
PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2015-17

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide information and seek comment on the proposed Darlington Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2015-17.

Summary

2. 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 current Homelessness Strategy for Darlington was produced to cover the period 2010 to 2015 and therefore a new strategy is now due.
3. The Government published Making Every Contact Count: A joint Approach Preventing Homelessness 2012 which set the Government's strategic direction. Since its publication new homelessness strategies have been generally called "Preventing Homelessness" strategies to reflect the main aims of the national strategy.
4. The key aims and objectives of the Darlington Preventing Homelessness Strategy focus on further strengthening the Council and its partners approach to prevention. The Council has made very significant progress during the life of the current Strategy in improving its approach to prevention. However, the numbers who are approaching the Council for help has been showing a consistent but small increase over the past five years presenting a key challenge for the new strategy.
5. The new strategy covers a period of two years to bring it in line with the Housing strategy which is due to be renewed in 2017.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that the content of this report be noted and that comment is made on the proposals and direction of the Strategy.

**Paul Wildsmith
Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources**

Background Papers

Darlington Homelessness Strategy 2010-15

Darlington Housing Strategy 2012-17

Making Every Contact Count: A joint Approach Preventing Homelessness 2012

Ken Davies: Extension 5955

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| S17 Crime and Disorder | The strategy forms an important element in the prevention of crime and assisting in the rehabilitation of offenders |
| Health and Well Being | There are very significant health issues related to homelessness and the risk of homelessness |
| Carbon Impact | There is no impact |
| Diversity | There are significant issues concerning the vulnerability of those who may be affected by homelessness |
| Wards Affected | All wards |
| 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 | The Strategy is a statutory requirement |
| Urgent Decision | No |
| 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 | 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. |

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Background

7. The Council is required to produce a Homelessness Strategy every five years as a result of the Homelessness Action 2002. The Current Homelessness Strategy was produced in 2010 and expires in 2015. As the current Housing Strategy is due to be renewed in 2017 the new Homelessness strategy will cover the period 2015 to 2017 to bring the two strategies into line.
8. In 2012 the Government published Making Every Contact Count: A joint Approach Preventing Homelessness which formed the Governments' national strategy on homelessness. The key aim was to focus on prevention, recognising that the social and financial costs of homelessness were very significant. As a consequence Local Authority strategies that have been published since this time have tended to be renamed Preventing Homelessness strategies to reflect the main strategic aim.
9. This strategy is produced after a review was completed of housing support related Homelessness Services. The results of this review were implemented in January 2015 and form part of the foundation of this strategy. A review is also being undertaken of the Homeless Service as part of the Governments' Gold Standard that was introduced in 2013. A Peer Review took place in February 2015 and the results will be known in March 2015. The results may influence the final draft of this strategy and its action plan.

Current Position

10. The review of Homelessness Services identified that the Council is either meeting or exceeding national performance standards. Throughout the life of the current strategy the performance on preventing homelessness has been among the best in England while costs of delivering the service are amongst the lowest.
11. This performance has been achieved during a period of considerable change. In 2011 the Government made changes to Homeless legislation in the Localism Act 2011 that allowed Local Authorities to discharge their homelessness duties by finding suitable private sector housing. Reforms to the welfare system have also been an important factor with changes to housing allowances, the introduction of the Bedroom Tax and ongoing changes to other benefits all having an impact. These changes were introduced against a background of the down turn in the economy and reductions in public sector funding. Combinations of these pressures are the drivers of an increase in the numbers of people approaching the council for help. In 2009/10 a total of 1761 approached the Council and by 2013/14 this had risen to 2038. However, as a result of preventative actions this has translated into small numbers who need statutory rehousing. In 2009/10 a total of 13 applications were rehoused as statutory homeless while in 2013/14 the number had risen to 32. For most of those who approached the Council for help their issues were resolved through a range of preventative measures that for example included negotiating for applicants to remain in their current home while their application for rehousing was

dealt with to the use of mediation.

12. The single largest reason for people seeking help was as a result of domestic issues- people being asked to leave the home of family and friends and relationship breakdowns. About 27% of those approaching the Council fall into these categories. This is consistently the largest group seeking help both in Darlington and nationally.
13. 2013-14 saw a noticeable increase in the numbers who are approaching who are either “sofa surfing”. In total there were 153 who fell into this category (7.5%) and this contrasts with 83 in the previous year 2012/13.
14. There has been a year on year increase in the use of Bed and breakfast accommodation. In 2009/10 B&B accommodation was used on a total of 82 days while in 2013/14 it had increased to 332 days. Part of this increase can be explained by the introduction of two Government initiatives :
 - (a) No second Night Out - no one who is identified as street homeless should spend a second night out
 - (b) Cold Weather Provision - when temperatures fall below zero no one should spend the night on the street.
15. Although the use of B&B's has increased this has not been reflected in the costs to the council. By applicants being able to claim Housing Allowance and effective management of how long people stay in B&B's there has been no noticeable increase in costs. However, the general increase in numbers is a key issue for future action.
16. The review of homeless housing related support services took prevention as its key theme and the delivery of support in a focused and timely manner as key objectives. As a consequence the balance of support was further shifted towards supporting people in their own homes and reducing the numbers who are housed in supported housing. This was achieved by the more efficient use of supported housing and floating support. The review was completed in 2014 and changes implemented in January 2015. The changes were introduced in close cooperation with providers and other partners.

Aims and Objectives

17. Although the performance on homelessness has been very good a number of significant changes need to be addressed;
 - (a) The numbers seeking help are increasing.
 - (b) There will be continued reductions in public sector funding through the life of the strategy and beyond.
 - (c) There are a small number of people with complex needs who are now excluded from most forms of housing. They are known to multiple agencies

who use considerable resources to manage their needs.

- (d) There are a growing number of people with mental health issues seeking help.
 - (e) Domestic abuse continues to grow.
 - (f) There is a need to reduce the use of B&B's.
18. The Preventing Homelessness Strategy identified two broad aims that reflect the partnerships understanding of the damage homelessness can do to the individual and the costs to services:
- (a) Find a solution before it happens by building on the existing work on prevention that avoids the worst effects of homelessness.
 - (b) Find a quick solution if it does happen-recognising that some people will become homeless and for these people it is critical to their wellbeing that a solution is found as quickly as possible. Finding the right solution quickly will also help to save money.
19. These translate into four Objectives:
- (a) Early intervention - A series of actions that build on the preventative activities already taking place. They are formed around the ten challenges contained within the Gold standard.
 - (b) Rehouse as quickly as possible - Finding suitable and stable housing includes work to ensure that there are decent standards of accommodation and housing management outside of regulated social Housing.
 - (c) Building the partnership - Recognising that a strong partnership is essential to the delivery of the actions from this strategy.
 - (d) No second night out - With the increasing numbers of people who are either sofa surfing or street homeless it is important to ensure that they do not fall into the vicious circle of homelessness. No second night out is designed to prevent this.
20. The resources required to deliver the homeless functions as described in the Strategy are subject to the conditions set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2015/16 to 2019/20 that was agreed by Cabinet on 17th February 2015.

Outcome of Consultation

- 21. Consultation was carried out extensively as part of the review of housing related support services and there was no need to duplicate this work although additional consultation was necessary to deal with areas not covered in the review.
- 22. Consultation took place with stakeholders on the development of this strategy. As a consequence a new group is going to be formed to support progress on the

strategy and consider the final draft of the strategy after the results of the Gold Standard review.

23. Formal public consultation will take place on the final draft of the strategy in April 2015.
24. The Tenants' Board have considered this draft of the strategy and made comment.
25. An Equality Impact assessment will be produced to support the final draft.