

DARLINGTON PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2019-2024

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report presents the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (**Appendix 1**) for comment as part of the formal consultation process prior to publication.

Summary

2. Section 1(1) of the 2002 Act requires 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 draft strategy consists of four main sections to satisfy the requirements of the regulations: A review, strategy, action plan and a new requirement to have a specific statement on rough sleeping. In recent years the Government has become increasingly concerned about the growth of rough sleeping. In 2018 the Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy and later in December its supporting guidance required homelessness strategies to be rebadged as Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies.
4. A report to this Committee in December outlined the outcome of the review and therefore this report focuses on the strategy and action plan.
5. The aim of the strategy is to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping. There are five key supporting objectives to the strategy
 - (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.

6. The emphasis on prevention is not new but the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 introduces new challenges and a requirement for much greater cooperation across agencies.
7. The Strategy also sets out a “holistic” approach to assessing needs, recognising that a solution may not be directly related to housing and again requiring greater cooperation with other agencies. As a consequence an important element of the strategy will be establishing a new monitoring group to help provide a new focus for coordination.
8. The Action Plan is intended for delivery over the life of the strategy but will be reviewed at the midpoint in its life.

Recommendation

9. It is recommended that Members comment on the strategy prior to the final draft being submitted to Cabinet for approval.

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
 Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018
 Report to Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee December 2018-Development of the Preventing Homelessness Strategy
 Report to Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee July 2018-Homeless Reduction Act

Pauline Mitchell: Extension 5832

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 homeless, 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

10. The new strategy at (Appendix 1) is based within a framework of legislation with recent changes introduced by the Government reflecting the increasing importance the Government has placed on tackling homelessness. Both the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 have a significant impact on the content and structure of the strategy.

11. A review of homelessness was conducted in 2018 and the results were reported to this committee in December. The review found that an effective service was being delivered and the Homeless Reduction Act enhanced the direction of service delivery that had been instigated in 2015. A key element of the successful delivery has been the work with partners and particularly the third sector organisations who work with us.

12. The main aim of the strategy is contained in the title “Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping”. Although prevention has been part of the Council’s approach for some time the new duties included in the Homeless Reduction Act do present a number of new challenges to the way we deliver services. The need to find a way to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness requires the development of “upstream” approaches and therefore shifts attention to identifying key early risks and developing solutions at that stage before the risk of homelessness has emerged.

13. This places the strategy within the wider context of the Sustainable Communities Strategy and the programmes that it drives to deal with inequalities through tackling issues such as poverty. The strategy identifies five objectives:

- (a) Those at risk of homelessness will be made aware of and have access to the services they may need to prevent it.
 - (i) As a result of the Homeless Reduction Act there is now statutory duty on Council's to prevent homelessness and this has far reaching implications. To deliver this the Housing Options Service must continue to evolve, developing new ways of delivering timely advice and support. The management of the new requirements are still being embedded and further work is needed with partners to explore additional ways that lead to earlier interventions which can reduce the risk of homelessness.
- (b) Provide suitable accommodation and support options for people who are, or who may become homeless.
 - (i) A fundamental element of this objective is ensuring that a range of housing is available and that it is accessible to those who need it. This includes interventions in social housing and private sector housing as well as ensuring the right forms of support are provided. It also includes ensuring the right types of support and supported housing are available to meet the new challenges.
- (c) Reduce rates of repeat homelessness.
 - (i) Repeat homelessness is seen as a failure of the system. It is not just repeat homelessness with an applicant but the challenge of some families where the cycle of homelessness has been passed between the generations. These can be the most challenging due to the complex and multiple problems that are associated with it. As well as looking at how to improve the individual's journey out of homelessness there is a need to review case management and the thoroughness of support to tackle this difficult challenge.
- (d) Provide the right support and services so that no person needs to sleep rough
 - (i) The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government has announced a national target to reduce rough sleeping by half by 2022 and to eliminate it altogether by 2027. Clearly this will be more difficult to achieve in major urban areas than in Darlington rough sleeping is less of an issue.
- (e) Build a strong partnership to deliver our aims
 - (i) Delivery of this strategy is dependent on the strength of the partnership. Building on the obligations of the Duty to Refer requirements provides a helpful starting point in developing the more in-depth relationships with a range of partners through the development of a new Homeless Forum.

14. The Action Plan sets out the key actions required to deliver these five objectives. At the heart of the actions is the need to understand the complex challenges that are involved. The need to shift to more upstream solutions that involve partners in more in depth approaches will involve much greater levels of cooperation across the partnership. The actions range from new ways to support those who are rough sleeping back into a stable lifestyle to analysing the information we already hold on those who approach us, in order to develop new procedures and initiatives that will prevent homeless or repeat homelessness.
15. The strategy will be monitored through a new partnership group .There will also be a review and update of the strategy at the midway point in its life.

Outcome of Consultation

16. A public consultation on the strategy began in February and will conclude mid-March. Partner organisations have also been consulted along with those who will make use of these services.
17. The final draft of the strategy will be presented to Cabinet taking account of comments received.