

Cabinet

5 February 2009



Sub Regional Homelessness Strategy Key Decision SHSC/LGR/14/08

Report of Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development Cabinet Portfolio Member for Economic Regeneration - Cllr Neil Foster

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report introduces and seeks approval for the County Durham Sub Regional Homelessness Strategy.

Introduction

- 2 The Homelessness Action Partnership (HAP) is the main vehicle for joint working on homelessness across the county. It is a strategic multi-agency partnership which aims to prevent and tackle homelessness and ensure that homeless people or people at risk of becoming homeless have access to decent accommodation and support to live as independently as possible in County Durham. Partners include the County Council (Children and Young People's Service and Adult Services including Supporting People), the seven District Councils, the Drug and Alcohol Action Team, Probation and the Housing Provider where housing stock is no longer managed or owned by the district.
- 3 In response to the challenges and opportunities faced by services in the Local Government Review process and to recommendations made in the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, the County Durham Homelessness Action Partnership sought agreement from the Durham Housing and Neighbourhoods Group to develop a sub-regional homelessness strategy. This document represents the strategic vision for Housing Solutions services across the new unitary authority from April 2009 to meet housing, advice and support needs across a diverse geographical and demographic area.

Background

- 4 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on the Local Housing Authority to produce a Homelessness Strategy. The strategy must include a review of current services and performance over the previous 5 years, against the action plan put in place following the first strategy developed in 2003. The strategy must also predict future levels of needs and demand based on research findings and consultation with partners and service users.

- 5 Each of the 7 District Councils within County Durham has worked within their strategy action plan to meet the housing needs of customers over the past 5 years. In addition, the 7 Districts, the County Council and other partners have worked together through the County Durham Homelessness Action Partnership to further improve and develop services.
- 6 Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 provides the statutory under-pinning for action to tackle homelessness. This homelessness legislation 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 to apply for help.
- 7 In 2002, the Government amended the homelessness legislation through the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002, with the intention of ensuring a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness, in particular by requiring a homelessness strategy for every Housing Authority area.
- 8 All local authorities must therefore review and produce a new Homelessness Strategy from July 2008 covering the period to 2013.

Current Position

- 9 There were six Homelessness Strategies in the County from 2003 – 2008, with Teesdale and Wear Valley's being a joint strategy. Common themes in these strategies included:
 - Improved and better co-ordinated advice and support services for homeless people.
 - A need for emergency access accommodation for all homeless people, including direct access accommodation for young people and emergency accommodation for substance misusers.
 - Improved options for suitable temporary accommodation and support provided for people during their stay in temporary accommodation.
 - Rent deposit schemes to assist homeless households to access the quality private rented sector.
 - Support for people placed in temporary accommodation.
 - Further research into the housing and support needs of substance misusers and mental health clients.
- 10 In July 2008 the HAP launched a countywide consultation of the draft Sub-Regional Homelessness Strategy for County Durham. The consultation included over 100 people from 60 organisations and services users from across the county and closed in October 2008. The final draft has been approved by the HAP.

The strategy has three objectives:

- i. To prevent homelessness: to further ensure that there is a comprehensive, prevention and housing options focused service across County Durham delivering advice and assistance to all in housing need.
- ii. To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk.
- iii. To support people who are homeless or who are at risk of repeat homelessness.

- 11 Briefing sessions for Members have taken place on 22 and 29 January 2009. The strategy is available from Member Services and the Strategy Action Plan is attached as Appendix 3.

