
DARLINGTON HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2010-15

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Bill Dixon,
Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Members approval and support of the Authority's Homelessness Strategy 2010-15.

Summary

2. It is a Government requirement that all local authority areas have a homelessness strategy and that the local authority leads on the development of this strategy. Darlington's current homelessness strategy was last updated in 2006 and work has been undertaken in the last year to develop a Homelessness Strategy for the area that will operate between 2010 and 2015. The development of the Strategy has been co-ordinated by the local authority but has been supported by a Steering Group with representation from the public, private and voluntary sector.
3. The Steering Group completed a review of homelessness in Darlington and found that the authority is meeting or exceeding all Government targets relating to homeless prevention. It was also identified that the Council's Housing Options Team has consistently achieved top quartile performance nationally with regards to homelessness preventions. The review did identify a number of areas where there were opportunities to further develop homeless prevention work and these included:
 - (a) increasing access and awareness of preventative homeless services,
 - (b) continuing to reduce the number of households experiencing housing difficulty as a result of family breakdown and
 - (c) increasing housing related support for individuals with complex needs.
4. The findings of the review have led to the development of three strategic aims and a number of objectives which will be delivered through an Action Plan over the next three years. The Action Plan will be monitored by a multi-agency steering group that will meet quarterly.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that Members approve the Homelessness Strategy 2010-15.

Reasons

6. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:-

- (a) National policy supports the development of homelessness strategies by local areas.
- (b) The strategic direction to tackle homelessness outlined within the Strategy incorporates the key priorities and best practice identified at national, sub regional and local level.

Cliff Brown
Director of Community Services

Background Papers

- (i) Communities and Local Government Strategy – No One Left Out: Communities Ending Rough Sleeping (2009)
- (ii) Communities and Local Government Strategy – Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives (2005)
- (iii) Tees Valley Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2009)

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S17 Crime and Disorder	The content of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This can be demonstrated through the multi-agency approach taken within the action plan for homeless prevention for prison leavers and families with anti social behaviour orders.
Health and Well Being	The Primary Care Trust had representation on the Homelessness Steering Group, the body responsible for completing the Homelessness Strategy. The Steering Group itself is accountable to the ‘Healthy Darlington’ Theme group of the Local Strategic Partnership. The impact of homelessness on both the physical and mental well being of a household is well documented and many of the objectives with the Homelessness Strategy have either direct or in-direct impacts on the well being of potential homelessness households.
Sustainability	The Strategy emphasises strategic issues linked to sustainability and homelessness such as maximising use of social and private rented accommodation to meet existing and future housing need.
Diversity	The Housing Options advice service remains accessible and free of charge to all local people subject to, or threatened with, homelessness.

Wards Affected	All wards will be affected by the actions contained within the Homelessness Strategy.
Groups Affected	Many of the actions resulting from the strategy will provide services that can be accessed by all members of the public. There are also specific actions for groups identified by the Government as particularly vulnerable such as families potentially suffering from domestic abuse or prison leavers.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Budget or Policy framework.
Key Decision	This is a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The prevention of homelessness is a significant factor in the health and well being of local people, improving “life chances” including access to training and employment, improving personal safety, and, reducing the likelihood of anti-social behaviour.
Efficiency	<p>The homelessness preventative agenda reduces the damaging effects of homelessness to families, individuals and communities. Positively engaging with local people who are homelessness, or, are threatened with homelessness, can reduce the level of expenditure associated with homelessness and deliver positive results for customers.</p> <p>The introduction of the Key Point of Access (KPA) allows a more efficient and appropriate use of temporary / emergency accommodation locally. Appropriate “matching” of customers with supported accommodation allows relevant services to be delivered to customers and allow planned moves to alternative accommodation to be managed at the appropriate time.</p>

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Background

7. In 2002 the Government introduced the 2002 Homelessness Act. The Act required local authorities to complete a review of homelessness and develop an appropriate strategy and action plan. These actions are required to be completed at least every five years. The current Strategy was last updated in 2006.
8. Recognising the importance of working in partnership to tackle homelessness, a Steering Group was established and given the responsibility of completing both the Homeless Review and Homelessness Strategy. The members of the Steering Group were from the public, private and voluntary sector and spanned a range of disciplines. The first role of the Steering Group was to complete a thorough review of homelessness in Darlington, as required by Communities and Local Government's (CLG's) Homelessness Code of Guidance. This review included a thorough analysis of the current and future levels of need, supply and resources for homelessness services.
9. This review was completed between February and May 2009 and the analysis of its findings, along with a comprehensive review of national sub-regional and local strategies and guidance relating to homeless, formed the basis of the Homelessness Strategy. Between June and October 2009 the Steering Group developed the 2010 Homelessness Strategy.

