

Interim Report on the Homelessness Strategy

SUMMARY

- 1.1 As requested by the chair of the Cost of Living Board, this report sets out the progress made to date on the development of the new Homelessness Strategy. Given that the strategy is still under development and the consultation not yet complete, it is necessarily an interim report. A final report will be submitted, if requested, later in the year.
- 1.1 The context in which the new strategy is being developed is one of shrinking resources and increasing demand for services. These factors weigh heavily on the determination of what can realistically be achieved in the years ahead. Nevertheless, the aspiration remains to prevent homelessness wherever possible, but where it does occur, provide suitable accommodation for the affected household as soon as possible.
- 1.2 Although the new draft strategy has not yet been written¹, the draft 'Homelessness Review' has recently been completed. This is a comprehensive analysis of the levels of homelessness, actions currently being undertaken to tackle it, and the resources available. A number of consultation exercises have also been carried out. This report sets out the likely 'direction of travel' of the new strategy in light of the findings of these activities.
- 1.3 As part of the drafting of the new strategy we have developed three over arching themes, or strategic priorities, which will shape future actions. (The putting together of a detailed action plan will take place later in the process). These priorities have been developed in light of the context of service delivery and the intelligence gained from the review process and consultation to date. They are subject to approval and consultation, and are as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Strategic Priority A | Maintain and improve measures to prevent and reduce homelessness. |
| Strategic Priority B | Promote financial inclusion and manage the impacts of welfare reform. |
| Strategic Priority C | Further strengthen partnership working and the coordination of housing services with other support services. |

¹ Time of writing is 27th August 2014

A more detailed discussion of these priorities is found in section 4.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note the update to the Board and make any comments and recommendations in relation to the themes of the new strategy.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 To ensure that Board members are kept updated on the development of the new Homelessness Strategy and have opportunity to have an input into the process.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 4.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 stipulates two stages in the development of a Homelessness Strategy:²
- The conducting of a 'Homelessness Review', which is a comprehensive analysis of the levels of homelessness, actions currently being taken to tackle homelessness, and the resources available.
 - The writing of the strategy itself, which is informed by the findings of the review and sets out the strategic direction of service delivery for the years ahead.

Homelessness Review

- 4.2 The draft Homelessness Review has recently been completed and will shortly be made public as part of the consultation process. A summary of some of the findings of the review are in Appendix 2. The major points are as follows:
- 4.3 Key indicators around the incidence of homelessness show a worsening picture. Homelessness applications are rising, the numbers assessed as actually being homeless are rising, and the numbers we are able to prevent becoming homeless are falling.

The precise figures are as follows: Comparing 2012-13 with 2013-14, the number of formal applications has risen from 272 to 802 households; the number accepted as homeless has risen from 169 to 316 households, while the number of preventions has fallen from 1496 to 1248. The number of rough sleepers (as officially counted) has risen from 24 to 47 over the same 12 month period. Trends over the last four years are detailed and graphed in Appendix 2.

² See: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/crossheading/homelessness-reviews-and-strategies>

- 4.4 The resources of the Council and other agencies that tackle homelessness are falling. Well documented cuts to central government support to Councils are coupled with falls in support and funding streams to other statutory agencies and those in the voluntary and community sector. In particular, reductions in Housing Related Support (HRS) are believed to have a direct effect on the levels of homelessness. The HRS budget was cut from approximately £10million in 2012 to the current budget of £1.7 million. This saw a reduction in commissioned support from 49 services supporting around 5,000 vulnerable people to 7 services supporting 165 vulnerable people – all of which are aimed at vulnerable homeless groups³.
- 4.5 Changes resulting from the economic downturn and in particular Welfare Reform are impacting detrimentally on many low income groups and those susceptible to homelessness. These changes include reductions in local housing allowance rates, the housing benefit cap, the 'bedroom tax' and the abolition of Council tax benefit.