Enhanced Housing Options

- 12 The Enhanced Housing Options Approach is a new way of providing housing advice, which empowers clients and transforms lives. John Hills' review on the future role of social housing in England, published in February 2007, highlighted the success of the 'housing options approach' in preventing homelessness, and also praised other 'choice-based' services such as Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) schemes. Hills saw the value in services, which "treat those in need of housing support in a more adult way....moving towards a system where people make more of their own choices from a wider range of options, providing support when people need it". Key to this approach is the need for early intervention and for services to be accessible to all.
- 13 The housing options approach fundamentally transforms the way that those in housing need interact with providers of housing advice. It empowers people by giving them information and advice about the options and services available and enables them to make informed decisions. In County Durham many of the District Councils have developed housing options services and a number have invested further to provide prevention services to enable early intervention to avoid homelessness to a wider sector of our communities. To promote an 'enhanced' housing options approach, Communities and Local Government invited bids from local authorities for two rounds of 'trailblazers.'
- 14 County Durham Homelessness Action Partnership submitted a bid on behalf of its partners in July 2008 for the second round of funding. The second round is to run in 2009/10 for 20 trailblazers to develop enhanced housing options services with guidance and support from mentoring authorities. The bid has been successful and will attract of grant of £260,000 over 2 years from April 2009 to develop Enhanced Housing Options across County Durham.

Resources

- 15 The strategic action plan developed from the review of homelessness services across County Durham represents an elevation in service design to replicate the good practice achieved across the county since 2003 and to further develop good practice to meet the challenges ahead. Whilst implementation of the action plan will ensure appropriate services are developed to meet current and future need, it is recognised that resources will need to be managed to deliver this vision over the life time of the strategy. Where expected funding streams are not delivered, an assessment of the impact on our ability to deliver elements of the action plan will be made to ensure the core service is not affected. Work to address need will continue in partnership with voluntary and statutory sector agencies to achieve the strategic objectives over the life time of the strategy.

Next Steps

- 16 To enable the Sub-Regional Homelessness Strategy to be taken forward and to ensure the new authority meets its legal requirements under Part VII Housing Act 1996, (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002), the document requires the approval of the new Cabinet in readiness for vesting day of the 1st April 2009.
- 17 In order to comply with Part VIII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) the new Authority is required to approve a Homelessness Strategy.
- 18 The Director and Head of Housing are preparing a structure for the Housing Options Service that will ensure staff are deployed to deliver a safe Homelessness Service from vesting day.
- 19 A Housing Options Policy has been produced in accordance with the strategy as a guide for staff and users, which broadly outlines the services that will be delivered across the County.
- 20 Further guidance will be prepared giving more precise details on each element of the service once the staff team is in place.
- 21 An 'Equality Impact Assessment' is in the process of being carried out on the strategy. A risk assessment has been carried out and is attached at Appendix 2.

Recommendations and Reasons

- 22 That the County Durham Sub Regional Homelessness Strategy be approved.
- 23 That the Head of Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, has delegated authority to approve and amend any related policies and procedures that are produced, which underpin the Durham County Homelessness Strategy.

Background Papers

Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002

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Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

(Does the decision impact upon a future Unitary Council?)

Yes

Finance

Costs contained within existing budgets, including two year pump priming grant from the CLG of £240,000 for the development of Enhanced Housing Options service from April 2009.

Staffing

Accounted for in LGR staffing proposals for Housing Service.

Equality and Diversity

Equality and Diversity Impact assessment currently being undertaken.

Accommodation

None

Crime and Disorder

Indirect impact on meeting the accommodation needs of those at risk of offending or re-offending within the community enabling National Offender Management Service and partners to manage offender risk.

Sustainability

Forward planning of budgets and decision-making process monitored following ending of CLG homelessness grant regime in 2011 to ensure services are maintained and/or reduced as appropriate.

Human Rights

Compliance with legislation in regard to discrimination will be addressed through Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment.

Localities and Rurality

Proposed delivery structures will be area based and locally sensitive to meet identified needs.

Young People

Ensures statutory requirement for joint working between housing and social service departments is maintained and improved, for instance the Joint Young Persons Protocol and the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Protocol.

Consultation

Consultation with staff, partner organisations and service users complete.

Health

Positive impact on health through addressing housing needs of key client groups.

