*
- *Economic Development Strategy*
- *Housing Service Plan*
- *Children & Young Persons Plan*
- *Community Safety Strategy*
- *Supporting People Strategy*
- *Local Development Framework*
- *East Midlands Regional Housing Strategy*
- *Leicestershire Local Area Agreement*
- *Best Value Performance Plan*

National:

The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) strategy for tackling homelessness, '*Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes, Changing Lives*', identifies 5 key areas in tackling homelessness issues:

- 1. Preventing homelessness*
- 2. Providing support for vulnerable people*
- 3. Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness*
- 4. Sustaining reductions in rough sleeping*
- 5. Providing more settled homes*

The delivery plan includes a range of actions that will help us to improve our services in these areas.

Other central government publications outlining the national agenda include: *'Sustainable Communities: Homes for All'*; *'Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities'*; *'National Youth Homelessness Scheme'*; *'National Service Framework for Mental Health'*; *'Supporting People'*.

In developing this strategy the Council also had regard to the Housing Corporation strategy *'Tackling Homelessness'* and the work of John Hills in his report *'Ends & Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England'*.

4. Our Vision for the Strategy

The Council recognises that homelessness hinders individual and community growth. Effects on individuals are not limited to housing but to health, training, education and overall self esteem. We recognise that solving one problem in isolation is not a satisfactory remedy and that people must be given choices and options. The Councils vision is to have the correct partnerships in place to maximise the potential for people to have a settled and secure home and enjoy the consequent benefits for themselves and society as a whole.

5. Working in Partnership - Stakeholders & Service Users

To ensure we have the support of our partners, we consulted widely during the course of our review of homelessness in Melton. The key priorities incorporated in this strategic document have been based not only on the Council's perspective, but on that of all relevant agencies and organisations in the Borough who work with people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. We believe we have achieved a holistic understanding of the challenges facing us. We have identified where new and improved joint working can prevent homelessness and increase available support to our most vulnerable customers.

As part of the Council's consultation programme, the review of homelessness and draft Homelessness Strategy documents were widely circulated for comment to appropriate agencies and partners and amendments made accordingly. This exercise added further value to our insight into homelessness issues locally, and how we should formulate and plan for the delivery of effective responses to key priorities.

Our service users have also been involved in the review process. We have conducted a number of telephone interviews with a sample of our customers so that we may better understand their views and experiences of the services we deliver. Perhaps more significantly, we have listened to their ideas for the future of our services and wherever possible incorporated these ideas into the strategy.

Our commitment to working in partnership and understanding the customer's experience is demonstrated in the Delivery Plan. We are dedicated to working with our partners to improve the way we serve our customers. Partnership and joint working are key themes that will underpin our operations over the next 3 years. We believe our customers will enjoy significant benefits from this approach.

6. Homelessness in Melton: The Homelessness Review

(This section condenses some key aspects of the body of work incorporated in the Review of Homelessness. The review is published separately and available on the Council's website at www.melton.gov.uk)