Consultation

- 4.6 The consultation process runs until October 31st. To date we have held a consultation event with service providers, face to face discussions with single homeless persons at Milestone house, and are running a postal questionnaire to families who had previously been at risk of homeless or actually homeless. This latter activity is still on going and the results yet to be analysed. We have also widely publicised the development of the new strategy and invited comments and feedback through the Council's web pages, a press release, and internally through *iderby* and *in touch*.
- 4.7 Initial feedback reinforces concern over many of the areas previously discussed. It also highlighted the following issues:
- *The reduction or loss of services* such as floating support and the end of funding for the mortgage rescue scheme
 - *Reduction in availability of suitable accommodation.* Between 2011 and 2013 the number of supported accommodation bed spaces was reduced from 527 to 150⁴. Much of this reduction has fallen on hostel accommodation. For example in the last 2 years Hartington House has closed with the loss of 40 units, Wilkins drive with the loss of 12 units, and NACRO accommodation (for offenders and ex-offenders) has ceased with the loss of approximately 30 units.
 - *More rough sleeping*, antisocial behaviour and street drinking including the availability of high strength alcohol,
 - *Dispersals of asylum seekers* by the UK Border Agency
 - *Private landlords being more 'choosy'* in terms of selection of tenants
 - *A lack of leaflets/ written advice*
 - *New benefit sanctions*, which can result in the suspension of housing benefit in certain cases.

Key themes for the new strategy

- 4.8 As part of the drafting of the new strategy we have developed 3 over arching themes, or strategic priorities, which will shape future actions. These have been developed in

³ Source: HRS Impacts Report to AHH DLT, July 2014

⁴ Source: Homelessness Briefing Paper to Cabinet Member for Housing and Advice, November 2013

light of the intelligence gained from the review process and the consultation feedback to date. These draft priorities are subject to approval and consultation, and are as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Strategic Priority A | Maintain and improve measures to prevent and reduce homelessness. |
| Strategic Priority B | Promote financial inclusion and manage the impacts of welfare reform. |
| Strategic Priority C | Further strengthen partnership working and the coordination of housing services with other support services. |

Rationale

- 4.9 Priorities A and B both concern resources: Priority A concerns the resources of the Council and other agencies engaged in tackling homelessness. It focuses on the importance of maintaining and improving service provision despite on going resource pressures. Priority B concerns the ‘resources’ of household groups at risk of homelessness and ensuring these are maximised.

Priority C recognises and endorses how essential it is that all agencies work together to tackle and prevent homelessness. Relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, drug and alcohol mis-use, mental health, violence and financial problems can all contribute to making households homeless. It is not possible for the Council to meet all of those needs in isolation. Consequently, homelessness services are delivered by a range of providers and partnership working is crucial to achieving many of the objectives that will be set out in the new strategy.

Differences between the previous strategy and the new strategy

- 4.10 The outgoing strategy (written in 2010) was produced in a substantially different climate. The number of households accepted as homeless had fallen by over 75%, while repeat homelessness had been eradicated almost entirely. Although it was post the credit-crunch and the onset of recession, it was written prior to the substantial funding cuts that were about to be implemented by the new coalition government.
- 4.11 The new strategy is being written in a climate of rising homelessness and squeezed resources. The new priorities reflect this, with their focus on maintaining services (despite the prospect of further government cuts) and maximising household incomes. Reconfiguring and improving service provision remains a constant goal, while effective partnership working is even more critical.
- 4.12 While a number of schemes and services have ceased altogether, some continue but with long term funding uncertain. The outlook for a sample of these is as follows...
- *Mortgage Rescue Scheme*. Funding expired April 2014 with no new funding secured. Once the remaining cases are completed this is likely to wind up.
 - *No Second Night Out* (a scheme to support rough sleepers and prevent repeat

and new occurrences). This is run by English Churches who have secured funding until September 2015. Thereafter there is no continued funding as yet

- *Derby Advice, the Citizens Advice/Law Centre and Direct Housing and Advice (DHA)* All these organisations agreed to continue working closely in partnership after the Government stopped funding legal advice in most areas of Social Welfare Law through civil legal aid. As a result, the Derby Integrated Advice Partnership (DIAP) was formed with support of some Advice Services Transition Fund money from government. This is 2 year funding which is now at the end of Year 1. As yet, there is no certain funding in place from Autumn 2015, though work is currently underway on a sustainability plan.

4.13 It is often the case with schemes such as these that funding is temporary. However, in the current climate it is possible that future funding will be more difficult to find, increasing the possibility that some of these services will not be maintained.

4.14 The remaining HRS budget of approximately £1.7m p.a. continues to support homelessness prevention measures. Any further reduction to this budget will inevitably impact on future service provision

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 None.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

| | |
|--|---|
| Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Estates/Property officer Service Director(s) Other(s) | Richard Burton Toni Nash Liz Moore Steve Sprason Perveez Sadiq |
| For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices: | Jeremy Mason jeremy.mason@derby.gov.uk Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 - Learning Points from the Homelessness Review |

IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 None arising directly from this report. This is an interim report on a strategy document that is yet to be written. It is intended for information purposes and to promote the consultation process. Should any future actions arising out of the finalised strategy result in a recommendation to incur additional costs in the future, a separate report will be presented which will detail the costs and funding arrangements.

Legal

- 2.1 Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 imposes a duty on local authorities to formulate a homelessness strategy, which is defined by s.3(1) as a strategy for—
 - (a) preventing homelessness in the district;
 - (b) securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless;
 - (c) securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in the district—
 - (i) who are or may become homeless; or
 - (ii) who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.”
- 2.2 There is a duty under s.1(4) to publish a new homelessness strategy within the period of five years beginning with the day on which their last homelessness strategy was published. And, under s.3(8) before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy, the authority must consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate.

Personnel

- 3.1 None arising directly from this report.

IT

- 4.1 None arising directly from this report.

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 The strategy is intended to support all people and families who are or at risk of homelessness and will address particular issues affecting people with protected characteristics. Following the consultation period, an equality impact assessment will be done before the strategy is formally approved.

Health and Safety

- 6.1 None arising directly from this report.

Environmental Sustainability

7.1 None arising directly from this report.

Property and Asset Management

8.1 TBC.

Risk Management

9.1 None directly arising from this report, but any risks will need to be considered in subsequent phases of proposal/ implementation of the strategy.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

10.1 Reduce homelessness and increase the housing supply.
Fewer homelessness acceptances and a reduction in the number of households living in temporary accommodation. (Derby City Council Plan 2014/15).

Appendix 2

Learning Points From The Homelessness Review

Derby's Homelessness Review 2014 provides a detailed and comprehensive analysis of homelessness in Derby. The summary below captures some of the key points which will inform the development of the new strategy.