Appendix 2: Risk Assessment for Key Decision

Risk Description	Potential Impact	Treatment (if not already in place, state implementation date)	Risk Owner
<p>The Homelessness Strategy is not approved by Cabinet.</p>	<p>Potential Judicial Review proceedings due to failure to comply with statutory requirement to review and produce strategy.</p> <p>Potential negative Regional or National press / media coverage.</p> <p>Reputation damage to the County Council.</p> <p>Criticism by other stakeholders e.g. Partners, central government.</p> <p>Reputation damage to own Service area</p>	<p>Document in final version. Consultation undertaken with staff, partners and service users. Member training planned for January to advise of the authority's statutory requirements.</p>	<p>Glyn Hall, Head of Housing</p>
<p>Identified priorities not implemented due to above.</p>	<p>Increase in the numbers of homelessness applications and presentations across County Durham.</p> <p>Increase use of temporary accommodation leading to failure to meet NI156 target set within LAA and central government target by 2010.</p> <p>Increase in crisis intervention leading to additional resource costs to housing and partner organisations.</p> <p>Reduction in quality of service to customers. Significant number of complaints from service users</p> <p>Statutory service still deliverable.</p>	<p>(As above) Current services working to align service provision to ensure current focus on homelessness prevention maintained.</p> <p>Combined districts services currently exceeding County target with continued focus to ensure transitions to single service does not incur detriment to performance.</p> <p>Current services focus on early intervention maintained and developed within single service.</p> <p>As above.</p>	<p>Glyn Hall</p> <p>Glyn Hall</p> <p>Glyn Hall</p>

Appendix 3: Action Plan This action plan is a working document and will be reviewed and made more detailed alongside the development of the new Unitary Authority's structures.

Objective	Outcome	How will this be achieved?	Resource	Timescales	Link to Local Area Agreement National Indicators
To prevent homelessness	All customers have access to a range of housing options and solutions.	Housing options service available to all customers across geographical localities.	General Fund: EHO Trailblazer.	2009/10	NI119, 141, 156.
	Customers receive prompt, accurate advice to resolve housing need and are supported to access specialist provision where appropriate.	Referral protocol across the county with a range of advice agencies offering free and / or legal services funded civil law remedies across a range of issues including, debt, welfare rights, employment, housing, mental health and community care law, promoting financial inclusion projects. File management, customer satisfaction and service standards amended to incorporate best practice in client care, file review and supervision. (Legal Service Commission Specialist Quality Mark).	No resource implications: Smarter working procedures & protocols developed to improve outcomes	2009/10	NI 156, 119, 141, 32, 173, 151
	Customers at risk of homelessness are able to access private sector housing and support.	Countywide Bond Guarantee Scheme accessible to all client groups on low income or means tested benefit.	Supporting People Commissioned service. CLG grant for bonds of £40k (from 08/09 budget)	2009/10	NI 156, 119, 155, 154
	Customers at risk of violence or harassment are able to remain in their home if it is their choice and safe to do so.	Cross tenure target hardening / Sanctuary Schemes available to all at risk of violence or harassment where homelessness is threatened. Work with partnership organisations to develop perpetrator programmes to enable perpetrators to change behaviour. Work in partnership with organisations to deliver the Freedom Programme to victims of domestic violence. Work with landlords to offer alternative housing to perpetrators to enable victims to remain in their home. Develop safe houses and partnership responses to enable victims to remain at home or access suitable alternative accommodation.	Current county grant spend by Easington & Derwentside of £25k. Need to continue existing level of service & identify potential funding routes to expand service delivery from April 09.	2010/11	NI 156, 119, 32, 141, 21
	Young people can remain in or return to family if it is safe to do so.	Family Mediation Service available to young people estranged or at risk of estrangement across the county. Review current provision to assess the need to engage with younger age group (under 16s).	Current SLA ends March 09. Funded via one-off CLG grant. New funding streams to be identified with SP / CYPS	2010/11	NI 156. 119. 117. 111. 79, 110.
	Young people presenting at risk of / or homeless have their accommodation and support needs met in a coordinated way.	Joint Protocol for 16/17 years olds continued across the county.	£40k CLG Grant. Match funding from SP/ CYPS. Service to be re commission by April 09	2009/10	NI 156. 119. 117. 111. 79, 110, 141

