

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET – 10 DECEMBER 2013

Title of report	PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013 – 2018
Key Decision	a) Financial No b) Community Yes
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Purpose of report	To seek approval of the draft strategy
Reason for Decision	To comply with government legislation
Council Priorities	Homes & Communities
Implications:	
Financial/Staff	The approved budget and staffing structure 2013/14, provides the necessary capacity and resources to implement the proposed strategy and Action Plan.
Link to relevant CAT	Private Sector Housing CAT
Risk Management	Delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan will be monitored through the NWL Homelessness Forum. Any risks will be included in the Corporate Risk Register as and when identified
Equalities Impact Assessment	An equalities impact assessment was undertaken on 10 September 2013 and approved by the Fairer CAT on 23 October 2013. An improvement action plan has been developed to address any potential negative impacts that were identified
Human Rights	None identified
Transformational Government	This strategy has been co-designed with input from service users, internal colleagues and a wide range of external, statutory and voluntary, partner organisations
Comments of Head of Paid Service	The report is satisfactory.

Comments of Section 151 Officer	The report is satisfactory.
Comments of Monitoring Officer	The report is satisfactory.
Consultees	Corporate Leadership Team, Head of Housing, Street Action Team, Housing Management Team, Stronger Safer Team, NWL Homeless Forum, Housing Choices Team, Members, Policy Development Group, service users, general public
Background papers	Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness ; s.179 Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (as amended); Housing Strategy 2012-2015 ; Laying the Foundations, A Housing Strategy for England (2011) ; Leicestershire Together agreed strategic outcomes March 2012; Council's Delivery Plan 2013-14 ; Call for evidence ; Information collected from the workshop 23 November 2012 – Draft Preventing Homelessness Strategy, Equality Impact Assessment, High Level Action Plan
Recommendations	<p>IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT MEMBERS:-</p> <p>A) APPROVE THE NEW STRATEGY</p> <p>B) DELEGATE AUTHORITY TO THE DIRECTOR OF SERVICES (IN CONSULTATION WITH THE HOUSING PORTFOLIO HOLDER) TO APPROVE ANY ASSOCIATED ACTION PLANS</p>

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to develop and publish a homelessness strategy, every five years. The strategy should be based on a review of the local homelessness situation, to ensure that it addresses the causes of homelessness and introduces and uses initiatives to prevent homelessness wherever possible.
- 1.2 NWLDC published its first Homelessness strategy in 2003 with a review due every five years to reflect the local homelessness situation and changes in Government policies. Our last Homelessness strategy was published in 2008 and covered the period 2008 to 2013 - hence the current need for renewal.
- 1.3 In August 2012 the Government introduced a new National Homelessness Prevention Strategy called *Making Every Contact Count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness*. Within this strategy the Government set 10 challenges for Local Authorities and their partners to deliver on (see paragraph 3 of this report). The strategy focuses on the prevention of homelessness through joined up working between services at every level in areas such as health, justice, benefits and social care. It highlights the need to identify people at risk of homelessness as early as possible and have pathways out of homelessness for those who need help. If everyone at risk of homelessness was to receive help at the earliest possible stage this could prevent them from losing their home. The 10 challenges set for local government will

lead to housing teams delivering a 'Gold Standard' of service. There is also guidance within this new strategy for a review to be carried out annually; enabling local authorities to take into account and respond to prevailing conditions both nationally and locally.

2.0 PROCESS

2.1 The process undertaken to complete the review is summarised in the table below;

Date	Summary Detail
Mar – Sep 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call for evidence from stakeholders including customers; desk top review of evidence and analysis of data; stakeholder forums and staff sessions
Nov 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop event 'Let's Side Step Homelessness' based around the existing work undertaken or planned by the Housing Choices team in connection with the 10 challenges or "Gold Standard" (see paragraph 3). Feedback from workshop discussion groups used to identify gaps in current service and provide focus for future priorities
Sep 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CLT approved initial draft strategy for wider consultation NWL Homelessness Forum¹ approved the initial draft and high level action plan, nominated Lead Coordinators for each of the 6 strategic priorities and tasked them with developing detailed actions and milestones by December 2013, together with relevant success criteria that could be monitored by the forum on a quarterly basis. The forum also undertook an Equality Impact Assessment of the draft Press release published in local newspaper and formal public consultation launched on the Council's website
Oct 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairer Corporate Action Team approved Equality Impact Assessment Draft scrutinised by Policy Development Group
Nov 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comments received from public consultation (Appendix 1) and scrutiny (Appendix 2) considered and additional information included in the final draft as a result - final attached at Appendix 3