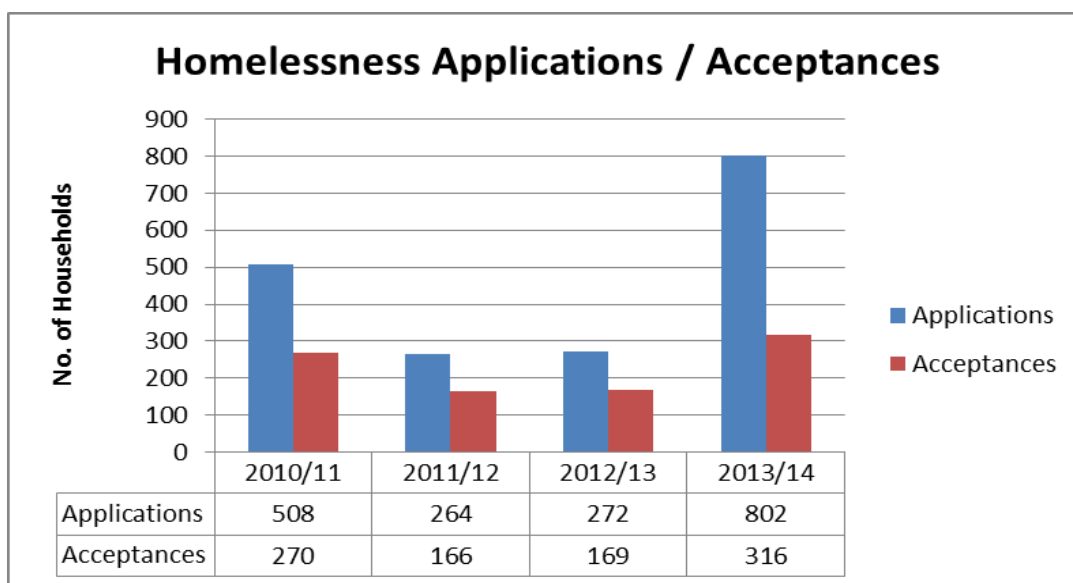
Causes of Homelessness

- a) The main cause of homelessness has become 'Termination of Assured Short hold Tenancy'. (35% of all cases) This has replaced 'Family, relatives and friends no longer willing/able to accommodate', which is now the 2nd largest cause (31%)
- b) Relationship breakdown, particularly violent relationship breakdown, is becoming an increasingly significant factor once again and now comprises 19% of cases.
- c) Perhaps contrary to expectations, repossession due to mortgage arrears remains a small and falling factor, accounting for less than 4% of cases. This is due to the following factors:
 - Record low interest rates and Government guidance to financial institutions which slows down or stops the repossession process – the so called 'pre-action protocol'
 - Mortgage Rescue Scheme (this has now ceased but dealt with 209 cases between 2009 and 2014)
 - Direct Help and Advice (DHA) court desk – which intervenes at possession hearings on behalf of the homeowner.
 - The post of Financial Inclusion Officer based at HOC
 - There are also a large number of other organisations providing debt advice through the Derby Integrated Advice Partnership (DIAP). This comprises Derby Citizens Advice & Law Centre, DHA and Derby Advice

Levels of Statutory Homelessness

The number of homeless applications and acceptances has increased significantly

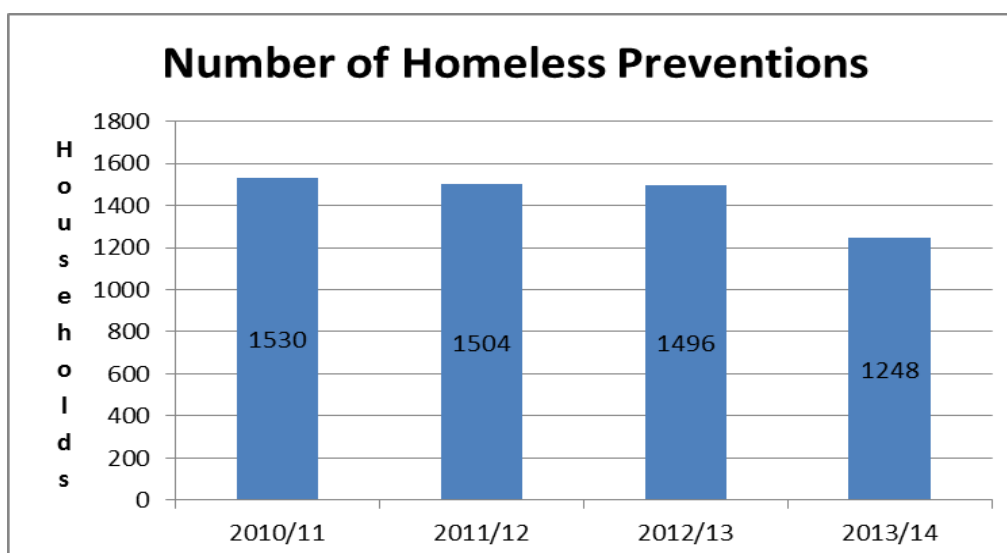
in the last 12 months, as illustrated below.



