

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY PANEL	Agenda Item No. 4
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Report of the Homelessness Prevention Manager

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UPDATE ON THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2008-2011

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide the panel with an update on the progress of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2011 and associated outputs.

2. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

Key LAA indicators:

- National Indicator 141: 'Number of vulnerable people achieving independent living'
- National Indicator 142: 'Number of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living'
- National Indicator 156: 'Number of households living in temporary accommodation'

Other indicators, tackled directly or indirectly by homeless services include:

- NI 6: Participation in regular volunteering
- NI 8: Adult participation in sport and active recreation
- NI 18: Adult re-offending rates for those under probation supervision
- NI 32: Repeat instances of domestic violence
- NI 39: Rate of hospital admissions for alcohol related harm per 100,000
- NI 40: Number of drug users recorded as being in effective treatment
- NI 117: No. of 16-17 year olds not in employment, education or training
- NI 130: Social care clients receiving self directed support per 1,000 inc. individualised budgets

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Definition of Homelessness

The homelessness legislation – that is, Part 7 of *the Housing Act 1996* – provides the statutory under-pinning for action to tackle homelessness.

'An applicant is statutorily homeless if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy, which is accessible and physically available to them (and their household) and which it would be reasonable for them to continue to live in. It would not be reasonable for someone to continue to live in their home, for example, if that was likely to lead to violence against them (or a member of their family).'

Source: Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities

The statutory housing duty

Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 places a general duty on housing authorities to ensure that advice and information about homelessness, and preventing homelessness, is available to everyone in

their district free of charge. The legislation also requires authorities to assist individuals and families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and apply for help.

The main homelessness duty ensures that certain categories of household, such as families with children, or the elderly or those with mental health issues, or a vulnerable for some other reason have a priority need for accommodation. Housing authorities must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for people who have priority need, if they are eligible for assistance and 'unintentionally' homeless. An authority has such a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of its residents, as well as to reduce any negative impacts of homelessness to the local community such as anti-social behaviour arising from rough sleeping.

If settled accommodation is not immediately available, accommodation must be made available in the short term until the applicant can find a settled home, or until some other circumstance brings the duty to an end, for example, where the household voluntarily leaves the temporary accommodation provided by the housing authority.

3.3 The statutory duty to have a Homelessness Strategy

In 2002, the Government amended the homelessness legislation through *the Homelessness Act 2002* and the *Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002* to ensure a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness, in particular by requiring a homelessness strategy for every housing authority district.

The strategy must be based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their district. It must set out the local authority's plans for preventing homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support is, or will be, available for those who become homeless or are at risk of becoming so.

All organisations, whose work can help to prevent homelessness, or meet the needs of homeless people in their district, must be considered in the strategy. Plans for joined up working such as this has a massive impact on reducing those who would otherwise potentially experience the negative aspects of homelessness and risks of becoming homeless.

Through the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy, the aim is to reduce the number of people in the local authority area who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The most effective way to achieve this is to take a preventative approach and to ensure that there are the necessary support services to act as a safety net. Access to free advice and assistance is also vital. Housing Options staff at the Customer Service Centre at Bayard Place have provided housing and homelessness advice to 15,062 people since April 2008. There has been a 7% increase in homeless presentations to the Local Authority over the period 08/09 compared with 07/08. However, as a result of early intervention, overall there has been a 2.75% reduction in homelessness acceptances.

An example of the impact of early intervention is the Tenancy Relations Service. Despite a 34% increase in applications for assistance due to the anticipated loss of privately rented accommodation, this service has effected a 15% reduction in homelessness acceptances for this category.

Another example of early intervention is the work being undertaken in schools to educate young people to plan their move to independent living. Workshops have been delivered to 800 Year 11 students during 08/09 resulting in a reduction of homeless acceptances for this age group.

In Peterborough there are excellent referral routes between the Local Authority and its partner agencies. There has been the introduction of generalist and specialist floating support for vulnerable client groups through the Supporting people Programme.

4. KEY ISSUES

The credit crunch is having far reaching implications, some of which have not yet been fully realised. Housing Options has seen a 72% increase in people seeking advice regarding mortgage arrears and a 59% increase in relationship breakdowns resulting in the threat of homelessness.

Timely access to support and advice can alleviate these issues, prevent actual homelessness and reduce pressure on housing waiting lists. There are 9949 applicants on the Peterborough Common Housing Register.

Better regulation of the Private Rented Sector is enabling more people to access this accommodation, enabled by the Local Authority's Rent Deposit Scheme, and the Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

5. IMPLICATIONS

The strategy has implications for all sections of society and all wards and parishes of the local authority area.

Financial Implications: There are no immediate financial implications.

6. CONSULTATION

Extensive consultation was conducted prior to the adoption of the strategy. It is also a requirement of the Supporting People funding programme that service users are regularly surveyed to ensure that the services they receive are fit for purpose.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It is anticipated that the consideration of this report, coupled with a question and answer session at the panel meeting, will result in Members fully understanding the issue of homelessness in Peterborough.

7. NEXT STEPS

It is recommended that a further update be brought to the Community Development Scrutiny Panel in March 2010 to again review progress and identify issues.

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Not applicable

10. APPENDICES

None

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