

CABINET	AGENDA ITEM No. 4
24 NOVEMBER 2014	PUBLIC REPORT

Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Cllr Peter Hiller, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Services	
Contact Officer(s):	Adrian Chapman, Assistant Director, Communities and Targeted Services	Tel. 01733 863887

THE HOMELESSNESS REVIEW 2014 AND STRATEGY 2013-2018

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S	
FROM : The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Services	Deadline date : 17 December 2014
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For Cabinet to note and comment on the activity of the Housing Needs Service over the last year; 2. For Cabinet to comment on the Homelessness Review; and 3. For Cabinet to agree on the broad strategic aims of the Homelessness Strategy and recommend that the Strategy be adopted by Council. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is submitted to Cabinet following approval from the Strong and Supportive Scrutiny Committee on the 3 September 2014.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is for Cabinet to review and comment on the information contained in the Homelessness Review, to comment and agree on the broad strategic aims of the Homelessness Strategy and to recommend the Strategy be taken forward and adopted by Council.
- 2.2 This report is for Cabinet to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 3.2.1 'to take collective responsibility for the delivery of all strategic Executive functions within the Council's Major Policy and Budget Framework and lead the Council's overall improvement programmes to deliver excellent services'.

3. TIMESCALE

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	YES	If Yes, date for relevant Cabinet Meeting	24/11/2014
Date for relevant Council meeting	TBA	Date for submission to Government Dept <i>(please specify which Government Dept)</i>	n/a

4. The Homelessness Review 2014 and Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018

- 4.1.1 In the last year the Housing Needs team have undertaken a comprehensive review of the Peterborough Housing Register and made a number of changes to the Peterborough Allocations Policy. These changes were:

- Setting the entry criteria to the housing register to allow only those in the most urgent housing need to join, this includes; Homeless households, those who are threatened with homelessness, those living in insanitary or unsatisfactory housing conditions, those who need to move for social/welfare reasons or where failure to assist in moving will cause particular hardship.
- Only accept applications from those who have a local connection with Peterborough by; having lived in the area for 6 of the last 12 months or 3 of the last 5 years, those who are working in the city, those who need to move to the area for special reasons
- Excluding applicants who own suitable accommodation or those who have sufficient financial resources to secure suitable accommodation by other means from joining the housing register. (This will not apply to those over 55 and eligible for sheltered accommodation)
- Those who have behaved in an unacceptable manner continue to be excluded from applying. This will be determined by; The Council or RSL is satisfied that the applicant or a member of their household has previously been guilty of unacceptable behaviour which would make them unsuitable to be a tenant, or the applicant or member of the household has been served with an injunction by the council or their landlord to stop them behaving in a way which causes nuisance or annoyance to others, or the applicant or a member of the household has current tenancy arrears in excess of 8 weeks rent, or the applicant or a member of the household has any outstanding former tenant arrears.

4.1.2 Additionally, the bedrooms standards policy that has previously been more generous was changed and brought in line with the criteria that will be applied to housing benefit claims from April 2013.

4.1.3 In order to support the RSL's in managing the issue of the removal of the spare room subsidy ("bedroom tax") the allocation policy also made provision to give band 1 priority to those who were assessed as under occupying their social housing tenancy. This has been relatively successful, but the continued demand for 1 & 2 bedroom properties has meant that many households are still unable to move into smaller accommodation.

4.1.4 In addition to the above changes we also included a number of additional preference categories, which gave increased priority for those who had a long standing local connection with the city (through 5 years continuous residence), those making an economic contribution to the city through employment or voluntary work in the area and ex-servicemen and women who have been discharged from service in the last 5 years.

4.1.5 This has been a significant area of work, which has been completed with minimal interruptions to the provision of essential advice and homelessness services and with no additional resources.

4.1.6 The result of the review has been a significant reduction in the number of applications on the housing register from 9,703 in January 2013 to 2,688 at the end of October 2014.

4.2 Housing Advice Services

4.2.1 As well as the review of the housing register we have continued to offer advice services to those who contacted the service. In the last financial year we were contacted 25,009 times by clients for advice and assistance. Of which 5,418 were seen face to face by an officer in the Housing Needs team. The type of enquiries dealt with by the officers in the team were wide ranging and on a number of housing related subjects.

