

Tackling homelessness

Spelthorne's Homelessness Strategy 2003-2006

1 Our vision

1.1 Homelessness is the Borough of Spelthorne's first housing priority. This means mobilising the effort and resources of the whole Council and all our partners to:

- Prevent homelessness
- Provide adequate, affordable homes
- Offer effective advice, information and other support services
- Cater for all groups of people who are, or may become, homeless.

1.2 The background to, and rationale for, this strategy come from the review and audit of homelessness we carried out in 2002/03. This was a joint exercise with our neighbouring authority, Runnymede Borough Council. A copy of the full review report is available to view on request at the Housing Advice Centre at the Council Offices and is also on the Council's website at www.spelthorne.gov.uk.

1.3 The strategy takes forward the key recommendations from the review. It is Spelthorne's response to the challenges set out in the Homelessness Act 2002 and other Government targets.

2 Delivering the vision

2.1 We will focus planning and action on three areas to deliver this vision:

- *Preventing homelessness* - to enable people to stay in their homes
- *Providing a safety net of good quality services* - for people who do become homeless
- *Reducing and minimising homelessness* - through long-term inter-agency working.

2.2 The charts below set out the commitments we have made through ten strategic objectives, and identify other options for action and research.

2.3 The strategy spans three years, but we expect to review it during this period, to respond to changes in guidance, resources and other local strategies.

3 Partnership

3.1 Achieving this vision is beyond the scope and capacity of a single-tier housing authority. So partnership with statutory, voluntary and private partners and service users lies at the heart of our approach. Most of the commitments listed below can only be achieved through close and active inter-agency working. We are particularly keen to promote and support Surrey-wide responses to homelessness.

4 Preventing homelessness (target dates shown in italics)

Key challenge
Transform the culture and design of services so that early action and prevention of homelessness become the norm.

Strategic objective 1
 Establish early contact with people facing homelessness as normal practice across homelessness and related services.

Strategic objective 2
 Establish appropriate prevention activities to address the biggest causes of homelessness. Pilot, monitor and review new prevention initiatives.

Strategic objective 3
 Improve the quality and availability of housing advice services.

- Commitments**
- Review procedures and practices to ensure early contact with people facing homelessness (2003/04)
 - Carry out home visits for all family/licensee exclusions (2003/06)

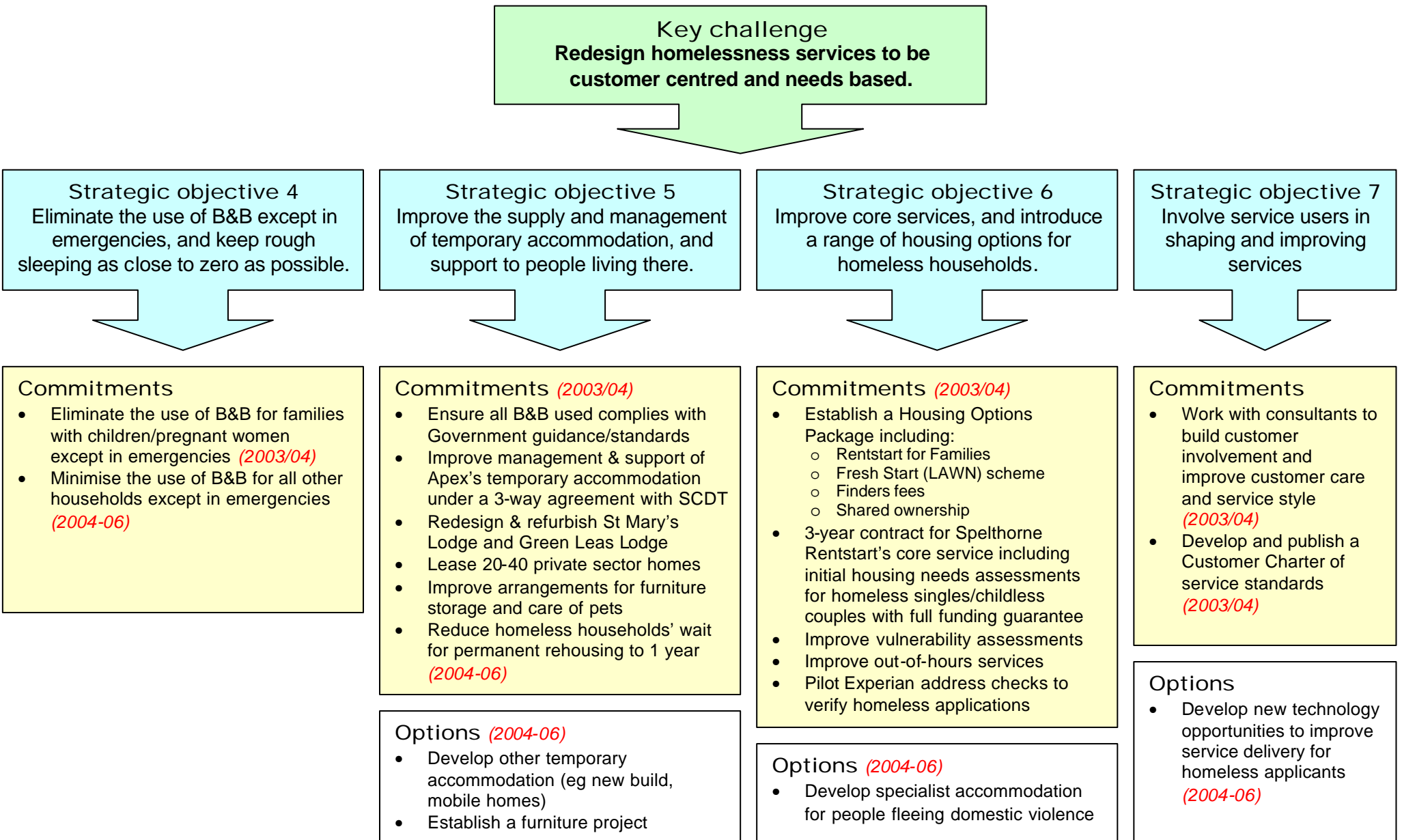
- Commitments**
- Review success of Homeless Households Family Mediation pilot (2003/04)
 - Review effectiveness of LB Camden second tier private rented sector housing advice consultancy pilot (2003/04)
 - Establish outreach services to victims of domestic violence (2003-06)
 - Pilot the provision of an officer in Housing Benefits dedicated to homelessness prevention casework, and supporting customers with finding and keeping accommodation by maximising benefit entitlement and the use of Discretionary Payments (2003/04)
 - Enable local access to emergency legal advice/injunctions (2004-06)

- Options (2004-06)**
- Establish a 'Spend to Save' Homelessness Prevention Innovation Fund from the Bed & Breakfast budget

- Commitments**
- Improve housing advice recording systems to capture statistics on homelessness prevention (2003/04)
 - Increase specialist housing advice training for Housing Needs staff (2003/06)
 - Develop a Housing Advice Strategy in consultation with relevant agencies (2004-06)

- Options**
- Establish a housing advice service at Staines County Court (2004-06)
 - Draw up a Service Level Agreement with Spelthorne Citizens Advice Bureau for their housing advice provision (2004-06)
 - Seek a Community Legal Service Quality Mark for the Housing Needs Section (2004-06)

5 Providing a safety net of good quality services (target dates shown in italics)



6 Reducing and minimising homelessness (target dates shown in italics)