3.0 REVIEW FINDINGS

3.1 Analysis of the data and subsequent meetings with partners highlighted that the Housing Choices team provide a wide range of housing options and prevention measures. A lot of work that goes some way to meeting many of the Government's **10 Gold Standard challenges** is already underway including:

	Gold Standard Challenge	How NWLDC is addressing the challenge
1	Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services	Since 2003, the Council has adopted and published a resourced district-wide homelessness prevention strategy demonstrating it is committed to preventing homelessness across all Council services
2	Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address	Through the use of First Contact referrals since the beginning of 2013, we have begun to work more

¹ a multi-agency partnership of statutory and non-statutory organisations, all of whom work with vulnerable groups and who are signatories to the strategy

	Gold Standard Challenge	How NWLDC is addressing the challenge
	support, education, employment and training needs	proactively with other partners to address support, education, employment and training needs and are currently assessing their effectiveness
3	Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients	A housing options prevention service has been provided since 2004-5. A self-service facility is to be implemented by the end of March 2014 for initial advice that will include optional written advice for all customers
4	Adopt a <i>No Second Night Out</i> model or an effective local alternative	We are working with all Leicestershire districts and the City Council on a <i>No Second Night Out</i> model and have already implemented a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol locally to provide shelter for the street homeless during periods of cold weather
5	Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support	We have an agreed housing pathway protocol in place with Leicestershire Probation service for ex-offenders and have started working with partners to develop housing pathways protocols for other client groups
6	Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords	In partnership with all Leicestershire districts and the City Council, 'Homefinder' privately rented lettings website has been developed and launched in August 2013 and a suitable private rented sector service for all client groups, including advice and support to landlords and clients is to be developed on the back of this
7	Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme	We have a mortgage rescue scheme in place and have already assisted 6 families to remain in their homes.
8	Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs	This is the Council's third five year strategy that is proactive in preventing homelessness and will be reviewed annually
9	Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation	Currently failing on this challenge as we have no bespoke temporary accommodation other than Bed and Breakfast. However, NWLDC will shortly introduce a pilot scheme, using some units of the Council's own stock to provide alternative temporary accommodation with the aim of not having to place any 16-17 year old in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10	Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks	Through the provision of alternative temporary accommodation (see challenge 9), we aim not to place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency, and then for no more than 6 weeks

3.2 Analysis of our statistics between 2008 and 2012 showed that the number of homelessness declarations made rose dramatically between 2009 and 2011-2012, then decreased again in 2012-13 due to housing advisors adopting a more proactive prevention approach

2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
148	101	128	199	129

3.3 Main recorded reasons for loss of last settled accommodation during 2012/13 were

- | | | | |
|---|--|-----|--------------|
| | | | (Nationally) |
| ○ | Parents, friends or relatives no longer willing to accommodate | 26% | (31%) |
| ○ | End of assured shorthold tenancy | 20% | (22%) |
| ○ | Violent relationship breakdown involving partner | 19% | (12%) |

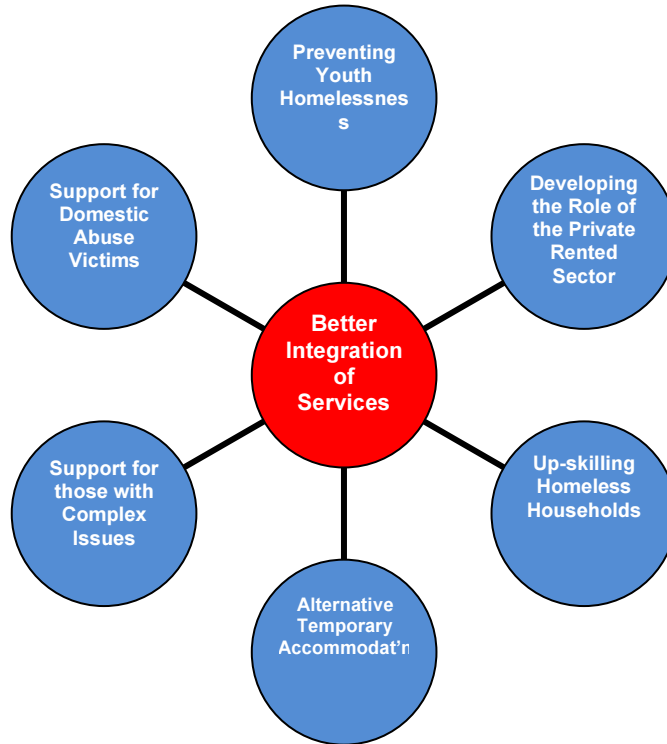
3.4 It was also evidenced that more and more of the clients both NWLDC were dealing with as well as some of our partners, were clients with multiple needs other than just homelessness (mental health, alcohol, drugs). In 2011/12, mental health issues accounted for 13% of all households accepted as homeless and in priority need. In 2009 this was just 2% of the total.

