

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2019-2024**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To set out the headline priorities and key issues for developing a new Preventing Homelessness Strategy for discussion and comment and detail the development process.

**Summary**

2. Section 1(1) of the 2002 Act obliges housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review every five years.
3. The current Preventing Homelessness Strategy was published in 2013 and requires updating. A new strategy is being developed taking in to account the changes that have been introduced through the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The emphasis on prevention introduced in this Act is one of a number of changes that have to be addressed within the new strategy. In producing the last strategy the Council had formally adopted prevention as a key aim so the new strategy will continue a path that the Council has already adopted with positive results.
4. The review of homelessness which forms the basis for the strategy has shown that homelessness has been increasing at a higher rate nationally than in Darlington. However, there was an increase of 94 applicants approaching the Council for assistance between 2016/17 and 2017/18, although the numbers going on to make a homeless application have reduced. This difference can be attributed to the success of the preventative work undertaken once an applicant has approached the Council for assistance.
5. For many people homelessness is associated with those seen begging in the town centre whilst a recent rough sleeper count found only three people sleeping rough in Darlington. All of the people who have been begging in the town have been seen by the Council's outreach service as part of the No Second Night Out initiative and either had somewhere to live or were offered assistance with housing. All three of the recent rough sleepers that were found were offered assistance which they refused, but support will continue to be available for them. Homelessness is caused by a range of factors but end of tenancy and relationship breakdown remain the main causes of homelessness.

6. There are five key areas that the strategy will focus on:
  - (a) Those at risk of homelessness will be made aware of and have access to the services they may need to prevent it.
  - (b) Provide suitable accommodation and support options for people who are, or who may become homeless.
  - (c) Reduce rates of repeat homelessness.
  - (d) Provide the right support and services so that no person needs to sleep rough.
  - (e) Build a strong partnership to deliver our aims.
7. These five areas reflect the current national and local policy context of focusing on prevention by intervening at an earlier stage and ensuring that there are the right types and levels of housing and support available to reduce the risk of homelessness.
8. A key element of the development of the strategy is engaging with partners and service users. Therefore a survey is being carried out of both partners and service users. A consultation group is also being established and work is taking place at a regional level to establish the processes for the new Duty to Refer that was introduced as part of the Homeless Reduction Act. This has created a duty on most statutory organisations to refer anyone they think to be homeless or at risk of homelessness to the Local Authority.
9. It is intended that a full draft strategy should be available for public consultation in February. There would therefore be an opportunity to present the full strategy to this committee as part of the consultation process in March 2019.

### **Recommendation**

10. Members are invited to comment in particular on:-
  - (a) The aims and issues that have been identified to form the basis for the Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024.
  - (b) The proposal for the draft strategy being considered at the March 2019 meeting of this committee.

**Ian Williams**  
**Director of Economic Growth and**  
**Neighbourhood Services**

### **Background Papers**

Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996  
Homelessness Act 2002  
Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

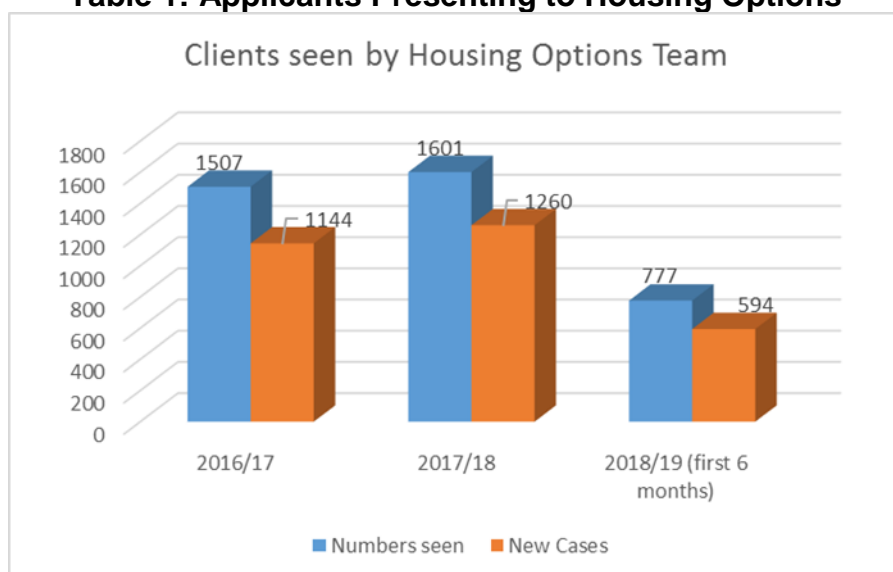
S17 Crime and Disorder	There are links between homelessness and offending behaviour. The changes being introduced should reduce the risk of homelessness and therefore reduce the risk of crime
Health and Well Being	There are potentially benefits to health by reducing the risk of homelessness
Carbon Impact	There is no direct Carbon Impact.
Diversity	There are significant issues concerning the vulnerability of those who may be affected by homelessness
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	Anyone who may be at risk of homelessness
Budget and Policy Framework	These proposals do not form part of the Council's Policy Framework as set out in the Constitution and therefore this report does not represent a change to the 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.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The specific duties towards 16 and 17 year olds who are at risk of homelessness or who are homeless, and the legal duties children's services authorities and housing authorities have towards them are set out in the Government's statutory guidance