Current Position

10. The review identified that in relation to all key performance indicators set by the Government, the authority is meeting or exceeding targets. For example the target to half the number of statutory homeless households in temporary accommodation by 2010 was met in 2006. However, this position continues to be monitored regularly and new local targets to develop the service further are being pursued.
11. Government have also committed to the vision of ending rough sleeping by 2012 and Darlington achieved this target in 2006. A rough sleeping count completed in line with Government guidance in 2006 did not identify any rough sleepers in Darlington. While this does not confirm that there is no rough sleeping in Darlington, as numbers recorded below ten rough sleepers can be recorded as a "zero" return and the survey is only a snapshot view, it does indicate that the number of rough sleepers in Darlington is very low and not a significant element of the homeless population locally. Indeed successful joint agency initiatives like "Below Zero" have provided guaranteed temporary accommodation for any homeless person should the external temperature fall below zero degrees on any given night in Darlington. It should be noted that to ensure Darlington continues to maintain and improve its performance towards rough sleeping a light touch rough sleeping count is being considered for 2010.
12. The Authority's Housing Options Service is achieving top quartile performance nationally on a range of National Indicators. The number of households identified as statutory homeless each year has fallen from 126 in 2005-06 to 17 in 2008-09. The reduction in

statutorily homelessness customers can be significantly attributed to the preventative work of the Housing Options Service providing invaluable free advice and assistance to a yearly average of around 800 households between 2007-08 and 2008-09. Of the households presenting to the advice service, homeless preventions were achieved in 6.98 per thousand head of population in 2008-09 translating to top quartile performance nationally. The most common reasons for households being potentially homeless were relationship breakdown, end of assured shorthold tenancies and asked to leave by friends or family.

13. The Council's continued success in homelessness preventative work means that relatively few households actually become homeless. The review identified that the most common cause of homelessness in Darlington is domestic abuse and this reflects the need for victims to sometimes find a place of safety very quickly. The review confirmed however that victims are aware of and have confidence in accessing the domestic abuse services available. Other violence, breakdown in relationship with friends or family and termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) are other common causes of homelessness in Darlington. The review also identified that the most common support needs of those who had become homeless were substance misuse, mental health issues and services tailored for younger people.
14. The main reasons for households seeking housing advice were related to relationship breakdown, the end of an AST and living in housing in disrepair. The most common support needs of those seeking housing advice were people with physical disabilities and younger people aged 18-24 years.
15. The Homelessness Strategy shares the same vision as the Council's Sustainable Communities Strategy and that is to provide opportunities for all to maximise their potential, and, help meet aspirations for all local people, ensuring that the disparity in the health and well being across the Borough is addressed and narrowed. The Homelessness Strategy 2010-15 is a key delivery vehicle towards delivering the aims and objectives of the Sustainable Communities Strategy.
16. The Homelessness Strategy 2010-15 recognises the diverse nature of the Homeless customer, their needs and requirements and provides a framework to deliver and manage services and resources to meet identified local needs. Whilst local services are relevant, accessible and appropriate, the Council continues to gather information about their Homeless clients, analyzing the Homelessness customer profile, to ensure that positive outcomes for Homeless customers continue to be achieved.
17. The Homelessness Strategy 2010-15 identifies three broad theme areas which are the foundation of all services provided:-
 - (a) Prevention of homelessness,
 - (b) Provision of accommodation for those who have become homeless, and,
 - (c) Providing support to customers who require support to sustain their existing accommodation or who require additional support to maintain future accommodation.
18. While Darlington have a high level of performance relating to homeless prevention and support for those who become homeless, the review did identify areas where improvements could be made. These improvements have been integrated into the Strategy's key priorities

020210 Homelessness Strategy 2010-15 Cabinet	Page 5 of 6
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and action plan and include:-

- (a) Raising awareness of existing housing and financial advice services and resources particularly during a period of economic uncertainty.
 - (b) Broadening the support services provided to families who are in danger of becoming homeless through the provision of an enhanced Family Intervention Project (which is currently being piloted) the introduction of short term taster accommodation and greater access to hostel accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.
 - (c) The adoption of a joint assessment process to ensure clients with multiple needs are identified and provided with the appropriate support services. This is particularly relevant for a client in housing need that has both mental health and substance misuse support needs.
19. The resources required to provide the homelessness function and additional actions identified within the Strategy are from Supporting People, DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government) grant and the balance from DBC resources. All resources and corresponding expenditure are included in the MTFP 2010-2014 that was presented to Cabinet on the 12 January 2010. These resources will be sufficient to provide the additional functions included in the Homelessness Strategy 2010-13.

Outcome of Consultation

20. The Homelessness Steering Group is a multi-agency body which was established for the purpose of reviewing existing homelessness services and developing the new Homelessness Strategy 2010-15. The Steering Group comprised of members from the voluntary, public and private sectors and examined cross cutting themes covering Housing, Health, Advice, and support. In addition, Darlington's multi-agency Annual Homelessness Forum was held on 25 September 2009 which also provided valuable information to inform the development of the Homelessness Strategy 2010-15.
21. The Homelessness Review included primary research undertaken with Homeless customers, Housing Advice services, and, was also informed by recent consultation completed by the Supporting People Review of Homelessness Services.
22. The Homelessness Strategy 2010-15 was presented to Neighbourhood Service Scrutiny Committee on 5 January 2010 and Members were happy to approve the content of the Strategy. Members of the Neighbourhood Service Scrutiny Committee do want to undertake a brief "task and finish" group exercise examining the impact of the current economic circumstances on local homelessness and were supportive of a further rough sleeper count in 2010.

020210 Homelessness Strategy 2010-15 Cabinet	Page 6 of 6
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