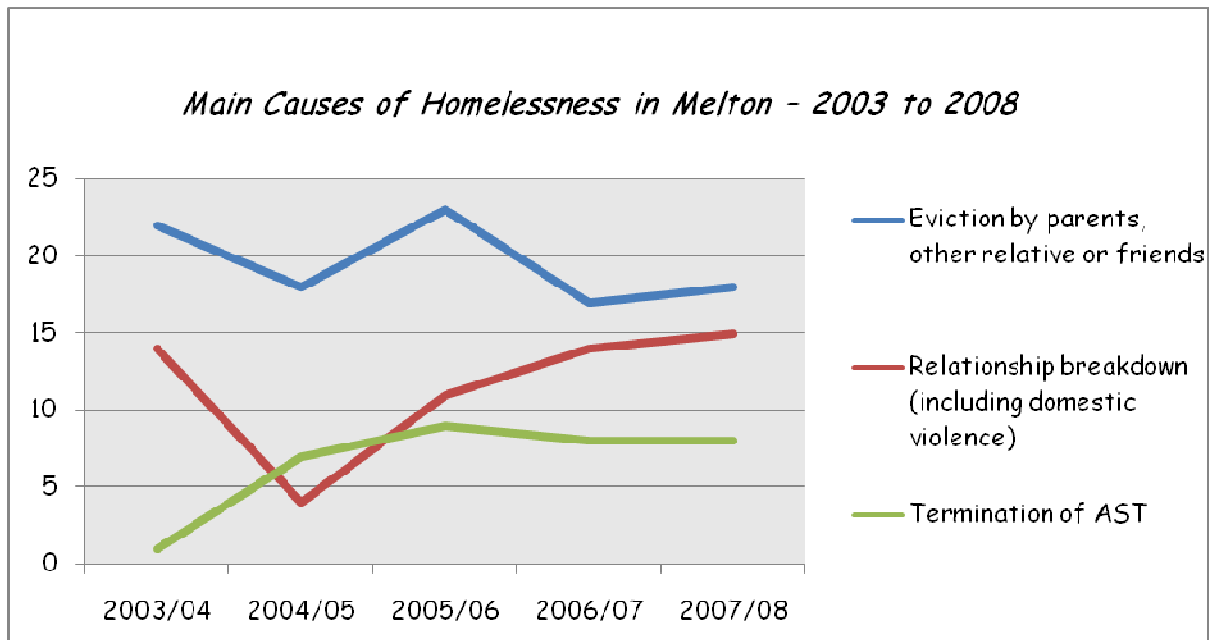
Affordability is a major ongoing problem for Melton, excluding significant numbers of people from entry level market rent and owner occupation. This has been augmented by insufficient delivery of affordable housing to meet demand, resulting in greater pressures on the Housing Service from people seeking advice with a housing related problem.

These issues increase the likelihood of family breakdown resulting in homelessness - concealed households are unable to address their own housing need. These factors contribute to rising waiting list numbers and almost certainly exacerbate levels of overcrowding and homelessness in the Borough.

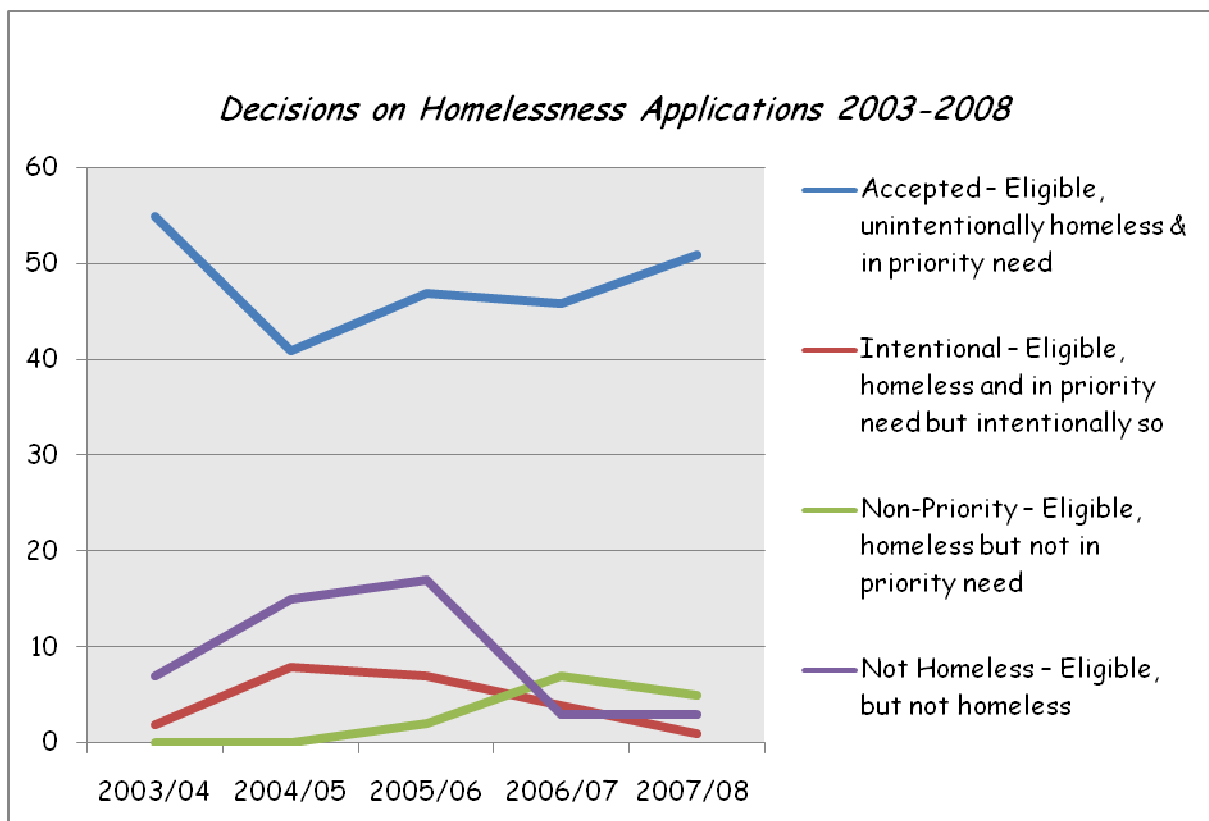
In Melton, people become homeless for various reasons. Of those, the three main causes are:

- Parental, relative or friend eviction
- Termination of Assured Shorthold tenancy
- Relationship breakdown - violent and non-violent

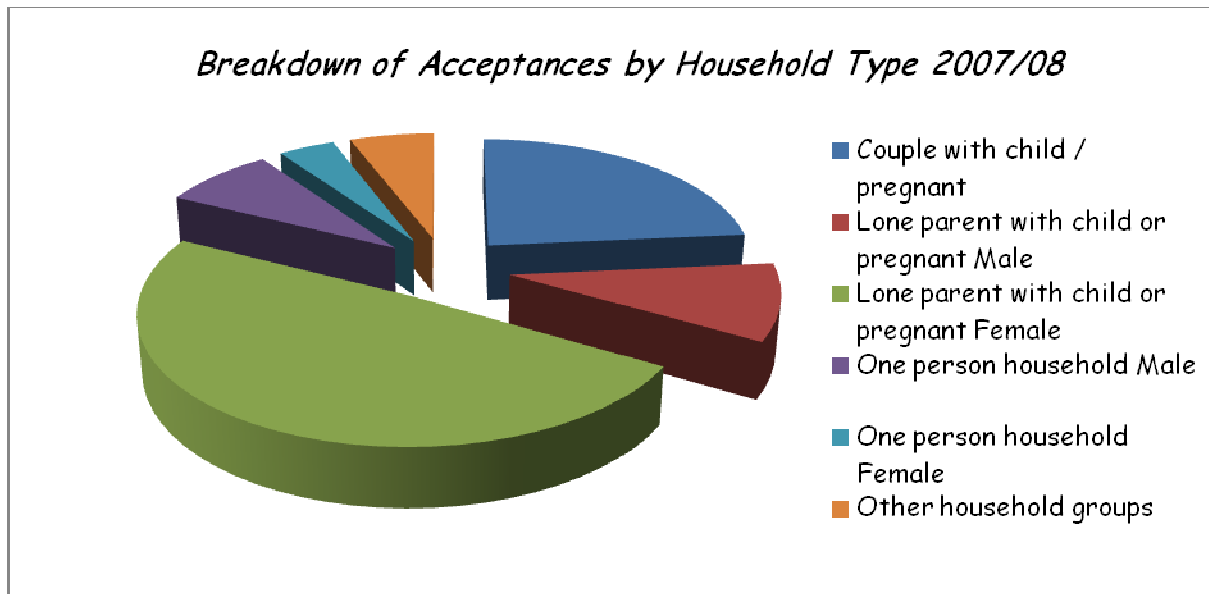
We acknowledge that the main causes of homelessness remain unchanged since the introduction of the 2003-2008 Strategy. This is also reflected by National and Regional trends. Whilst the main causes remain the same, we have nevertheless achieved reductions in the number of homeless acceptances resulting from parent, relative or friend evictions and from termination of Assured Shorthold tenancies over the past 2 years:



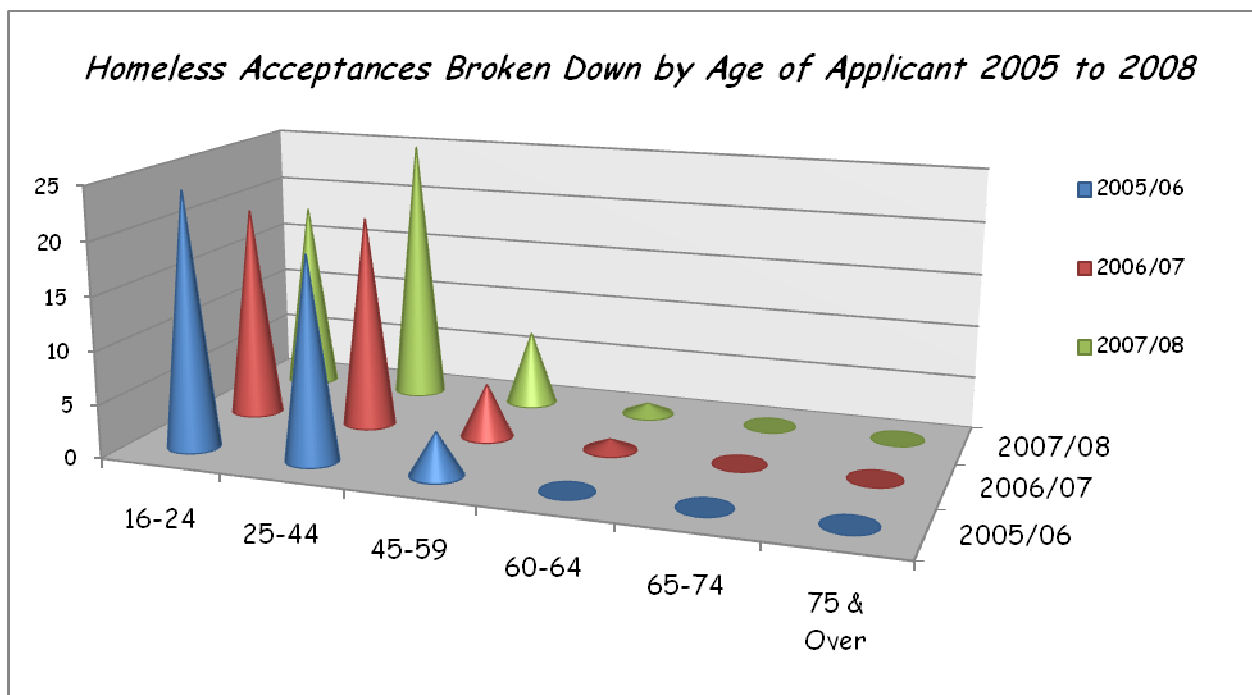
25% of households who apply to the Council for assistance under the provisions of homelessness legislation are unsuccessful, and there has been a gradual trend of increasing numbers of accepted homeless households in Melton since 2004/05:



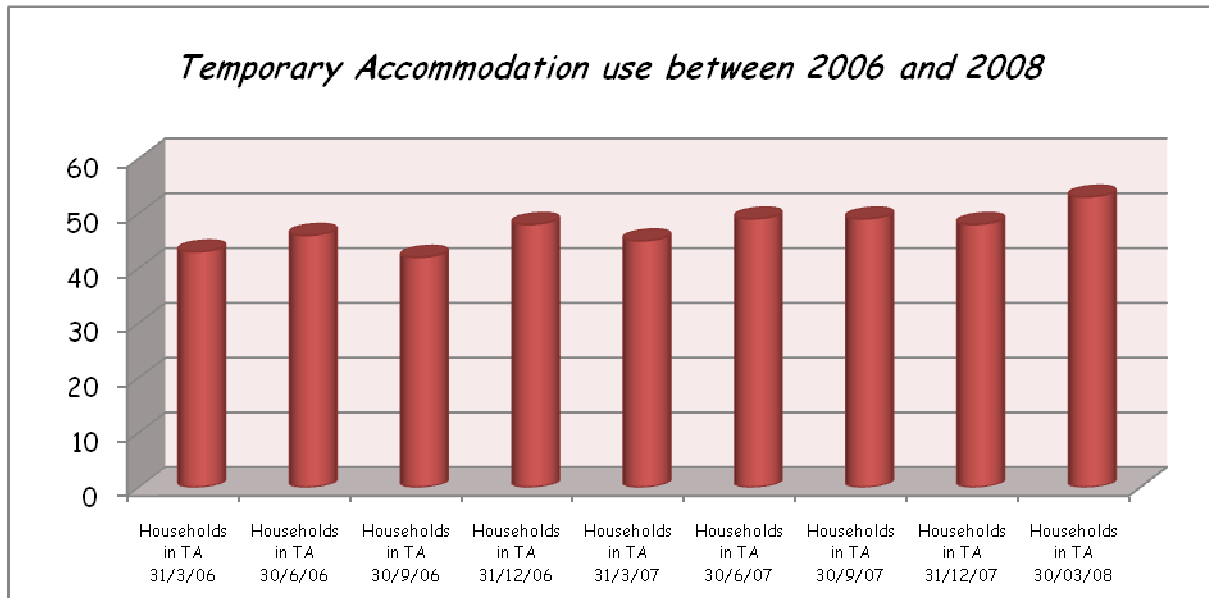
The review further demonstrated that a high proportion of homeless households in Melton include children or a pregnant household member:



In 43% of homeless acceptances, the applicant was under 25 years of age. In a further 44% of homeless acceptances the applicant was aged between 25 and 44 years of age:



There is a significant challenge facing the Council in reducing the use of temporary accommodation. Numbers in temporary accommodation have increased during the previous quarters to a peak of 59 on the 30th June 2008:



The review highlighted the key areas we must focus on if we are to improve our performance and deliver increasingly effective services to those households facing homelessness. The findings of the review have been fed into the delivery plan and inform the 8 Strategic Objectives that will drive our work over the coming 3 years.

The strategy's primary emphasis will be on preventing homelessness by targeting specific groups, fostering effective partnerships to reduce homelessness, and reducing the number of households residing in temporary accommodation.

7. Housing Services and Employment

The John Hills Report, published in 2007 has identified:

- Concentrations of worklessness and deprivation on social housing estates
- That despite higher standards many people are actually less happy with their neighbourhoods and their homes
- That our communities are not sufficiently mixed
- That there is a real need to do more to overcome worklessness and to promote mobility
- The proportion of people in social housing on a low income has risen dramatically
- Half of social households of working age are economically inactive.

In Melton we are concerned about these issues. Whilst we enjoy relatively low levels of unemployment when compared to the region, we are keen to ensure we are providing a modern housing options service to our customers.

Whilst there are clear challenges for the Council in delivering Housing Options to prevent homelessness and reduce temporary accommodation use, we are nevertheless interested in working towards the Enhanced Housing Options approach and adopting the new ideas that are coming from central government.

We will consider:

- What information is available around worklessness as it relates to homelessness in the Borough?
- How can the Council provide advice to job seekers and 'better off at work' advice as part of options interviews?
- Could more joint working with Job Centre Plus staff help to address this problem?
- What other partners could the Council engage to tackle worklessness?

8. Strategic Objectives

Taking on board the research undertaken in the Review of Homelessness, the Council has agreed the following key priorities for the Homelessness Strategy. They underpin the Delivery Plan.

- ❖ *Homelessness prevention*
- ❖ *Maximise the use of existing housing stock*
- ❖ *Develop the Housing Options Approach*
- ❖ *Engage the private rented sector*
- ❖ *Tackle numbers of households residing in temporary accommodation*
- ❖ *Improve partnership working*
- ❖ *Understand the customer journey*
- ❖ *Value for Money*

9. Resources

The Council has a number of resources available to us to tackle homelessness, and recognises that to successfully implement the Delivery Plan we will need to consider what other resources we can access. The resources available now are:

- *General Funding from Council*
- *CLG funding through Homelessness Grant and any other funding available in light of the current economic climate*
- *Partnerships with other agencies allowing us to tap into and benefit from the resources of others*
- *Service savings through a spend to save policy*

10. Monitoring and Review

We are committed to ensuring this strategy remains a live document that will lead to perceptible change. To ensure we do this, clear plans have been established to monitor not only our progress but also the impact the strategy is having on homelessness provision in Melton.

The Council focuses on improving performance in a number of key areas. Performance is measured through a set of nationally and locally developed performance indicators.

Housing Options performance is monitored by Management Team on a monthly basis and Best Value Performance Indicators are monitored quarterly through the standard corporate process.

The Council will publish annual reviews of the strategy to update our customers and stakeholders on progress towards the delivery plan.

11. Equal Opportunities

It is the aim of Melton Borough Council to ensure that no-one applying for advice or assistance with housing is treated less favourably for any reason. The Council is therefore committed to giving equality of opportunity and ensuring that it does not discriminate against any person on the grounds of sex, sexuality, disability, race, religion or ethnic origin.