## MAIN REPORT

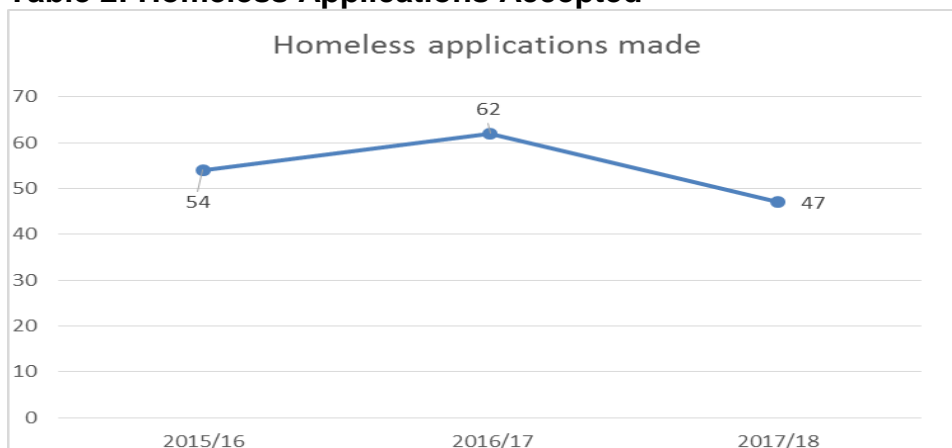
### Information and Analysis

11. There is a statutory duty on Strategic Housing Authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy every five years. The process for producing the strategy is subject to statutory guidance that includes three elements; a review of homeless performance; a strategy based on that review and an action plan for delivery of the strategy. It also sets out the need to engage with partners and specifically identifies prevention as a key area for coordination. This is a direct result of the introduction of Homeless Reduction Act 2017, the impact of which was the subject of a report to this committee in July of this year.
12. The current strategy was produced in 2013 and was titled Preventing Homelessness Strategy to reflect its main aim, to avoid people becoming homeless. The introduction of the new Act therefore provides additional momentum to this approach. There have also been a number of other additions to legislation mainly concerning adjustments to the approach to domestic abuse that will be taken account of in the strategy.
13. There has been a national review of performance data and significant changes have been made to the sets of information gathered. These changes were introduced in April 2018 and mean that comparison of performance between this year and previous years is now limited.
14. The review of homelessness demonstrates that the numbers approaching the Council for advice or help increased from 2016/17 to 2017/18 as shown in Table 1. The half year figures for this year suggests there is not a year on year increase but the post-Christmas period tends to be the busiest part of the year so the situation will be closely monitored. In terms of homeless applications accepted, Table 2 shows some variations year on year but no significant trends up to 2017/18.

**Table 1: Applicants Presenting to Housing Options**



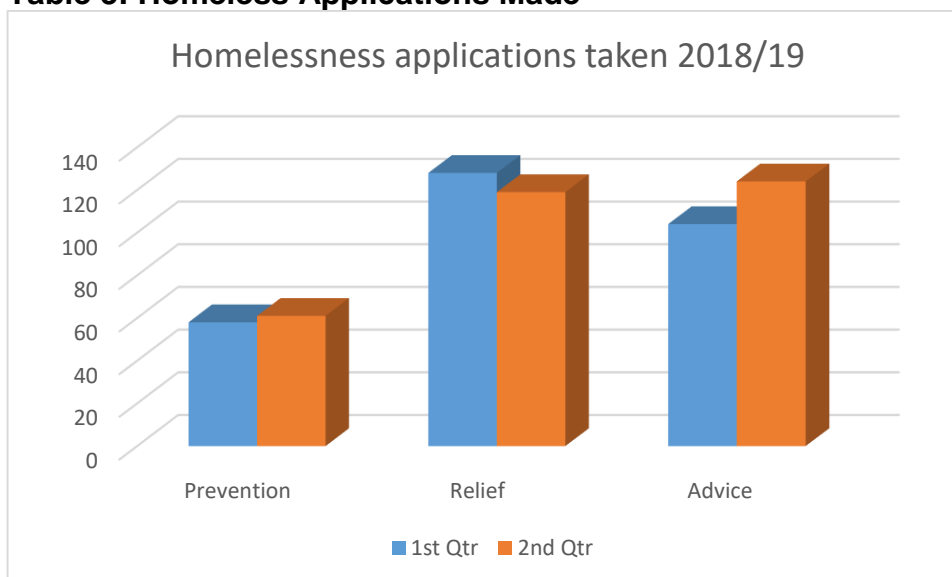
**Table 2: Homeless Applications Accepted**



15. Unfortunately direct comparisons cannot be made for 2018/19 due to the Homelessness Reduction Act and the changes in how we are now required to work with individuals and how data is recorded. Table 3 however shows how individuals have been assisted for the first 6 months of 2018/19. The emphasis on prevention has enabled the Council’s Housing Options team to find solutions for those seeking help that has meant that comparatively few people have had to go to the stage of making a homeless application. This is a very important aspect of the work as the trauma of homelessness, even for a short period can have a devastating impact and was the driver behind the emphasis on prevention in the Homeless Reduction Act. Key elements of the prevention include:

- (a) advice and information
- (b) early identification
- (c) pre-crisis intervention
- (d) preventing recurring homelessness
- (e) partnership arrangements

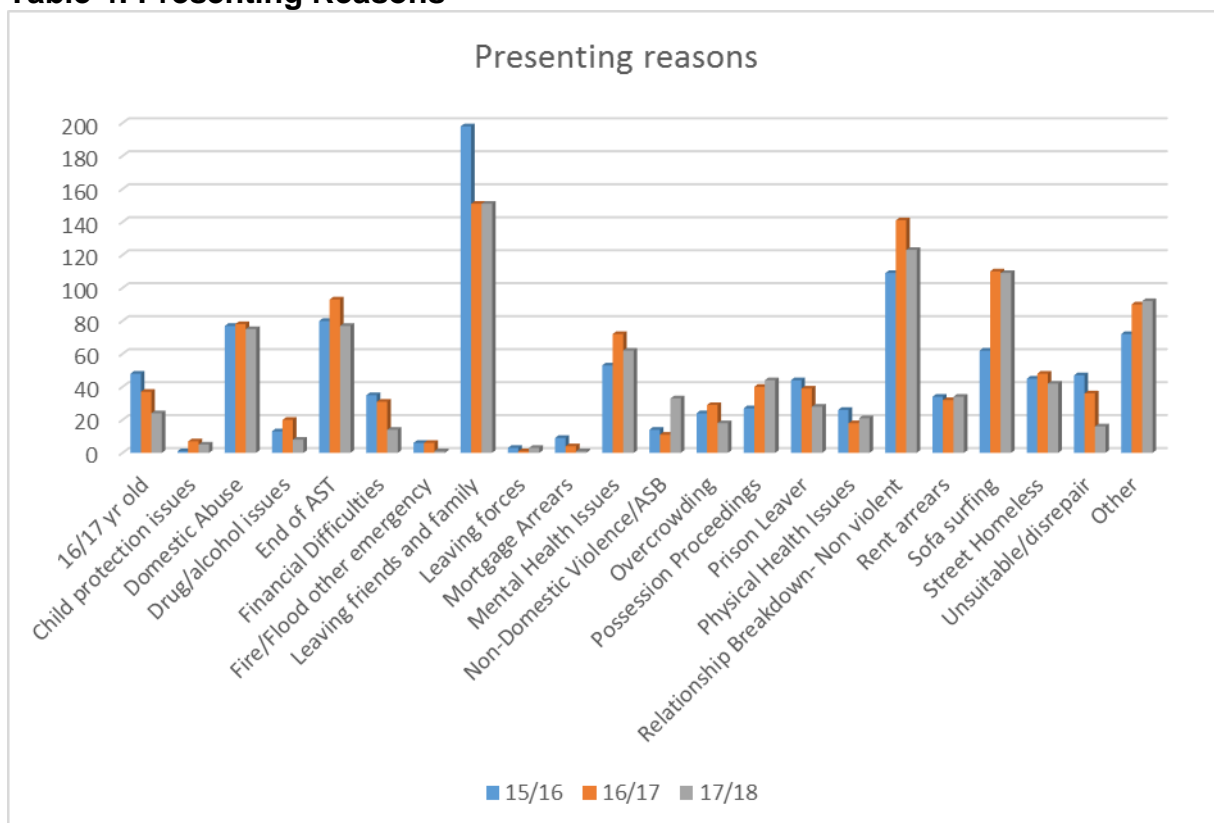
**Table 3: Homeless Applications Made**



16. As shown in Table 4, approaches for assistance can be attributed to a number of factors including:

- (a) The impact of the Welfare Reforms, particularly more recently the impact of Universal Credit which is discouraging private landlords to accept those on benefits.
- (b) The number of people losing their accommodation in the private sector with the end of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST).
- (c) Relationship breakdown.
- (d) Financial issues.
- (e) Health related issues.

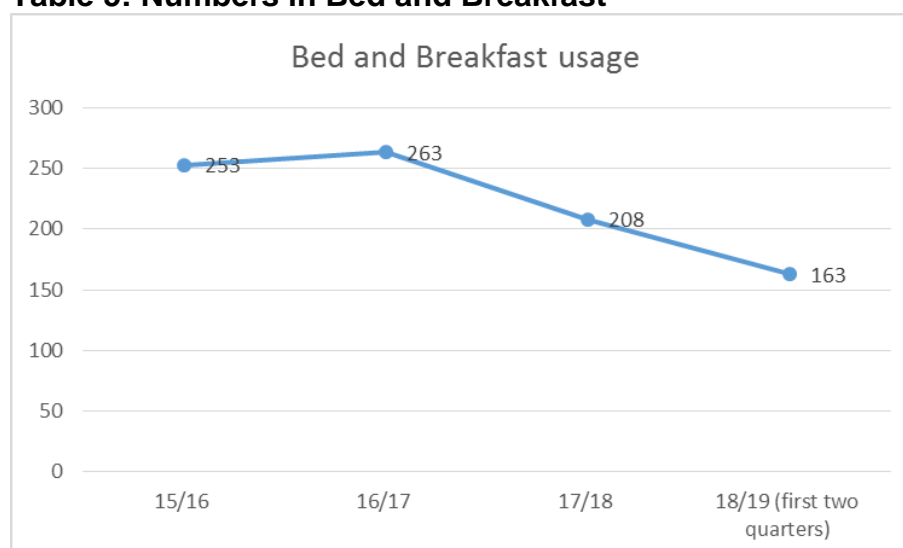
**Table 4: Presenting Reasons**



- 17. The increase in the number of people begging has attracted the attention of both the public and the press. For many the sight of people begging equates with people being “street homeless”. The evidence suggests that this is not the case.
- 18. The Council’s Housing Options Service ensures that everyone who is found to be begging is approached to see what assistance can be given to them. They have found that virtually all of those begging in the town centre have a home. In a number of cases they do have other problems such as addictions and assistance is always offered. Work is ongoing to address the begging issue through a multi-agency approach. There is however an issue of people who do not have a fixed address and these are often described as “hidden homeless”.

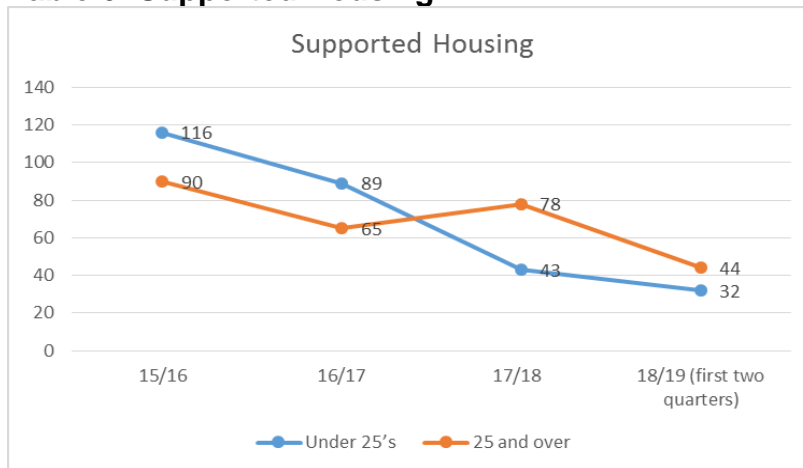
19. An annual count to determine the number of people sleeping rough found that there were three people sleeping on the streets, all of whom refused assistance when approached. Each year the 12 local authorities in the North East Regional Homeless Group take part in a count on the same night and this year it was 17 October. This provides a snapshot of the numbers of people sleeping rough in the region. The Council has put in place a number of programmes to ensure that no one in Darlington needs to sleep rough including programmes that intervene at an early stage to avoid the crisis of losing a home.
20. In the year 2017/18, the Housing Options team provided interim accommodation for people in the following areas:
- (a) No Second Night Out – 51 people
  - (b) Severe weather emergency protocols – 40 people
  - (c) Sofa surfing – 109 people
21. The number of people who are “sofa surfing” is indicative of a problem of hidden homelessness; people who will move between family and friends and occasionally will sleep rough. A further issue has been the challenges in helping people with mental health issues. There has been an overall upward trend in numbers approaching with this problem but the main challenge has been in the complexity of the problems that some present with. Some have numerous problems such as mental health, drug addiction and financial problems. These cases can often take longer to resolve resulting in longer stays in temporary accommodation such as Bed and Breakfast.
22. The number of households being placed in Bed and Breakfast has been reducing although this may change if the trend of the first six months of this year continues as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Numbers in Bed and Breakfast**



23. The main reason for the increased usage in the first six months is the changed requirements of the Homeless Reduction Act which, as anticipated, has seen more people being placed in temporary accommodation due to the longer decision making process.
24. The numbers referred for supported housing or receiving a support service have been reducing in recent years although, like Bed and Breakfast, the first six months of this year suggest an overall increase as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Supported Housing**



25. Overall, the Homeless Reduction Act has brought the most significant changes to homeless practice in recent times. Everyone who approaches for assistance now has a detailed personalised plan to provide a framework for the Council and applicants to work together to identify appropriate actions to prevent or relieve the applicant's homelessness. This includes non-priority households and the workload, as well as the overall timescales, have increased accordingly, leading to a corresponding increase in bed and breakfast usage.

## Strategy

26. The new strategy will reflect the impact of the Homeless Reduction Act in terms of strategic direction and will be supported by a full needs analysis. There are five key elements that will form the basis of the strategy:
- Those at risk of homelessness will be made aware of and have access to the services they may need to prevent it.
  - Provide suitable accommodation and support options for people who are, or who may become homeless.
  - Reduce rates of repeat homelessness.
  - Provide the right support and services so that no person needs to sleep rough.
27. Build a strong partnership to deliver our aims.



28. The main challenges for the new strategy will include:

(a) Addressing the impact of the Homeless Reduction Act:

- (i) Further development of our preventative approach. The management of the new requirements are still being embedded and further work is needed with partners to explore additional ways that earlier interventions can reduce the risk of homelessness.
- (ii) Implement the “duty to refer”. Work is ongoing at a regional level to agree a referral system that will take account of the overlapping boundaries of various statutory authorities and thereby simplify the process.
- (iii) Ensure that the right levels of support and housing are available including temporary and supported housing.

Part of the challenge is to ensure that a range of good quality, affordable rented accommodation is available so that there are a range of solutions available to meet different needs. For some, the provision of support will also play an important role in being able to retain a home and an appropriate mix of supported accommodation as well as support services will be critical to avoiding homelessness, particularly repeat homelessness.

- (b) Address the challenges of those with more complex problems, particularly in relation to mental health. The needs of this group tend to be the most resource intensive to meet. Finding the right solution will be one of the key challenges of the strategy and will require close working within the Council as well as key partner agencies and the voluntary sector.
  - (c) The impact of the full roll out of Universal Credit. Through establishing a good working relationship with the DWP the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit has not, as yet, seen the same level of problems that have been reported in other areas. The continuing roll out of the service will see a large growth in the numbers in receipt of UC during the life of the strategy and the situation will need to be closely monitored. Universal Credit along with other Welfare Reforms will continue to be a prominent feature of prevention work.
  - (d) Develop a new partnership arrangement to take account of the “duty to refer” and monitor the delivery of the strategy. The only way that critical elements of the strategy will be successfully delivered is through working in partnership with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations. The breadth of work involved in preventing homeless together with the need to coordinate organisations roles within the “duty to refer” suggest that a new form should be established to help to deliver the new strategy.
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## **Action Plan**

29. An action plan will be produced to support the delivery of the strategy. The Action Plan will be developed as part of the consultation that will take place in developing the strategy. The aim is to produce a full draft strategy for consultation in February and the final document to be considered by Cabinet in April. To reach these points a group of partners will work with the Council to develop and refine the strategy before a wider consultation takes place. This will be an opportunity to engage all relevant partners engaged in earlier identification and intervention to prevent homelessness as well as those involved in providing direct services.
30. An important element of the development work will be consulting service users about their experiences of the system. A range of means will be deployed to consult including focus groups and surveys.