Objective	Outcome	How will this be achieved?	Resource	Timescales	Link to Local Area Agreement National Indicators
To prevent homelessness	Customers at risk of homelessness due to neighbour disputes or anti social behaviour are supported to remain in their homes.	Community mediation services available to resolve disputes between parties. Family intervention project are continued or implemented to work with families engaged in anti-social behaviour and at risk of homelessness. Review of current provision across the county and work in partnership with community safety and social landlords assist in continued provision where appropriate.	Current joint arrangement in Easington. Need to develop new service and funding streams over the life of the strategy.	2012/13	NI 119,156,21, 30, 111, 117, 23, 110
	Vulnerable people can access a co-ordinated response to their housing, support and advice.	Vulnerable Adults Protocol to meet the housing, support and advice needs of vulnerable groups: Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Those in priority need but intentionally homeless ▪ Those in residential or community treatment for substance misuse ▪ People with learning disabilities or mental health problems ▪ The elderly ▪ Those admitted to hospital with no suitable accommodation to return to on discharge ▪ Priority and prolific offenders ▪ Returning prisoners ▪ Gypsies and travellers ▪ People suffering domestic violence. <p>The protocol will sit alongside and compliment the Housing and Returning Prisoners Protocol and the Common Assessment Framework.</p>	No resource implications. Development & promotion of protocol required within existing resources linked to improvements gained by service redesign and improvements to working practice.	2009/10	NI 119, 156, 141, 40, 125, 21, 187, 151, 173, 152
	Customers threatened with eviction and without legal representation have access to free, independent legal advice to avoid homelessness within 3 days of a possession hearing.	Referral protocol established with lead organisations within the County Court Duty Schemes covering Durham, Sunderland, Hartlepool, Bishop Auckland and Consett.	No resource implications. Duty schemes fully funded by Legal Services Commission.	2009/10	NI 156
	Customers are supported to remain in their tenancies	Homelessness prevention fund accessible to all in housing need on low-income and / or mean tested benefit. Rent referral protocols established with RSLs and private sector housing providers to enable housing options advice and prevention services to be offered prior to possession action.	CLG Grant. Suggested allocation £30k (£10K per locality).	2009/10	NI156

Objective	Outcome	How will this be achieved?	Resource	Timescales	Link to Local Area Agreement National Indicators
To prevent homelessness	Gypsy and traveller people have prompt and supported access to the housing options services and associated prevention tools and services.	Referral protocol established with relevant organisations to enable Gypsies and travellers to have access to appropriate advice and support to access housing and benefit options.	No resource implications. Decision to be made on staff deployment to deliver service following service design.	2010/11	NI 156, 141
	Young people are aware of their housing options and the impact of homelessness at an early age.	Peer education engaging young people across the county to raise the profile of homelessness prevention, housing options and associated services and support.	No resource implications. Current services externally funded. New funding to be developed to renew.	2011/13	NI 156, 112, 111, 117, 110
	Young people are able to make informed choices prior to independence and to support skills development to prevent loss of accommodation.	Life skills training to prepare socially excluded young people at risk of homelessness to prepare for independent living.	£11k from existing CLG grant in Easington. Pilot to continue 09/10. New funding required following service evaluation. 10/11.	2011/12	NI 156, 141, 119, 112, 111, 117, 110
	Front line staff from a range of disciplines to have the skills and knowledge to identify and respond to early risk of homelessness and are able to support their clients to access appropriate support to avoid homelessness.	Prevention champions training delivered to front line staff across the statutory and voluntary sector.	No implications in short term. Additional CLG grant secured via HAP for development and delivery. Funding to be identified to deliver post April 09.	2009/13	NI 156, 141
	Customers at risk of homelessness have access to discretionary housing payments and advice and support to local suitable, alternative housing options.	Discretionary housing payments accessible to customers experiencing short-term financial hardship.	No resource implications. Partnership working between internal departments to ensure spend of allocated funds.	2009/10	NI 156, 141
	Expand influence and effectiveness of Homelessness Action Partnership and increase scope of prevention agenda.	RSL's engaged with the homelessness prevention agenda. Prevention champions play an active role in Homelessness Action Partnership.	Development resources required.	2009/10	NI 156, 141
	People in or at risk of fuel poverty are supported to increase available income to remain in their home.	Fuel poverty options available via housing options team to assist those identified as living in fuel poverty to increase affordability of accommodation.	No resource implications. Promotion may increase access to central government grants.	2009/10	NI 156, 141, 187