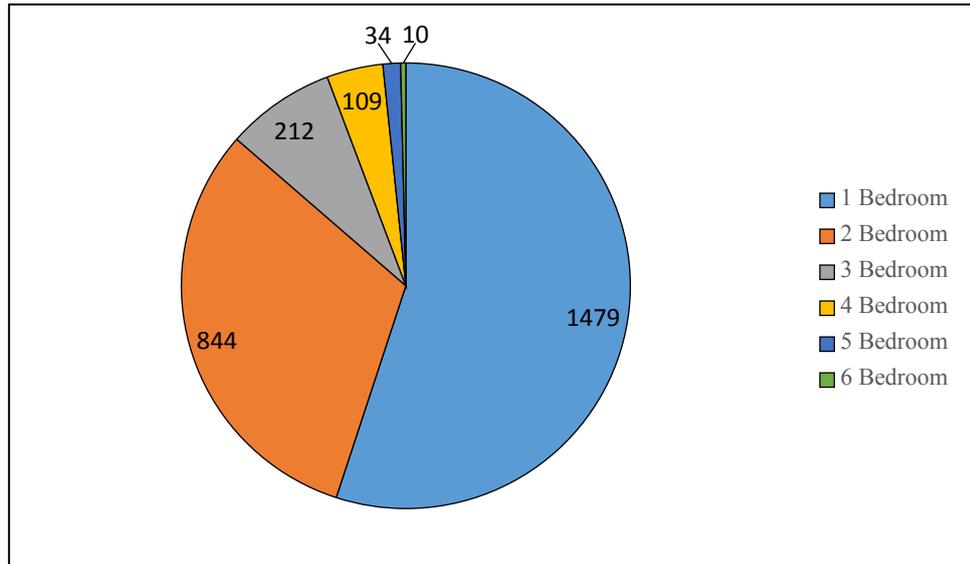
4.3 The Housing Register

4.3.1 As detailed previously the number of applicants who are now live on the housing register has reduced significantly, however the number of people who are approaching us for assistance is still as high as it has ever been. In the last 12 months we have seen 3517 clients face to

face who have either enquired about joining the housing register, had an application processed or amended a current application.

4.3.2 In the 12 months from April 2013 to March 2014 we accepted 965 new applications onto the housing register.

4.3.3 The total number of applicants on the housing register at the end of June 2014 was 2,688. The composition of these households varied, but the majority were either single applicants or couples with a one bedroom need. The chart below shows the current housing register broken down to show bedroom need.



4.4 Allocations

4.4.1 The Council still maintains its nominations agreements with the Housing Associations who have accommodation available in Peterborough and these properties continue to be allocated through the Council's choice based lettings scheme (Peterborough Homes).

4.4.2 Each week our partner Housing Associations advise us, which properties they have available to let and we advertise them to the people on our housing register. Applicants can then choose, which of the available properties they would like to be considered for.

Properties are then shortlisted by:

1. Who has expressed interest (eligible applicants)
2. Highest priority band
3. Who has been in their band longest
4. Who has been on the register longest

4.4.3 In 2013/14 we allocated 1217 properties through the choice based lettings scheme.

4.5 Homelessness Prevention

4.5.1 As detailed earlier in this report the Housing Needs Service adopts a housing options approach to clients who approach the authority for assistance and will seek to prevent a household's homelessness wherever possible. We have a number of options when preventing homelessness and have been successful in a large number of cases, which may have otherwise resulted in the household becoming homeless and the council having to accommodate in temporary accommodation, while seeking alternative accommodation.

We have done this by:

- Negotiating with householders/landlords to allow resolve the issues, which led to the threat of homelessness
- Liaising with Housing benefit to resolve payment issues
- Taking steps to improve security in the home to allow victims of domestic violence to remain in the home (Sanctuary Scheme)
- The Mortgage Rescue Scheme / Mortgage debt advice
- By supporting households to move to alternative affordable accommodation in the private sector

4.5.2 At the end of March 2014 we had completed on 24 mortgage rescues and had a small number, which were pending completion and funding had been agreed to ensure that these cases completed. We were the best performing authority in the East & South East areas and the reputation of the officer in the Housing Needs team was further enhanced by the HCA zone agent who referred a number of authorities to us for advice and guidance.

4.5.3 Unfortunately the Governments Mortgage Rescue scheme closed down on the 31 March 2014. However we still have a number of tools available to us to support households who find themselves in financial difficulty and where we are unable to keep them in their home we are able to support them to exit home ownership and move to alternative accommodation.

