
DEVELOPING A PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. A new Preventing Homelessness Strategy is due for publication this year. This report provides information on the first stage of development of the strategy covering reviews of the Council Service and changes to support contracts.

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. Local Authorities are required to conduct a review of homelessness within their area and then publish a strategy setting out how they will tackle and prevent homelessness. The current Preventing Homelessness Strategy covers the period to 2017 and therefore a new strategy is now due. The strategy will cover a period of five years to 2022.
3. The first stage of development of the strategy is to review the whole of the homelessness prevention offer in Darlington from early intervention and prevention through to the offer of accommodation. A number of the housing related support contracts were reduced by the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). These services were re-scoped based on the available funding, the impact of which is being captured and will continue to be monitored throughout the next year.
4. The review of the council services found that the numbers being seen have fallen but that the level of homelessness has remained consistent. Although the numbers being seen has fallen the number of people where homelessness has been prevented has increased suggesting continuing good performance.
5. The publication of the strategy will depend on when guidance to support the Homeless Reduction Bill is published. This Bill has all-party support and is in the final stages of its passage through Parliament. The Bill extends the duty to those threatened with homelessness to 56 days and increases duties to assess, prevent and relieve homelessness for eligible applicants. The strategy will also be dependent on details being published of a new Supported Housing Fund which will address the shortfall in rent and service charges as a result of the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance. It is anticipated that a draft strategy will be available for consultation in the late summer/autumn.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that Members are asked to note and comment on the content of this report.

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Background Papers

Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2015-17

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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 and therefore a Key Decision
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.
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MAIN REPORT

Introduction

7. The Preventing Homeless strategy is due for renewal in 2017. This is a statutory document required under the Homelessness Act (2002). It requires that:
 - (a) Local Authorities carry out reviews of homelessness within their area.
 - (b) Formulate and publish strategies for tackling and preventing homelessness problems based on the results of those reviews.
 - (c) Publish a new strategy within five years of the previous strategy having been published.

8. The title of the strategy was changed in 2015 to Preventing Homelessness to reflect the main aim of the strategy. It also reflects prevention being a theme within Government policy for a number of years. The strategy also includes an Action Plan to support deliver over the 5 years.

9. The current strategy has two aims:
 - (a) Find a solution before it happens: The first and fundamental aim of this strategy is to prevent homelessness.
 - (b) Find a quick solution if it does happen: Unfortunately, even with the best efforts, it is recognised that there will be occasions when someone will become homeless, so the second aim is to make sure that a suitable solution can be found as quickly as possible.

10. There are four objectives set out in the strategy:
 - (a) Early intervention and prevention
 - (b) Minimise the use of temporary accommodation
 - (c) Strive to ensure no one is in Homelessness Crisis for a second night
 - (d) Building the Partnership

11. Overall the aims of the strategy have been achieved despite it being affected by considerable change both as a result of changes to public finance and the Welfare Reforms while the new strategy is also entering into a turbulent period.

12. The new strategy will be affected by the Homeless Reduction Bill that has completed its passage through Parliament and now only requires Royal Assent. The Bill will add additional duties to prevent homelessness:
- (a) The Bill will require councils to help all those who are homeless and not just those who are considered a priority need such as those with dependent children or who are particularly vulnerable.
 - (b) The duty towards people threatened with homelessness will be extended from 28 days to 56.
 - (c) It amends the definition of homelessness to apply to households served with a notice seeking possession where the landlord intends to apply for possession and the council does not ask the applicant to remain in the accommodation.
 - (d) Strengthens and clarifies the duty on housing authorities to provide advisory services to help to prevent homelessness.
 - (e) New duty to assess and agree a personalised plan: Requires local authorities to carry out an assessment of an applicant's case if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
 - (f) New 'prevention' duty in cases of threatened homelessness: It requires local authorities to help to ensure that suitable accommodation does not cease to be available for applicants who are threatened with homelessness.
 - (g) New 'relief' duty to help to secure accommodation: Requires local authorities to help to secure accommodation for all applicants who the authority is satisfied are homeless and eligible for assistance.
 - (h) A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
13. The Government have acknowledged that local authorities will incur additional costs as a result of the increased duties. It has set aside £68 million for the next two years. However, it is anticipated that previous good performance on prevention will mitigate the impact of the changes in Darlington although it is still likely that cost will increase as a result of the increased duties to those who are not in priority need. This may lead to increased pressure for temporary accommodation as well as increased administration. The extent of the impact on services in Darlington will depend on the detail contained in Guidance that will be published after the Bill gains Royal Assent.
14. A number of other changes are being introduced by the Government that will also affect the strategy. The National Office of Statistics has criticised the current system of gathering performance information and as a consequence trials of a new system are beginning. This may mean that performance indicator may have to change part way through the life of the strategy.

15. There are also proposed changes planned to the funding of Supported Housing that may have an impact on the strategy. The Government is introducing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) cap on housing benefits that will affect supported housing from April 2019. It has been recognised that the cap could have a particularly negative impact because of the higher costs of supported housing. In September 2016 the Government announced that it planned to introduce a Supported Housing Fund that will top up costs above the LHA. Details of how the fund will be administered are yet to be announced but the change has created uncertainties within the sector, affecting potential new developments. Also the Government have been reviewing the funding of administrative costs that can be claimed by supported housing providers through housing benefit. This is a much smaller element of costs but, the Government are also considering creating a separate fund that adds another funding stream with the potential to create more complexity.

Support Services

16. The current strategy recognised that it was steering through a period of considerable challenges. The changes to public finances have presented challenges for all aspects of Local Government and that included the way support services are delivered. A review of support services has seen changes to contracts and the way support has been delivered. Due to the reduced financial envelope, services were remodelled to provide a 'triage' approach with the onus being on the client to engage. The impact of these changes will need to be reviewed over a longer period of time as although, initially they are proving to be successful, we need to ensure that in the longer term it does not increase the number of vulnerable people who get stuck in the 'revolving door' of being at risk of homelessness. There has been particular concern expressed recently about vulnerable younger people and the flow chart provided at **Appendix 1** shows the current range of services available.
17. Darlington has also secured money from DCLG's 'Homeless Trailblazer' funding. This is a 2 year project looking at preventing homelessness 'upstream' based on responding at the earliest opportunity to Vulnerable Adult reports where they do not meet the threshold for a safeguarding or adult social care intervention. This project, along with Community care/Crisis awards, need to be fully understood to ensure we have an holistic overview of emerging pathways and earlier opportunities for preventative work.

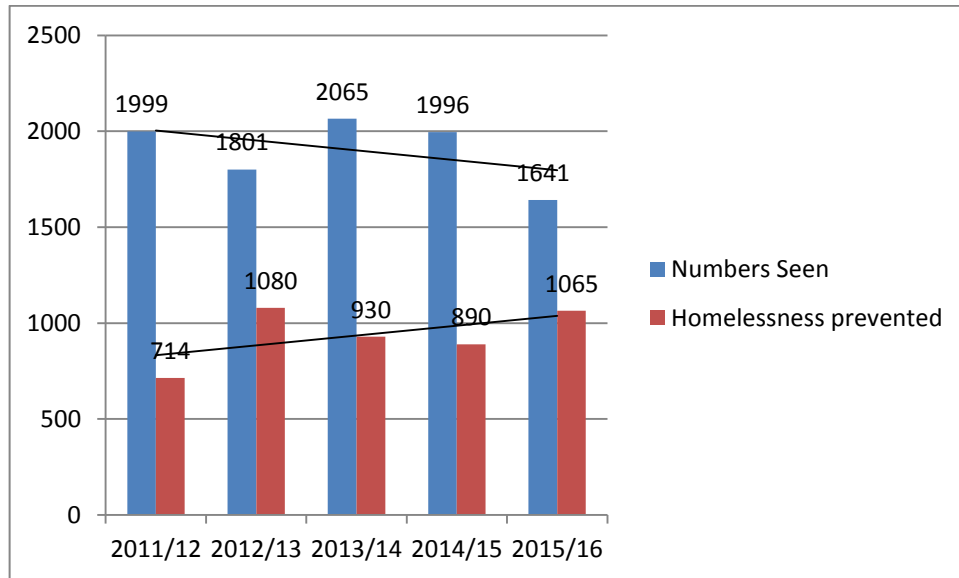
Housing Options

18. The way that the Council delivers its Housing Options service has had to change to reflect a changing environment. As part of the changes that were introduced to support services, Housing Options introduced a new "triage" service that diverts some applicants to short term support, leaving those in greatest need to be assessed by Housing Options. Although the change was made in October 2016 the system did not become fully operational until November. It will take some time to assess the impact of the change but the intention is to prevent homelessness

through this early intervention while focusing on those in most need.

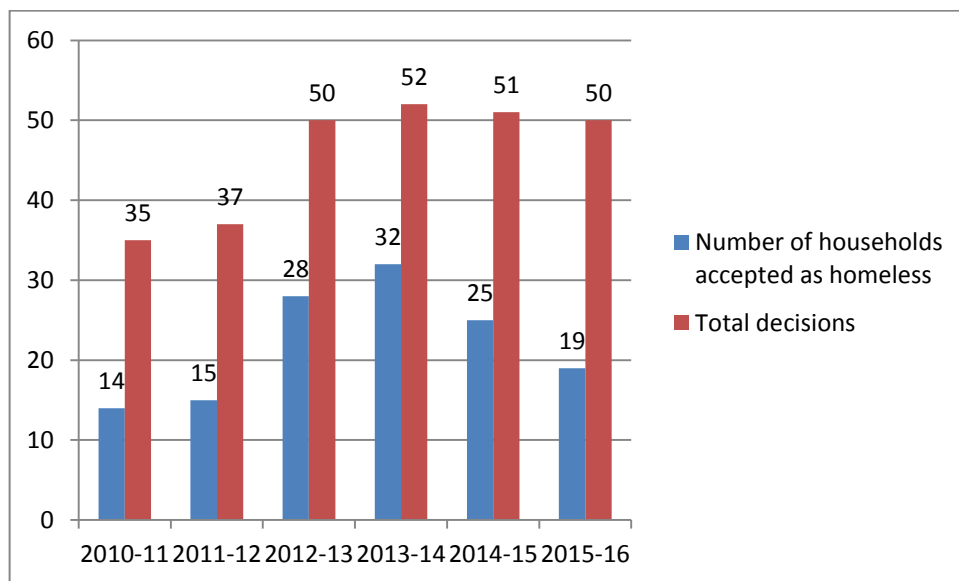
- The last full year statistics show that total numbers seen have declined again for a third year:

Table 1 : Homelessness Prevented



- The numbers of people that a homeless decision is made about is small. This is mainly due to the scale of preventative work that ensures that for the vast majority of people another solution is found. In the past 6 years there has been an increase in the number of decisions but it has been constant at about 50 cases for the past four years. However, partial figures for 2016/17 suggest that in this year we may see a slight increase in numbers reversing this trend. By January 2017 53 applications had been made. The number of cases where the Council accepts housing responsibility have been in decline since 2013/14:

Table 2: Number of Households Accepted as Homeless



21. A more detailed analysis of presenting issues demonstrates the range of needs that are being dealt with. Consistently the main issue has been applicants leaving family and friends, followed by relationship breakdown. Partial figures for 2016/17 have been projected forward for the full year. They suggest that overall numbers are likely to be lower than previously:

Table 3 : Presenting Issues

Presenting Issues	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Projected 2016/17
Leaving Family or Friends home	201	199	198	149
Relationship breakdown-non violent	138	101	109	144
Other Reasons	137	120	72	135
Domestic Abuse	93	81	77	76
Sofa Surfing	153	100	62	163
Drug/alcohol issues	26	20	13	23
Mental Health Issues	51	43	29	37
Rent Arrears	50	36	34	36
Mortgage Arrears	24	10	9	4
Possession proceedings	23	21	27	37
End of Tenancy	108	93	80	90
Child protection issues	9	9	1	5
16/17 year old	39	49	48	38
Non-domestic violence/ASB	22	35	14	11
Physical Health Issues	21	31	26	24
Financial Difficulties	54	58	35	34
Unsuitable/disrepair	44	51	47	41
Prison Leaver	28	39	44	12
Overcrowding	35	40	24	29
Fire/Flood other emergency	0	0	6	6
Leaving forces	0	0	3	0
General Advice	782	851	683	394
Total	2038	1996	1641	1488

22. In recent months begging in the Town Centre has increased and a misconception has arisen that this is associated with an increase in homelessness. Streetlink which manages No Second Night Out and 700 Club, who carry out outreach work have been approaching all those who are identified as begging. Of the 14 people approached 13 were found to have stable accommodation. The No Second Night Out programme is intended to ensure that no one will spend more than one night rough sleeping. There are a number of reasons why people begin begging but it is clear that in Darlington a lack of accommodation is not a motivation.

Consultation

23. It is anticipated that consultation on the draft strategy will take place during the late Summer/Autumn. The timing is dependent on the Government publishing guidance associated with the Homeless Reduction Bill and details of the Supported Housing

Fund being published.

24. The outline timetable is:

Table 4: Strategy Development Timetable

April 2017	Adults and Scrutiny Report
March/April	Homeless Reduction Bill becomes law
May	Identify key challenges in consultation with Stakeholders
June/July	Carry out research with service users/providers
August/September	Guidance published
August/September	Factor in changes to reporting of P1E
August/October	Supported Housing Fund proposals published
September/October	Complete EIA
September/October	Presentation to Stakeholders
October	Strategy out for consultation
November/December	Strategy to Cabinet

25. An Equality Impact Assessment will be will also be published with the strategy.