3.5 Youth Homelessness is still a problem with 64% of homeless acceptances in the District from those aged under 35 years of age. This group is specifically affected by the Housing Benefit changes and lack of shared accommodation in the area. Access to early information, advice and guidance is critical if we are to turn the tide on future homelessness presentations for this group.

3.6 Unemployment is also a prevalent factor amongst the homeless. Over the past five years, an average of 76% of all homeless applicants have been either unemployed, or unable to work due to sickness, caring responsibilities or retired etc. If we are to prevent these people from falling back into homelessness, it is important that we try to get as many of these people back into employment, education or training through referrals from our housing options service and through partnership working.

4.0 NEW STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

4.1 The 6 priority areas for improvement that we identified from the Homelessness Review will be underpinned by a central objective - *Better Integration of Services*.



4.2 **Better Integration of services will underpin all priorities** – we will improve the way we communicate and work with partner agencies involved in homelessness prevention, directly or indirectly, by developing shared protocols that support mutual clients. We will develop information sharing pathways and signposting between agencies that is fundamental to all our work.

4.3 The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the actions needed to deliver on these priorities, together with a note of which of the Government’s ten challenges they support. This demonstrates how we are working in partnership to achieve the Government’s “*Gold Standard*” locally

- **Earlier intervention to prevent youth homelessness** – We need to be more proactive about early intervention and prevention through education to stem the numbers of younger people presenting as homeless and improve the understanding about the respective roles of social care and housing in relation to 16/17 year olds. **(Challenges 2 & 9)**
- **Timely support for domestic abuse victims** – existing support agencies are seeing an increase in the number of families referred to their services due to the current financial climate and fact that more people are aware of their service. At the same time, funding is being cut and waiting lists are growing. We need to work with partners to ensure timely support is available for victims. **(Challenge 5)**
- **Developing the role of the Private Rented Sector** - We need to maximise links with private landlords and provide them with appropriate support and incentives to give them the confidence to provide homes for the full range of vulnerable groups. We also need to consider provision of settling in visits and continued tenancy support for private tenants to prevent repeat homelessness. **(Challenge 6)**

- **Supporting those with complex issues**– more and more clients with complex needs including mental health problems are presenting and it is unclear what information and support is available, especially those with low level problems who don't meet social care thresholds. More time is needed to support the vulnerable with Choice Based Lettings. **(Challenge 5)**
- **Alternative temporary accommodation** – the District needs a wider range of temporary accommodation other than Bed & Breakfast, including emergency accommodation with support. We also need to consider increasing the provision of shared accommodation for young single homeless under 35 years affected by the new benefit rules. **(Challenges 9 & 10)**
- **Up-skilling homeless households** -The fact that 76% of all homeless declarations are received from those who are out of work and mostly on benefits is an area of concern and requires a more proactive and co-ordinated approach to up-skill customers and encourage them to be more independent. **(Challenge 2)**

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no additional financial implications. The approved budget and staffing structure 2013-14, provides the necessary capacity and resources to implement the proposed strategy and emerging Action Plan.

6.0 NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 If Cabinet approve the recommendations in this report, the Housing Choices Team will publish and circulate the approved Prevention of Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 to all relevant partners and progress the development of the detailed Action Plan so that it can be approved by the Director of Services and Portfolio Holder for Housing and implemented from 1 January 2014.