



**Darlington Draft Preventing Homelessness
Strategy 2015 - 2017**

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1.0 Introduction

Why a new Strategy?

The Preventing Homeless Strategy sets out how we will tackle Homelessness over the next two years

We decided to call the new strategy Preventing Homelessness as this better reflects what we want to achieve. This follows the lead set by the Government when it produced “Making Every Contact Count” in 2012 which focuses on the role of “prevention”. Prevention is a key strategic theme that has been adopted by successive Governments.

The Homelessness Act (2002) requires all local authorities to develop a Homelessness Strategy every five years, based on a review of the local homelessness situation. The last Homelessness Strategy for Darlington was produced to cover the period 2010 to 2015.

During this time a number of significant changes have taken place locally and nationally that also make a new strategy essential. However we also need to bring the Preventing Homelessness Strategy into a



coordinated planning cycle with the Housing Strategy which is due to be renewed in 2017. As a result this strategy will cover the period of 2015 to 2017. A new strategy will be produced in 2017.

Focus of the Strategy

At the time that this strategy was being produced the Government produced a number of funding initiatives designed to target funding at those who are likely to be trapped in a cycle of long term homelessness.

This illustrates that as well as a focus on prevention there is a need to tackle the issues that can create long term homelessness.

Both of these themes can be found in this strategy.

Planning for the Future

We recognise that homelessness is not just about housing. Poor health can be a cause of homelessness or an effect of homelessness. Homelessness might lead to crime but the reverse is also true. There are many interrelated links that suggest that the delivery of this strategy has to be about a partnership approach. The Sustainable Communities strategy “One Darlington, Perfectly Placed” focuses on the need for strong partnership to move forward. Therefore the delivery of this strategy is based on building a partnership that can collectively address the challenges that we have before us.

2.0 National and Local Context

The population in Darlington is estimated to be 105,564¹, made up of 46,670 households. The population is expected to grow by a further 2000 by 2020. The last Strategic Housing Market assessment in 2012 estimated that there was a need for about 300 new "affordable" properties per year. Like the rest of the UK housing supply is not keeping up with housing demand

Government funding has significantly reduced for housing but despite this Darlington will see between 100 and 200 new properties for affordable rent being built each year. The Council is also committed to build more properties using its own resources. Although this growth is welcome it is still below the estimated need for new affordable rented housing

The private sector is also growing with the numbers of private rented properties increasing rapidly (18% of the total housing stock at 2011 Census). In addition work is ongoing to bring empty homes back into use.



This sector continues to grow largely through the purchase of existing properties. Owner-occupation will see the largest planned growth of new build homes. As well as the growth in housing there are ambitious plans to support the growth of the economy with for example the development of Central Park, a mixed advanced industries and housing development.

Darlington was ranked as the 75th most deprived Local Authority out of 326². Although we have not seen the levels of unemployment that other areas of the Tees Valley experienced during the recession we still experienced a noticeable downturn with unemployment higher than the national average. There are now signs of the local economy recovering.

Increases in available housing and the recovery of the economy should help in the longer term to ease underlying pressures on homeless services

Key changes are also planned in the delivery of Adult Social Care and Health. The Clinical Commissioning Group in Darlington and the Council are developing a joint commissioning approach that will see joined up commissioning of services. This should help to address some of the issues that emerged during the review for this strategy concerning the number of people seeking help that had health and social care issues.

There are some positive signs for the future but we also face significant challenges as we move forward.

¹ Source: ONS Mid-year population estimates 2012

² Source: IMD 2010

Homeless Guidance

Probably the most significant guidance is: **'Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness'** DCLG 2012.