Objective	Outcome	How will this be achieved?	Resource Implications	Timescales	Link to Local Area Agreement National Indicators
To prevent homelessness	Customers are able to take positive action to prevent their own homelessness where appropriate.	Self help information developed to assist service users to take positive action to prevent homelessness.	General Fund / CLG Grant. Potential use of EHO Trailblazer funds if bid successful.	2010/11	NI 156, 141, 119
	People in mortgage arrears or unable to repair their home have access to a range of solutions.	<p>Investigate the potential to link mortgage rescue scheme with RSL partner with potential to enhance a Youthbuild type service to assist those equity rich and cash poor to improve their homes.</p> <p>Partnerships developed with mortgage lenders to increase early intervention and referral for specialist advice services.</p> <p>Service publicity highlights options available for customers to seek early intervention and solutions.</p> <p>Promote the ability for owners to rent a room in their home with tax relief up to £4,250 pa or £2,125 if claiming income support.</p>	<p>Potential resource implications for delivery of mortgage rescue. Access to central government funding for NE of up to £1m 09/10 £2m 10/11 £1m 11/12.</p> <p>Partnership development required to access funding and deliver product within proposed service design options.</p>	<p>2009/10</p> <p>2009</p> <p>2009</p> <p>2009</p>	NI 156, 141
	To ensure returning prisoners have their housing and support needs assessed and addressed in partnership with support agencies and resettlement plans.	Reaffirm commitment to the HARP protocol following its re-launch.	No resource implications.	2009/10	

Objective	Outcome	How will this be achieved?	Resource Implications	Timescales	Link to Local Area Agreement National Indicators
To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk.	More accommodation options are available.	Work with empty homes officers to increase supply of suitable housing options for vulnerable groups.	No resource implications to H/less budget.	20011/12	NI 156, 155, 158, 154
	Customers who are homeless are able to access accommodation	Homelessness prevention fund accessible to all in housing need on low-income and / or mean tested benefit. Countywide bond scheme available	Prevention fund £30k BGS £40K CLG Grant.	2009/10	NI 156, 141
	Customers have one point of access on information and bidding for housing options across providers and the county.	Durham Key Options web site developed as hub of housing options, self-help and information on a range of prevention services.	EHO Trailblazer funding £260k over 09/10 –10/11	2009/10	NI 156, 155, 158, 154
	Allocations policies recognise varying housing needs and responds proactively to prevent presentations as homeless.	Common allocations policy aligned to prevention agenda ensuring preference given to those at risk of homelessness.	No resource implications.	2009/10	NI 156, 155, 158, 154
	16-25 year olds have alternatives to accessing B&B accommodation in an emergency and agencies have time to source alternative housing options whilst young person is supported in safe and appropriate temporary accommodation.	Night stop hosts recruited and trained across the county to meet the short-term accommodation and support needs of young people aged 16-25. Supported Lodgings developed with CYPS.	£18K from current CLG grant Easington DC for SLA to March 2010. Cost per placement shared with CYPS = of approx £2,000 CLG grant or general fund.	2010/11	NI 156, 141, 119, 112, 111, 117, 110
	The housing needs of all customers are met by providing a varied housing market promoting products to meet the diverse needs of customers across the county.	Influencing planning and housing policy to reflect the needs of customers at risk of homelessness or excluded from the housing market to promote low cost home ownership and social renting units.	No resource implications.	2009/13	NI 156, 155, 158, 154
	Where homelessness prevention has been successful in reducing the number of customers requiring access to temporary accommodation, development of innovative approaches to re-using temporary accommodation to meet changing needs will be investigated.	For example: Current temporary accommodation, where available and appropriate, developed into taster flats to meet the accommodation and support needs of young people leaving care or aged 16-21 moving on from supported housing provision. Current temporary accommodation where available and appropriate developed into safe houses to meet the accommodation and support needs of those fleeing domestic violence.	Development of innovative use of accommodation following successful implementation of Housing Solutions Service. Funding streams to be identified.	2010/13	NI 156, 155, 158, 154