Of particular note is the rise in the number of applications between 2013 and 2014. The rise from 272 to 802 cases constitutes an increase of 295%.

Preventions

The number of preventions has been gradually falling as illustrated below:



These falling levels are likely to be due to:

- A general increase in the volume of enquiries putting a strain on all aspects of the service
- A loss of supported accommodation due to HRS cuts
- A reduction in front line staffing capacity which impacts on the ability to prevent

homelessness as this is a labour intensive activity

- d) The wider economic downturn which has reduced the capacity of partners and other agencies to assist in collaborative working to prevent homelessness⁵

The Incidence of Homelessness

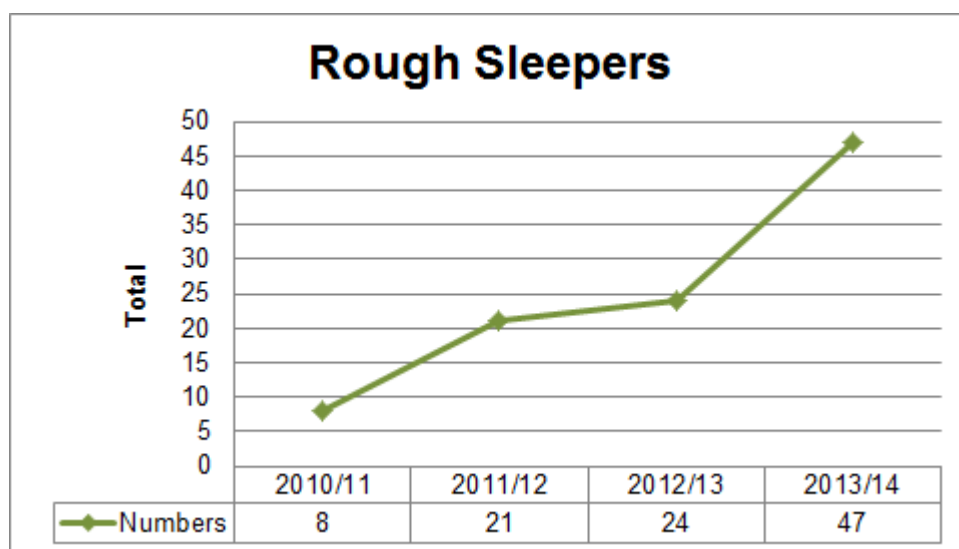
Age Profile

- a) Younger age groups remain the most susceptible to homelessness. The age ranges 16-24 and 25-44 have comprised over 75% of all cases in the last four consecutive years.
- b) Within this range there is an increasing proportion in the upper tier, reflecting greater levels of family breakdown and reducing average household size.

Household Type

- a) Single parents remain the most susceptible group to becoming statutorily homeless, comprising in excess of half of the total throughout the previous four years
- b) Couples with dependent children are the second largest group consistently accounting for over one quarter of the total.

Rough Sleeping



As with over all levels of homelessness, the rough sleeper count is high and rising. The main reasons for this rise are likely to be...

- a) A reduction in the quantity of supported accommodation

⁵ Much of this analysis is based on a report to the PHL Performance Surgery, 28 November 2013

- b) Reduction in on going support including tenancy support
- c) A general squeeze in the resources of voluntary and community organisations that have supported rough sleepers.

Resources

Resources have fallen for many of the departments and agencies that tackle homelessness. Examples include:

- a) Year on year cuts in central government support to local government
- b) Subsequent cuts in HRS budget and staffing resource
- c) Financial pressures on the Community and Voluntary Sector and other statutory agencies such as the Citizens advice Bureau, Youth Offending Service etc.

There have also been falls in the personal resources of many households due to the economic downturn and changes resulting from welfare reform.