The strategy sets out 10 local challenges for local authorities that form the Gold Standard:

1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness
2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. Offer a housing options preventative service
4. Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective alternative
5. Have housing pathways agreed
6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups
7. Actively engage in mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.
8. Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness



9. Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed & Breakfast accommodation
10. Not place any families in B&B accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

National Policy:

The national housing strategy is set out in **Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England**, published in November 2011 it set out to:

- Increase the number of houses available to buy and rent
- Improve the flexibility of social housing (increasing mobility and choice) and promote homeownership
- Protect the vulnerable and disadvantaged by tackling homelessness and support people to live independently

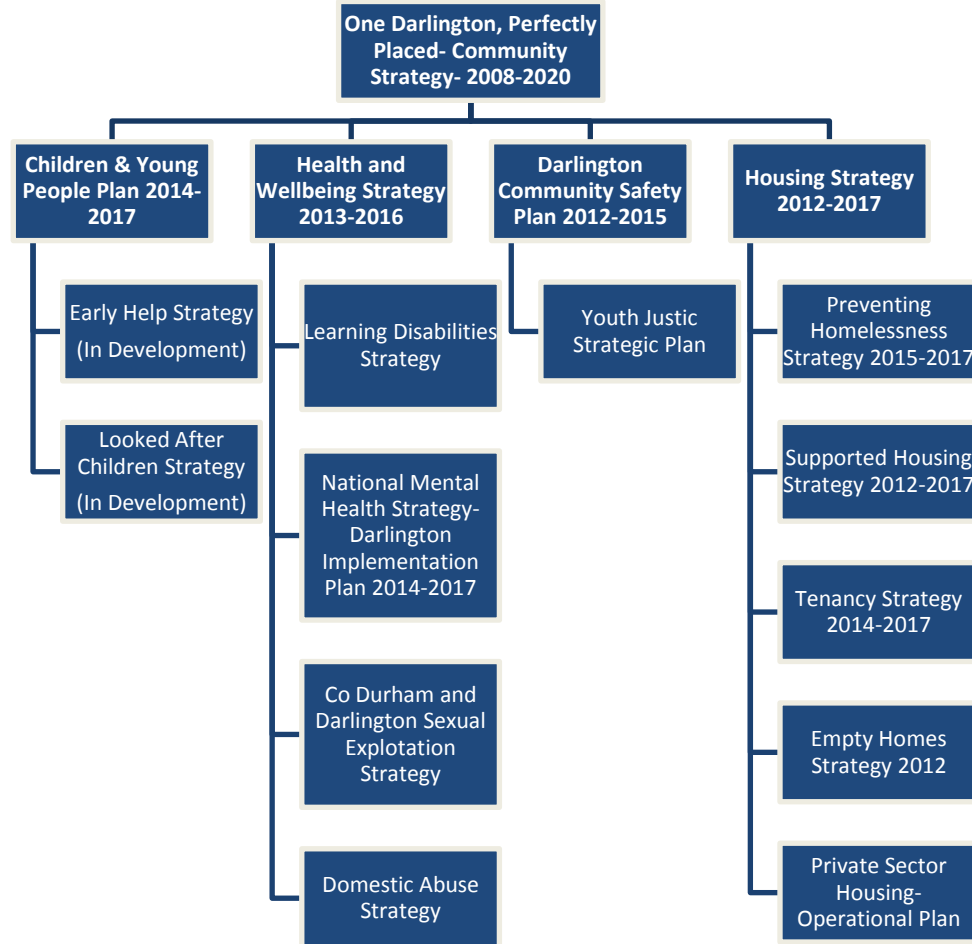
The Localism Act 2011

- Reforming homelessness legislation to enable councils to discharge their duty by offering good quality private rented homes where appropriate, freeing up social homes for people in need on the waiting list
- It gives back to local authorities the freedom to manage their own waiting lists, and make it easier for them to move existing social tenants to more suitable accommodation.
- It also encourages authorities to make use of the existing flexibilities within the allocation legislation
- Introduces Flexible Tenancies

Welfare Reform Act 2012

The Government is making significant changes to Housing Benefits, introducing a Universal Credit system (designed to simplify the benefits system and improve work incentives) and introducing a cap on benefits payable. These changes present a significant challenge to landlords, their tenants and local authorities responsible for meeting housing needs in an area.