4.5.4 We continue to support both tenants and landlords in the private sector through our tenancy relations officer. We have now assisted 592 households and have been successful in the prosecution of 3 landlords who have been found guilty of illegal eviction and have 4 cases pending.

4.5.5 The Housing Needs Service continues to offer a Rent Deposit Scheme which enables persons to access an interest free loan to be used for the up front costs associated with securing a property in the private rented sector. This continue to be a successful option for the prevention and relief of homelessness and also increased access to permanent accommodation. In 2013/2014 a total of 232 households were assisted into private rented sector accommodation through this scheme totalling £100,521.

4.5.6 In addition the increased Discretionary Housing Payments fund (DHP) made available to all local authorities has been used to support households who were in receipt of housing benefits and may be at risk of homelessness to move to alternative private sector accommodation by paying up front fees such as deposits, rent in advance and reasonable administration fees. In 2013/2014 a total of 196 households were assisted into private rented sector accommodation through this scheme totalling £168,127.

4.5.7 Last year we reported to the Department of communities and local government that we were successful in preventing homelessness in 413 cases.

4.6 Homelessness

4.6.1 As well as the advice services offered by Housing Needs where a household approached us for assistance and we are satisfied that the applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness within the 28 days we are under a duty to accept a homeless declaration and commence an investigation into whether the applicant is considered 'statutory homeless' and therefore owed a full housing duty.

4.6.2 In 2013/14 we accepted homelessness applications from 1095 households. This is marginally less than the previous 2 years, but remains considerably less than 4 years ago (1326). Of the 1095 applications, 250 were accepted as 'statutory homeless' and owed a full housing duty compared to a high of 395 in 2009/10. This is in contrast to the national picture, which has since slight increases in homelessness acceptances since 2010.

4.7 Rough Sleeping

- 4.7.1 2013/14 has been a challenging year in terms of dealing with rough sleeping in the city. We continue to offer support services to rough sleepers and the no second night out scheme, which was piloted in the city in partnership with Axiom Housing Association & Peterborough Streets, was successful in supporting those new to the streets into accommodation before they became entrenched. This resulted in the number of rough sleepers who were identified in Peterborough at the time of our annual rough sleeper count was lower than previous years.
- 4.7.2 The pilot has now drawn to a close and has been integrated into the daily work of Axiom's New Haven hostel and the Housing Needs team. Unfortunately the recent shock closure of Peterborough Streets has meant that the council has had to pick some additional work, but clients should not be adversely affected.
- 4.7.3 Most recently there is an apparent increase in street based activity, such as begging and rough sleeping, which we continue to address as and when it arises. Unfortunately some of more recent arrivals to the streets of Peterborough have migrated from other cities and do not have connections with Peterborough so are unable to access services here. While we continue to support rough sleepers by offering reconnections to the area from which they travelled many refuse our assistance as they are able to maintain their lifestyle from donations from members of the public. We will continue our work with the Police and anti social behaviour teams in order to address the issue with begging and rough sleeping in the city centre.

4.8 Homelessness Review 2014 & Homelessness Strategy 2013 - 2018

- 4.8.1 Cabinet is asked to review and comment on the attached documents (Appendix A) and give approval for the Homelessness Strategy to be taken forward to Council for adoption.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The revised action plan was compiled in consultation with the Homeless Strategy Steering Groups focus groups, held in November and December 2012. These focussed on the prevention of homelessness, increasing access to accommodation, rough sleeping and promoting settled lifestyles and sustainable communities. In addition the previous review document was presented to scrutiny committee and recommendations/amendments were made as a result.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- 6.1 Approval is sought from Cabinet to recommend the Strategy for approval and adoption by the Council.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The Homelessness review and strategy have been written to meet the requirements of Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 To not conduct the homelessness review and formulate a strategy. Section 1(4) requires housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a further homelessness review, within the period of five years beginning with the day on, which their last homelessness strategy was published.

9. IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 While the Housing Needs team have been successful in managing the impact of welfare reform on homelessness numbers in city. The roll out of universal credit across the rest of

the country and further improvements in the economic climate, which lead to a rise in the interest rate could result in the more homeowners being placed at risk of homelessness.

- 9.2 Continued investment in homelessness prevention activities is required in order to mitigate additional pressures on the council when meeting its statutory duty towards homeless households.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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

Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002)

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities

Local Authorities' Homelessness Strategies, Evaluation and Good Practice