Objective	Outcome	How will this be achieved?	Resource Implications	Timescales	Link to Local Area Agreement National Indicators
To support people who are homeless or who are at risk of repeat homelessness	Homeless people have their housing and support needs met.	Increase provision of accommodation based services in the North and South of the county. Regularly evaluate the needs of individuals to ensure that services are appropriate and being accessed.	Supporting People funded service development. Housing Corporation. Within 08/09 budget for SP commissioning body.	2009/13	NI 40, 119, 125, 141, 32, 30, 111, 156, 151, 173, 152, 110
	Improved move-on options for service users of accommodation based services.	Work in partnership with Supporting People and service providers to develop move-on provision via MOP.	No implication yet identified.		
	To improve people's chances of overcoming homelessness by linking housing options and training and employment opportunities across the county.	Develop links to and between training and employment options/providers for those in housing need to enable customers to access appropriate training and employment opportunities. Options for skills based projects, such as the Youthbuild construction skills project operating in Easington, explored further to meet the training, employment and housing needs of young people.	EHO Trailblazer funding of £260k over 09/10 & 10/11	2009/10	NI 40, 119, 125, 141, 32, 30, 111, 156, 151, 173, 152, 110

Objective	Outcome	How will this be achieved?	Resource Implications	Timescales	Link to Local Area Agreement National Indicators
Cross cutting	Housing options and homelessness service provision are consistent and effective across the county.	Review procedures and practice aligned to ensure consistency across the county. Fit for purpose performance management system linked to LAA priorities.	No implications.	2009/10	NI119, 141, 156.
	The diverse demographic and geographic needs of customers are responded to.	Home visits, outreach, out of hours, weekend working and innovative approaches developed to reach rural localities and hard to reach groups across the county. Out of hours provision consolidated to ensure service accessible across the county.	Within service design & general fund.	2009/10	NI119, 141, 156.
	To ensure customers have access to information on the housing options, advice and assistance available to avoid homelessness and create sustainable tenancies when homelessness is unavoidable.	A range of re-branded information leaflets and booklets developed promoting early intervention, prevention services and housing options across the county.	General fund & EHOs trailblazer.	2010/11	NI119, 141, 156.
	To work in partnership with voluntary and statutory partners to raise awareness of housing and associated solutions developed to respond to customers needs.	Communications strategy developed with appropriate partners to promote homelessness prevention, housing options and associated services to socially excluded groups and those at risk of homelessness.	As above.	2010/11	NI119, 141, 156, 40, 32, 111, 21, 117, 155, 154
	Homeless Action Partnership reflects and responds needs of commissioners, partners and service users to deliver on strategic objectives in partnership with the statutory and voluntary sector.	Options appraisal for the development, management, governance and strategic relevance of the Homeless Action Partnership within County Durham from April 2009.	No implications yet identified.	2009/10	NI119, 141, 156.
	Housing Associations are part of an effective partnership with local authorities to prevent homelessness and develop affordable housing options.	Sub-Regional / Regional Homelessness Prevention strategy developed with RSLs.	Share costs for publishing & training. General fund.	2010/11	

Objective	Outcome	How will this be achieved?	Resource Implications	Timescales	Link to Local Area Agreement National Indicators
District Priorities (Uplifted into Strategy)	Derwentside:				
	Maximise access in all tenures to affordable housing options.	Develop housing options for special needs groups including those with learning disabilities and those with drug or alcohol abuse problems.	Resources to be identified.	2009/10	
	Reduce use of temporary accommodation and meet CLG target by 2010.	Review More than a Roof service:	Within current DDC budgets.	2008/09	