



10 January 2019

**Homelessness and Homelessness
Strategy progress update**

**Report of Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and
Local Services**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with headline statistics relating to homelessness and of progress made in relation to the Homelessness Strategy prior to a presentation delivered by Marie Smith, Housing Manager, Regeneration and Local Services.

Executive Summary

- 2 This report provides a summary and headline statistics in terms of the number of people contacting Housing Solutions for housing advice and the levels of homelessness over the last three years.
- 3 The Homelessness Act 2017 resulted in a new code of guidance being issues to Local Authorities. This suggested a review of homelessness and the development of a strategy to address the current issues.
- 4 This report will summarise the results of the review and outline the timetable for consultation on the draft strategy. In addition an overview will be provided in relation to the changes in service delivery since the introduction of the Homelessness Act in April 2018.

Recommendation

- 5 Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment upon the information provided in the report and during the presentation.

- 6 That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the refresh of the work programme for 2019-2020 receives a further progress report.

Background

- 7 The Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee have previously received progress reports and presentations on the Homelessness Strategy with the last update provided to members at the meeting on 26 February 2018. It was agreed by members at that meeting that the committee would receive detail of progress as part of the committee's work programme for 2018/19.
- 8 Arrangements have been made for Marie Smith, Housing Manager to attend the meeting on the 10 January 2019 to deliver a presentation focusing on Homelessness and the Homelessness Strategy covering:
- Contacts to Housing Solutions;
 - Homelessness: headline statistics;
 - Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: update and statistics;
 - Review of homelessness and Homelessness strategy and;
 - Rough sleeping in Durham City.

A copy of the presentation is attached as appendix 2.

Homelessness and Homelessness Strategy

Contacts to Housing Solutions

- 9 The first point of contact for Housing Solutions is The Housing Advice Line. The number of clients contacting the Housing Advice Line is monitored and analysed to inform future service development.
- 10 Clients are provided with one off advice by Housing Advice Line officers or are referred for further assistance to a range of specialist officers. These include Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT), Private Sector Housing, Homeless Advice and Prevention, Home Improvement Agency (HIA), Regeneration & Warmer Homes, Durham Key Options choice based lettings scheme & Family Intervention support. Clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness are referred to a Housing Officer for a more detailed assessment.

- 11 The number of clients contacting the service for general housing advice over the last three years has increased. This may be due to the service growing in size after acquiring a range of specialist teams providing support and advice functions to clients. In 2017/18, 4597 clients contacted the service claiming homelessness either through the housing advice line or a referral from a partner agency for housing advice, prevention or homelessness.
- 12 In response to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 the delivery of the front line service was reviewed to ensure compliance and improved service delivery. A new structure was implemented in April 2018 to strengthen the level of support provided to clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and recording mechanisms altered to align with government requirements.

Homelessness: headline statistics

- 13 The number of completed homeless applications have fluctuated over the last three years. In 15/16 458 were completed and in 16/17 528 were completed and in 2017/18 there were 492 homeless applications completed.
- 14 Housing Solutions have adopted a preventative approach over the last five years and offer a range of prevention tools for clients. This means assisting clients to remain in their home where possible or help them to find alternative accommodation. The prevention tools include but are not limited to:

Joint protocol for 16/17 year olds;

- Remain Safe target hardening scheme;
- Pre eviction protocol working together with landlords;
- Family intervention case work to assist households with complex needs;
- Prevention fund to assist clients access accommodation; and
- Use of the Discretionary Housing Payment to provide a top up for short fall in rent.

- 15 The number of clients prevented from becoming homeless has increased year on year. In 2015/16 there were 1237 clients helped to stay or move home, in 2016/17 1333 clients and in 2017/18 1541. It is considered that the increase is as a result of a continued focus on early intervention as well the introduction of new services and improved recording.