Local Policy: The Preventing Homelessness Strategy relates to and is dependent on a number of other local strategies. The diagram below illustrates the range of relations that are important to delivering the Preventing Homelessness strategy:



3.0 Achievements Since 2010

Although this has been five years of significant change there have been many successes:

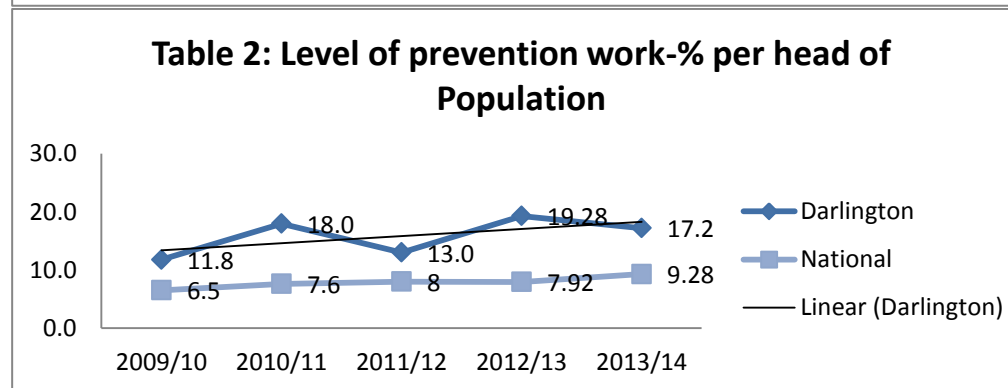
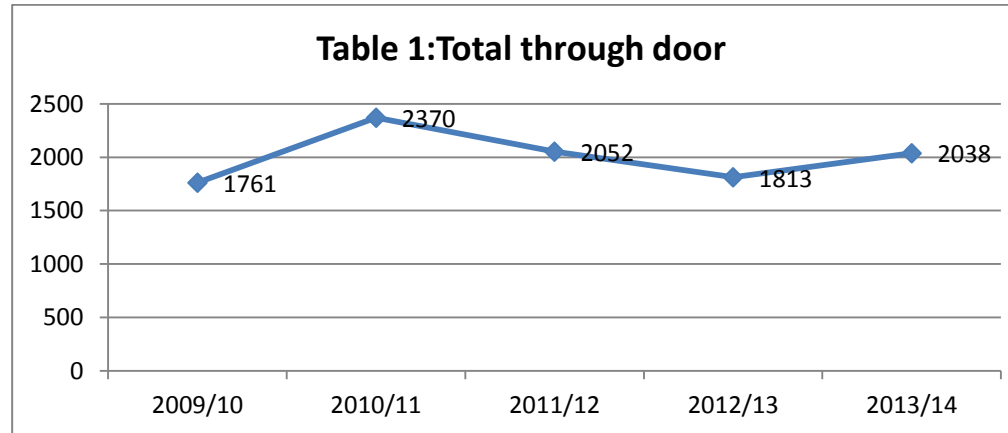
- ✓ A successful bid with Durham and Northumberland Councils for funding through the Domestic Abuse fund. A total of £78,500 was awarded to Darlington
- ✓ A successful joint bid with Durham County and First Stop to the Single Homeless fund that supports targets offenders. A total of £85,439 was awarded to Darlington
- ✓ The Housing Plus service has been introduced aimed at preventing vulnerable Council tenants from putting their tenancy at risk.
- ✓ Successful implementation of the Key Point of Access (KPA) which has streamlined the assessment and referral process in services for those at risk of homelessness. This has led to reduced representations and reduced waiting time for services
- ✓ The Capita software has enabled us to gather more strategic data to inform future service design and has enabled us to monitor services more closely
- ✓ Housing Options now take a better preventative approach to homelessness, identifying issues with tenancies prior to it actually failing. Officers work alongside landlords and negotiating notice periods
- ✓ Partnership working between DBC and the voluntary sector has greatly improved in the intervening years. Providers work more closely together and will share information and support plans with clients moving between services. The joint working and multi-agency approaches help facilitate looking at the bigger picture surrounding the clients' issues, for example, the joint protocol with Children's Services for 16-17 year olds
- ✓ Implementation of the Local Connection policy has significantly reduced the number of bed spaces being occupied by people with no local connection
- ✓ Providing an appointment system to reduce repeat callers and to give a full comprehensive and structured appointment.
- ✓ Looking at the risks and needs of the client, including, identifying pathways and action plans to independent living, identifying the skills the client needs to enable them to manage a tenancy, as well as considering accommodation support or floating support
- ✓ A floating support service designated for complex needs clients has been able to work with a high number of people who have been known to services for years and have been able to support them to find independent accommodation
- ✓ A women only shared house has been opened and achieved 98% successful move on
- ✓ Young people are being supported to access more move on accommodation through a providers links with Landlords
- ✓ The YMCA and the 700 Club at St George's Hall introduced short hold tenancies to give clients additional rights.

4.0 Review of Housing Options and Homelessness

The trend in people coming into Housing Options has been showing a steady increase. There has also been a rise in approaches from 1545 cases in 2007/8 to 2038 in 2013/14 (Table 1³).

While there has been an increase in the numbers approaching Housing Options, the level of successful prevention interventions has also been steadily increasing with Darlington performing well above the national average (Table 2⁴).

The introduction of the Key Point of Access (KPI) and a new appointments system have improved the service leading to better outcomes.



Support needs are now identified at an early stage and there is improved sign posting.

A continuing issue is finding solutions for those with complex needs. They often are involved with a number of agencies and require on occasions intensive help. Although this is a small group they can often require considerable resources. Good progress has been made in improving cooperation between agencies but there is more to do.

Within the overall increase in those approaching some presenting issues are reducing. Table 3 illustrates this.

³ DCLG P1E Statistical Returns 2004-2013

⁴ DCLG P1E Statistical Returns

Presenting Issues

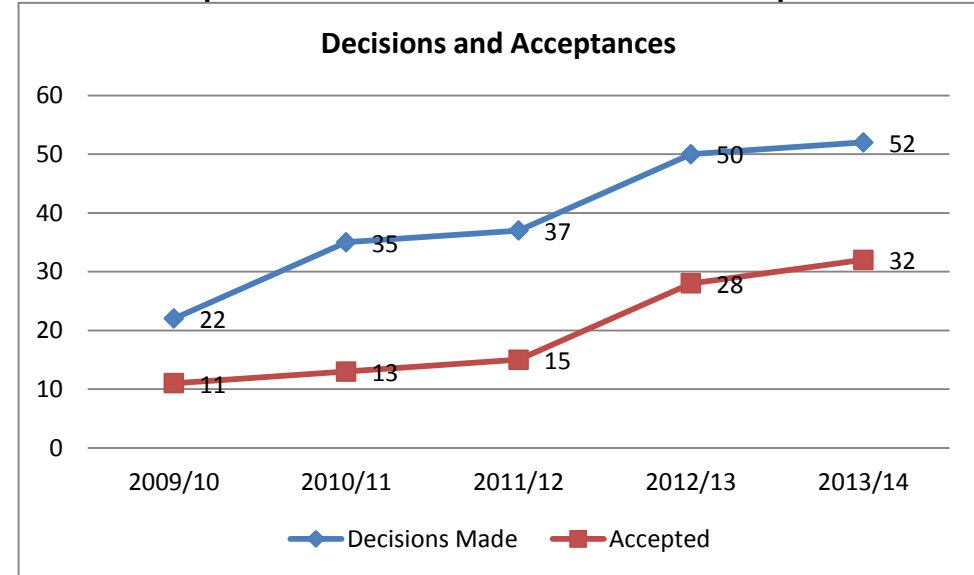
A more detailed analysis of presenting issues demonstrates the range of needs

Table 3: Presenting issue				Trend	
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14		
Leaving Family or Friends home	175	171	201	↑	
Relationship breakdown- non violent	113	101	138		
Other Reasons	188	123	137		
Domestic Abuse	60	70	93		
Sofa Surfing	78	83	153		
Financial Difficulties	0	9	54		
Mental Health Issues	65	46	51		
Rent Arrears	50	43	50		
16/17 year old	20	18	39		
Overcrowding	20	25	35		
Prison Leaver	45	25	28		
Drug/alcohol issues	35	17	26		
Possession proceedings	18	15	23		
Non-domestic violence/ ASB	33	18	22		
Physical Health Issues	13	18	21		
End of Tenancy	123	120	108		↓
Unsuitable/disrepair	73	51	44		
Mortgage Arrears	25	31	24		
Child protection issues	10	6	9		
General Advice	911	823	782		
Total	2055	1813	2038	↑	

Decisions about Homelessness

The numbers about whom a decision is made is quite small. In 2013/14 a total of 52 decisions were made. Of these the Council accepted that 32 were due a responsibility of rehousing. Of those not accepted 15 were intentionally homeless, 4 were eligible but not in priority need and one was not eligible.

Table 4: Comparison of Homeless Decisions and Acceptances



There has been a general increase in the use of Bed and Breakfast since 2010. Usage has partly increased as a result of adopting the No Second Night Out and Below Zero initiatives

Although usage is well below the national average focused work is proposed to reduce the need for this type of accommodation.

About a quarter of all those who made use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation had a mental health issue as their main need and when taking account of those with mental health as a secondary need the figure rises close to half.

The numbers with a mental health problem who are going into Bed and Breakfast has been increasing reflecting an increase in numbers seeking help.

During the calendar year to December 2014 analysis showed 242 of those seeking help had mental health as a first or secondary need.

Table 5: B&B Usage

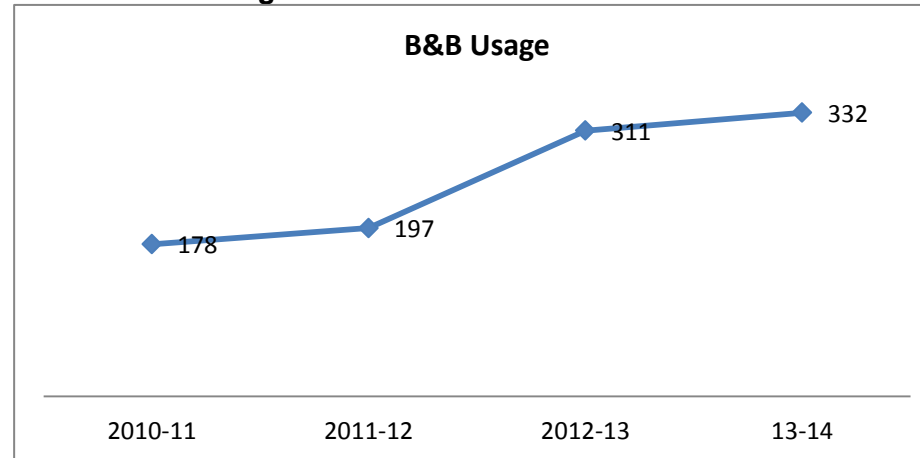
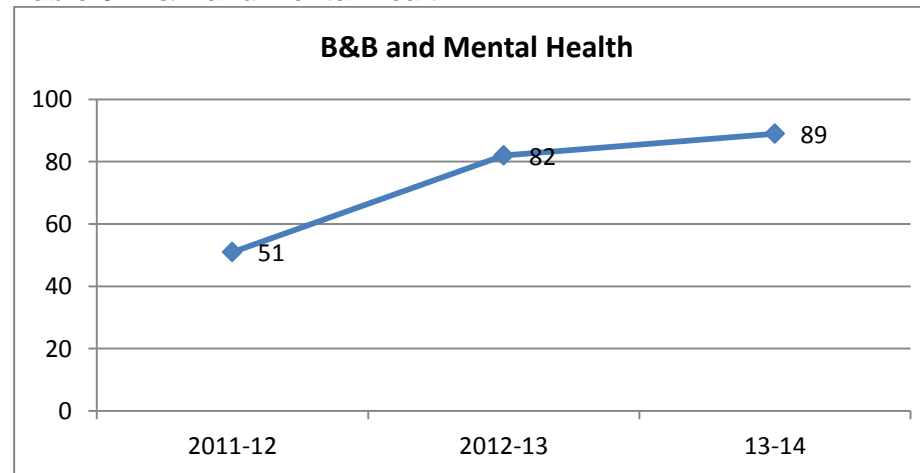


Table 6: B&B and Mental Health



Many have other needs as their main issue such as financial problems or drug or alcohol problems masking the extent to which mental health is a factor overall.

The growth in numbers accessing B&B accommodation seems to reflect the difficult cycle of housing failures that have seen some people with complex needs failing in a succession of different forms of housing including supported housing, leaving Bed and Breakfast as the only option available. This presents a significant future challenge

5.0 How needs and services are changing

Access to Housing

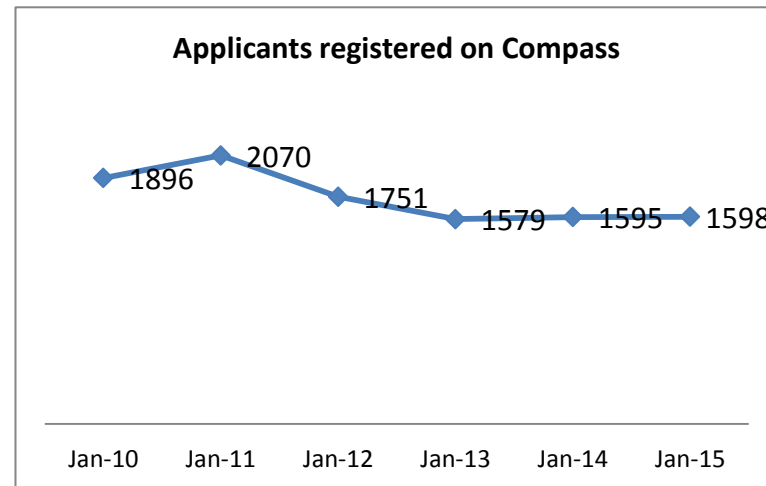
Although the numbers seeking help have shown an upward trend, numbers who are registering with the Choice Based Lettings Service, Compass have shown a decline from 1896 in 2010 to 1598 in 2015 (Table 7).

During this time there has been a small decrease in Council stock due to regeneration and Right to Buy while there has been growth in properties provided by other Registered Housing Providers (Housing Associations) that have offset this. The main growth on the waiting list has been single people under the age of 40. In response the Council has changed its allocations policy to allow people aged 18 and over to apply for first floor flats, thereby increasing housing options

Private Sector

The growth of the private sector has increased housing options. However, changes to the Housing Allowance have created reduced options for younger people. A key issue has been the inconsistent management in the

Table 7: Applicants Registered on Compass for Darlington



sector. The Council's Private Sector Housing is taking a leading role in working with Landlords to improve this situation.

Health

There has been a growing awareness of the links between health and homelessness. As part of Inclusion Health Programme's work the Department of Health commissioned St Mungo's to investigate the health costs of homelessness.

In-depth analysis shows the cost of services to address physical health conditions ranging from £6,468 to £44,612 per person in a 12 month period. This does not include mental health care, treatment for substance use or medication. Among the local challenges has been dealing with Hospital Discharge and finding suitable accommodation for people with physical disabilities

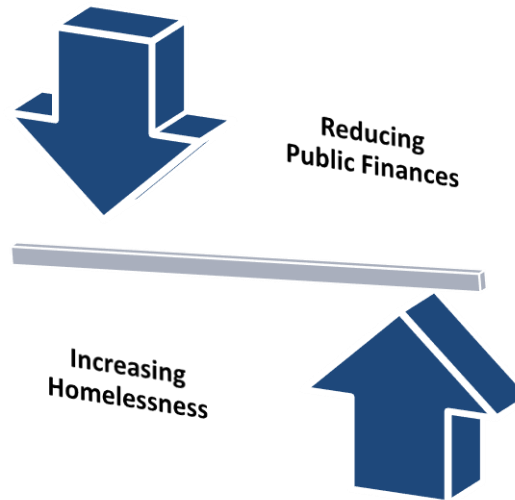
Integrated Offender Management

This provides a strategic umbrella to bring together representatives from criminal justice agencies, the local authority, health services and the voluntary sector, to address locally determined offending priorities through targeted interventions. Darlington's successful joint bid with Co Durham for the Help for Single Homeless Fund reflected this approach focusing on offenders and meeting their housing and support needs to deter them from offending. The bid contained a multi-agency approach with the Third Sector playing a major role.

6.0 Challenges for the Strategy

Preventing homelessness is far more cost effective than dealing with its consequences and the new strategy will continue to focus on prevention and early intervention:

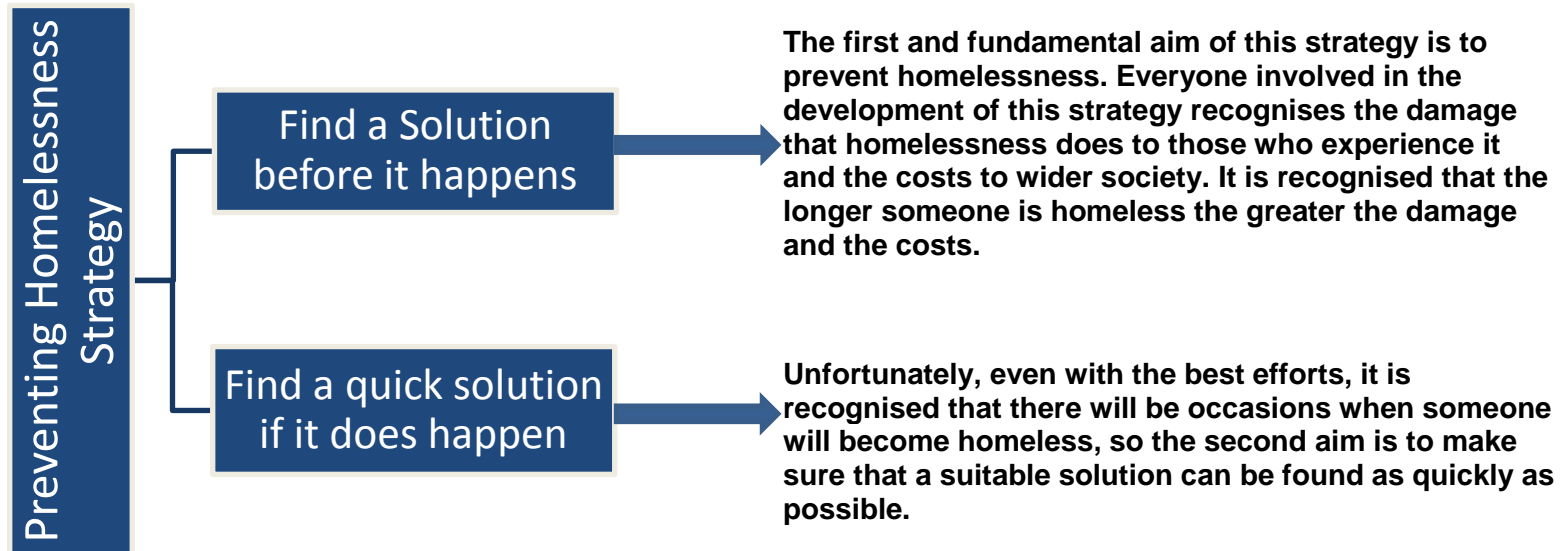
- The impact of the Welfare Reforms will continue to be a factor. Universal Credit is likely to be rolled out in Darlington towards the end of 2015 and drawing on the evidence from the pilot areas it seems that it will present a number of challenges.
- Addressing the growing numbers of people presenting with mental health as a need.
- There is a small “hard core” of people who have complex needs in need of assistance
- There is a need to develop a new pathway for 16/17 years olds to provide access to safe and stable housing



- Significant reductions in public sector funding will see further changes to the way services are delivered and what services are available. This will have both direct and indirect consequences over the long term
- Access to private sector housing is important but this needs to be of good quality
- There is very little suitable temporary accommodation available for those with physical disabilities
- Refuge accommodation does not allow male children aged over 16 to stay.

- Health is also a major issue. There are issues concerning drug and alcohol abuse that cross over into the criminal justice system
- To tackle the challenges we now face we must build on the partnerships that we have forged while taking advantage of the increase in available housing.
- The use of B&B's has grown consistently over a number of years but is still relatively low
- We need to continue to work with schools and colleges to provide information and build awareness of the risks of homelessness
- The Empty Homes project has demonstrated that homeless and excluded people can be helped to gain skills and find stable accommodation

7.0 Aims of the new strategy



8.0 Objectives

We have developed 4 inter-related objectives that will form themes for this strategy:

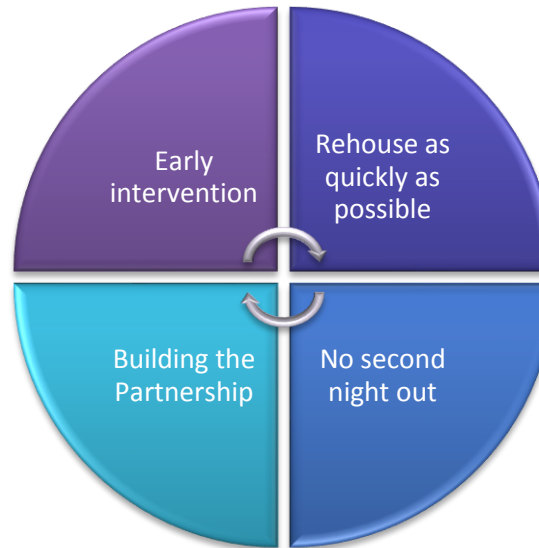
Early Intervention

To prevent homelessness through information, advice and support to those at risk of homelessness

Support actions and changes to service delivery to help people to remain in safe and stable accommodation

Building the Partnership

Develop new partnerships to jointly meet the challenges that we collectively face



Rehouse as quickly as possible

Recognise that some people will become homeless and that they need to be moved to an appropriate solution as quickly as possible

No second night out

The number of people who are found to be sofa surfing have been growing. It is critical that we find a housing solution for these people to avoid the the worst effects of homelessness

9. Priorities for Action

Objective	Action	Description	Who	When	
1	Early Intervention and Prevention	Action 1	We will focus on keeping people in their existing accommodation (wherever practical and appropriate to do so).	Janette McMain	Immediate and ongoing
		Action 2	We will adopt the principles set out in "Making Every Contact Count"	Janette Mc Main	Sept 2015
		Action 3	We will ensure there are clear housing pathways for all client groups	Janette McMain/ First Stop	Dec 2015
		Action 4	Work with Police and Probation to ensure a pathway to suitable accommodation on discharge from prison	Janette McMain	Sept 2015
		Action 5	We will develop educational work with young people about housing options, the skills needed to maintain independent living and the reality of homelessness	Janette McMain/ Various Providers	On going
		Action 6	Review outcome of the Housing Options Advisor working in the MASH to identify young vulnerable children that could potentially be homeless at 16 and plan preventative work	Janette McMain/ Children Services	July 2015
		Action 7	Research into the areas of need, including impact assessments to determine current and likely future levels of homelessness and homelessness trends.	Janette McMain/ Nicola Childs	March 2016
		Action 8	Work with Commissioning Services to ensure that there is an appropriate range of support and supported accommodation available	Janette McMain/ Nicola Childs	Jan 2016
2	Minimise the use of Temporary Accommodation	Action 9	We will review the use of B&B's to ensure minimum usage	Janette McMain	Ongoing
		Action 10	We will review the quality and suitability of temporary accommodation	Janette McMain	Ongoing

Objective	Action	Description	Who	When	
3	Build the Partnership	Action 11	We will develop a new Homelessness Forum to monitor progress of this strategy and help to develop a new strategy in 2017	Janette McMain	Dec 2015
		Action 12	We will work closely with health service colleagues to identify those at risk by making every contact count to reduce health inequalities.	Janette McMain/ Miriam Davison?	Dec 2016
		Action 13	Review the needs of those with mental health issues	Janette McMain/ Julie Wheatley	Nov 2015
		Action 14	We will strive to deliver the principles of no second night out	Janette McMain	Ongoing
		Action 15	We aim to reduce the number of homelessness crisis situations arising from hospital discharge from West Park	Janette McMain/ West Park Hospital	Dec 2015
		Action 16	Work with Private Sector Landlords to increase the availability of good quality accommodation	David Burrell	Ongoing
		Action 17	Identify suitable temporary accommodation for victims of domestic abuse for whom current available temporary accommodation is unsuitable	Nicola Childs	August 2015