The main prevention tools used to assist clients to remain in their existing home have been consistent over the last three years: resolving housing benefit problems, supporting victims of domestic abuse and use of the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

- 16 The main three reasons for homeless applications has remained consistent over the last three years: Loss of rented or tied accommodation, domestic abuse and parents no longer willing to accommodate.
- 17 The main reason for clients contacting the service for general housing advice is due to financial difficulty.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: update and statistics

- 18 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was introduced on 1st April 2018. The legislation extends clients' entitlements to help and places a renewed focus on the prevention of homelessness. Reporting and recording mechanisms have changed in order to align with the new requirements under the act which are: duty to prevent homelessness and duty to relieve homelessness. When a client presents to Housing Solutions they are placed into one of these categories depending on their circumstances.
- 19 From April 2018 to September 2018 3824 clients presented through the Housing Advice line or were referred by another agency due to homelessness or the threat of homelessness. Of these cases 427 have been prevented from becoming homeless whilst 120 have been relieved from their current situation. 1853 received advice or early intervention work.
- 20 The figures are higher than the same time period last year but this is due to the changes brought about by the Homelessness Reduction Act and all clients now requiring to be placed in two categories and assessed via a personalised housing plan.
- 21 A review of the changes to service delivery is currently ongoing to understand the impact, success and identify areas for improvement.

Review of homelessness and Homelessness strategy

- 22 Housing Solutions have developed a Homelessness Strategy which is a separate document as well as part of the overall Housing Strategy for County Durham. This has been developed in response to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and a revised Code of Guidance.

- 23 Housing Solutions have reviewed homelessness in County Durham over the last three years and the strategy sets out the strategic approach, key priorities and actions towards preventing homelessness across County Durham over the next three years.
- 24 The purpose of the homelessness review was to determine the extent to which the population in the County is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, assess the likely extent in the future, identify what is currently being done and by whom to prevent and tackle homelessness and consider existing resources.
- 25 The Homelessness Review, which informed the strategy considered trends over last three financial years, 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 and involved a mixture of desktop research, staff surveys, partner events, consultations and benchmarking with other authorities. The review will be available as a separate document to be read alongside the strategy.
- 26 The three aims of the strategy are:
- Prevent homelessness through early intervention;
 - Increase access to and supply of accommodation for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
 - Provide a range of support services to reduce the risk of households becoming homeless.
- 27 A range of issues and actions are identified in the strategy and aligned to these three aims.
- 28 Monitoring of progress towards achieving the actions set out in the action plan will be undertaken with partners via the Housing Support Group. On an annual basis the action plan will be updated and new actions may be identified to support the strategy. An annual homelessness report will be produced and made available to the cabinet member and various corporate groups.
- 21 The Homelessness Strategy is progressing through Cabinet alongside the Housing Strategy and County Durham Plan and will be out to consultation in the New Year for six weeks.

Rough Sleeping

- 29 In late 2017 Housing Solutions responded to concerns around Rough Sleeping in particular in Durham City.

- 30 The service co-ordinated a multi-agency strategic group to explore solutions to the issue of Rough Sleeping in Durham City and as a result of this an outreach worker was funded by Housing Solutions.
- 31 The Rough Sleeper outreach worker is managed by Changing Lives – a homelessness charity and provides assertive outreach to entrenched Rough Sleeper in Durham City. The pilot will last initially for one year and so far the worker has engaged with 67 clients; of these 30 have moved on and 54 clients have engaged with Housing Solutions for housing advice, support and assistance.
- 32 The Government are encouraging local authorities to bid for funding to assist with tackling Rough Sleeping and Durham have currently placed a bid and are awaiting a decision. Further funding has been made available and Durham will be submitting a further bid for a regional rough sleeper coordinator to establish an assessment centre and assist with move on and support.

Conclusion

- 33 Following consideration of the report and presentation members of the committee will be aware of: the services and support provided by Housing Solutions; the headline homelessness statistics and the preventative approach adopted in County Durham; the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the impact on service provision; the review of homelessness in County Durham and the development of the Homelessness Strategy and the approach used to prevent rough sleeping in Durham City.
- 34 Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny will continue to monitor the progress of Homelessness Strategy and the work of the Housing Solutions Service in addressing homelessness in the county with a further progress report to be included in the committee's work programme for 2019/2020.

Background papers:

Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018

Contact: Marie Smith 03000 264724

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Compliance with homelessness legislation

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

The Homelessness Strategy will be subject to consultation

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

An EIA has been carried out

Human Rights

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable