

Corporate Management Team

10 July 2013

Homelessness Strategy: 2013-2018:



Report of Corporate Management Team

Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Development

Councillor Eddie Tomlinson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing and Rural Issues

Introduction

1. To seek approval from cabinet of the Homelessness Strategy for County Durham 2013-18.

Background

2. The Homelessness Act 2002 determines that local authorities must formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of an area wide review. The life of the strategy should be no more than five years, and when the strategy expires or is due for expiry; the authority must publish a new homelessness strategy.
3. The current Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 has now expired and a new strategy must be adopted by September 2013. The 2013 – 18 County Durham Homelessness Strategy has been developed through the County Durham Homelessness Action Partnership (HAP), the vehicle for strategic joint working on homelessness across the County.

In line with government Guidance, the strategy includes plans for:

- The prevention of homelessness;
 - Ensuring there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or who may become homeless;
 - Ensuring there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.
 - The strategy to be an effective and relevant document by developing it in partnership with all stakeholders and service users.
4. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) continues to recognise the importance of preventing homelessness and set out 10 “Local Authority Challenges” in the recently published “*Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness*” report. The Government’s ‘Gold Standard’, based around these 10 challenges, sets the bar for local

homelessness services. A sector led peer review scheme underpinned by support and training, is designed to help local authorities deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services.

5. Developing effective local strategies in partnership, to prevent & tackle homelessness *proactively* is a positive step towards achieving the “Gold Standard” represented by the 10 challenges. The challenges emphasise the importance of robust local preventing homelessness strategies, and a comprehensive housing options offer to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. One of the challenges specifically relates to effective local homelessness strategies to meet emerging need.

The **ten local challenges** the government has posed to the sector are to:

- Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.
 - Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
 - Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
 - Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
 - Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
 - Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
 - Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
 - Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
 - Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
 - Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.
6. The Council will seek to secure the “Gold Standard” over the life time of the strategy. To ensure services and partnerships develop to reflect best practice the strategy action plan will be aligned to incorporate actions identified to assist in this goal.

The Statutory Homelessness Duty:

7. Section 184 of the Housing Act 1996 states that where a local authority considers a person may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days, they shall make such investigations as are necessary to establish whether the person is eligible for assistance and if so what duty is owed to them (if any).
8. The principal duty is an obligation to secure that suitable accommodation is available for a person who is:
 - Homeless or threatened with homelessness in 28 days. (S175 HA 1996)
 - Is eligible for assistance. (S.185 HA 1996)
 - Is in priority need. (S.189 HA 1996)
 - Is not intentionally homeless. (S.191 HA 1996)
 - Has a local connection. (S.199 HA 1996)

Homelessness Strategy 2008-13:

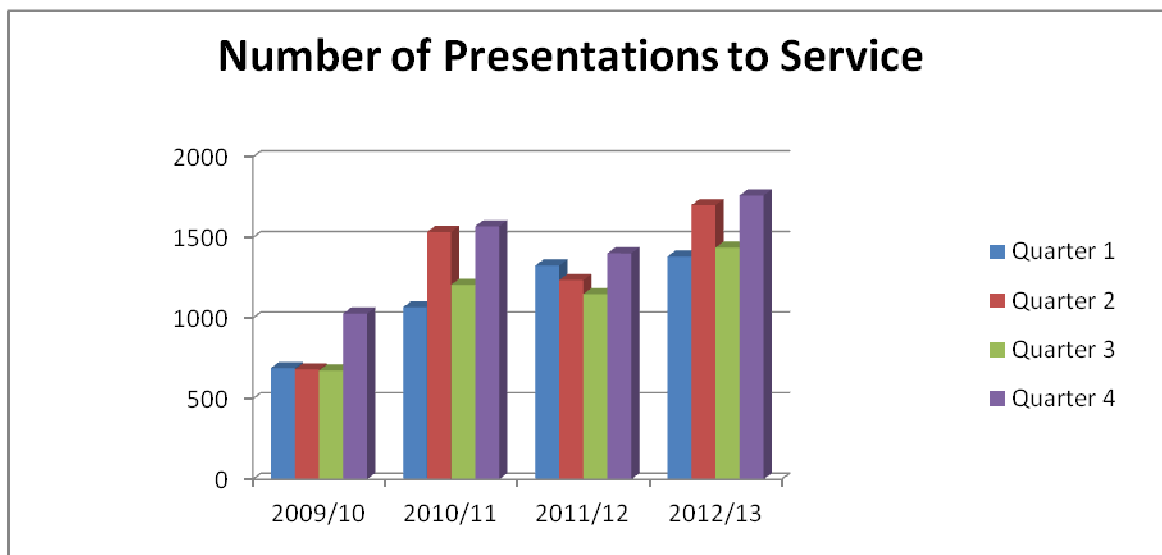
9. The Homelessness Strategy for County Durham, 2008-13 was developed prior to Local Government Reorganisation with the former District and County Council(s) working together within the Homelessness Action Partnership (the strategic group for homelessness in the County). The strategy for 2008-13 set out how the Housing Solutions Service would develop post vesting day, to incorporate best practice from the former District Services and build on this, with our partners to meet the housing and support needs of the residents of County Durham.
10. The Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 had three strategic objectives:
 - To prevent homelessness by delivering prevention and housing options focused service across County Durham that delivers advice and assistance to all in housing need.
 - To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk.
 - To support people who are homeless or who are at risk of repeat homelessness.
11. Over the past 5 years the Council has been working with various partners to develop and improve services to prevent homelessness. Appendix 2 lists the service developments over this period.

Trends and Progress 2008-13

12. The Housing Solutions Service monitors presentations to the service and reports trends and outcomes on a quarterly and annual basis. Recording of

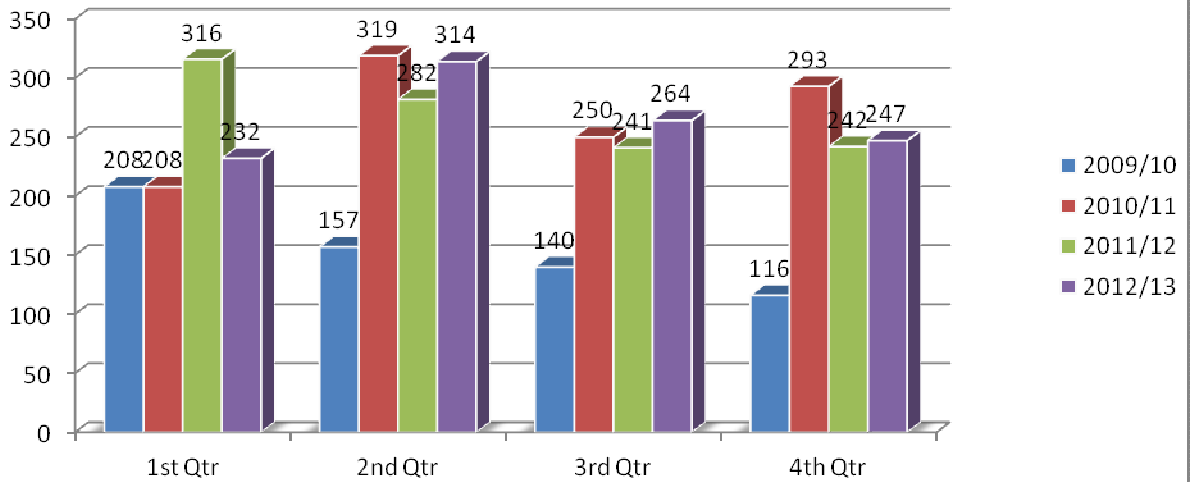
outcomes generally sit within either statutory homelessness duties or homelessness prevention.

13. Preventing homelessness means providing people with the ways and means to meet their housing and any housing-related support needs in order to avoid experiencing homelessness. Effective prevention will enable a person to:
 - remain in their current home, where appropriate; or
 - to delay a need to move out of current accommodation so that a move into alternative accommodation can be planned in a timely way;
 - Or to sustain independent living.
14. Prior to Local Government Reorganisation (April 2009) many of the former District Councils did not have computerised systems to record presentations or homelessness applications so we are unable to provide accurate data for this period. From April 2009 a new integrated system was available; as a consequence the review of trends will cover 2009/10 to 2012/13.



15. Over the period presentations to the service have increased from 3075 in 2009/10 to 6281 in 2012/13 representing a 104.2% increase.
16. Over the period presentations to the service have been mainly concentrated in the East (Seaham and Peterlee) and to the North (Derwentside and Chester-Le-Street).

Number of Homeless Applications Received



17. The number of homelessness applications relates to the number of households who have approached the Council where we have had reason to believe that the statutory threshold for enquiries to commence under Part VII of The Housing Act 1996, (as amended Homelessness Act 2002), have been met. That is where Housing Solutions have reason to believe the applicant is eligible for assistance and homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days.
18. Homelessness applications to the authority have increased by 70% from 2009/10 to 2012/13. However, over the past year 11/12 – 12/13 applications have reduced by 2.2%. Over the period significant work has been undertaken to ensure a consistent approach to homelessness applications, investigations and decisions leading to a more consistent trend in applications from 2010/11 to 12/13.
19. The total numbers of decisions represent statutory decisions made by the Council following applications under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended Homelessness Act 202). The decisions made by the council as a percentage increase or decrease from 2009/10 – 2012/13 is:
- Ineligible households -90%.
 - Eligible, but not homeless +85%
 - Eligible, homeless but not in priority need +29.3%.
 - Eligible, homeless, in priority need but intentionally homeless +10.8%.
 - Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need +28.4%

The three main reasons for homelessness over the period have been:

- Domestic Violence
- Loss of Rented accommodation
- Non-violent relationship breakdown.

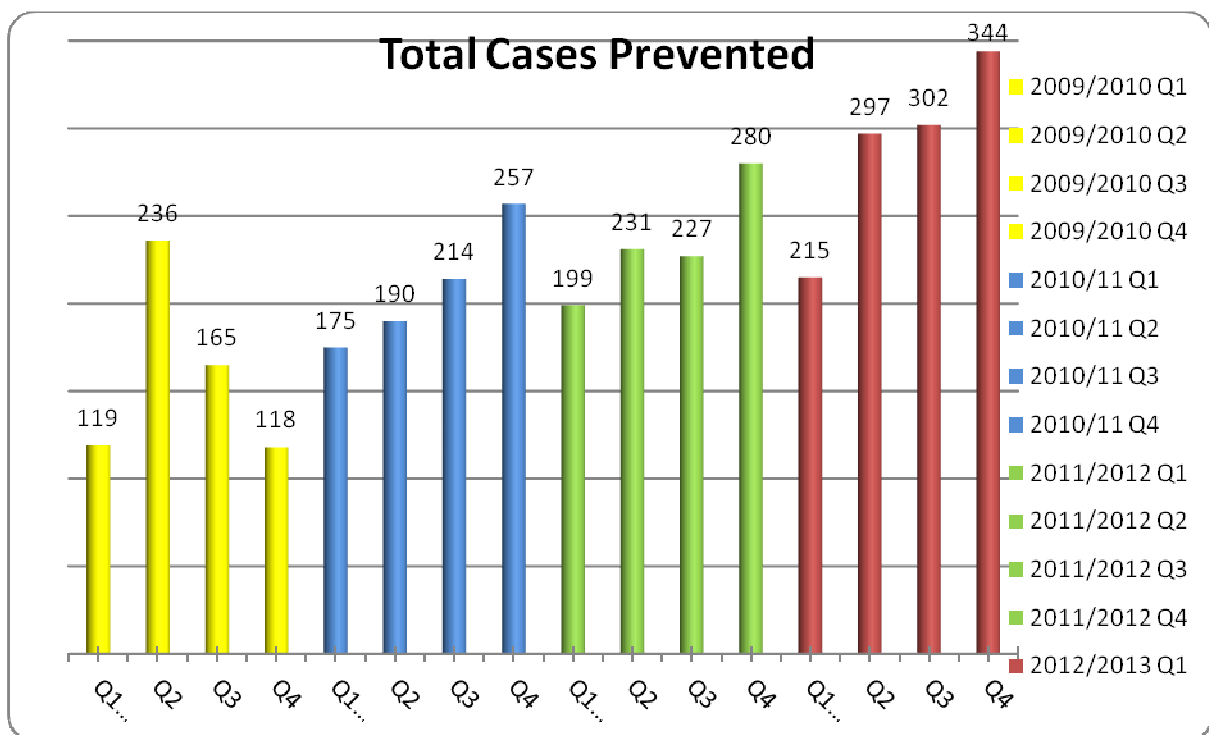
21 Whilst domestic abuse remains the main reason for homelessness across the county, there has been a 28.3% decrease in 2012/13 compared to 2011/12. This is a consequence of the on-going partnership work on reducing the prevalence of domestic abuse in County Durham and specialist training within the Housing Solutions Service in supporting victims of domestic abuse and a corresponding increase in supporting victims to remain in their own home if safe to do so through the Remain Safe project.

The top three reasons for priority need over the period have been.

- Households with dependent children
- Violence / threat of violence
- Mental illness

22 The main priority need groups broadly mirror the main reasons for homelessness with many households fleeing domestic abuse containing dependent children.

23 The predominant ethnic group requiring homelessness applications has been White British broadly in line with the demographic of the county. The predominant household type has been lone parents with dependent children followed by one person household and couples with dependent children. The predominant age group requiring homelessness assessment has been 25-44, followed by 16-24.



- 24 Over the period the Council and its partners have prevented 3566 households from becoming homeless, an increase over the period of 281%. Over the past year the Housing Solutions Service has undertaken a diagnostic assessment with the assistance of the DCLG Specialist Advisor. This work concluded that the cost to the authority of processing a homelessness application is £924.20p, compared to the average prevention costing £741.36p – making prevention not only better for the family and individual, but also 28% cheaper. Over the period prevention of homelessness has therefore avoided approximately £652,000 of Durham County Council costs.
- 25 The costs avoided by the Authority do not include the wider social and economic savings of homelessness prevention. In August 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government report: Evidence review of the cost of homelessness: attempted to establish the cost of homelessness to wider government departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health, Ministry of Justice and to Local Authorities. Combining these wider social and economic costs, each homelessness case is estimated to cost the wider economy between £24,000 and £30,000. Taking this lower estimate, homelessness prevention has saved County Durham £85.5 million over the past 5 years.
- 26 Over the past 12 months (March 12 – April 13) the service has seen a 22.8% increase in presentations with over 6,200 people seeking advice and support. Cases resulting in the prevention of homelessness have increased by 24.2% to 1159, exceeding the local performance indicator. At the same time there has been a 2.2% decrease in statutory homelessness applications.
- 27 It is also noted that there has been an increase in households presenting due to inability to afford their housing costs. Rent arrears cases have increased by 103%, possession cases have increased by 249%. Over the same period homelessness due to domestic abuse has decreased by 28.3%, whilst at the same time prevention of homelessness following the provision of additional security measures to enable victims of violence to remain in their home, if safe to do so, have increased by 92%. A significant milestone has also been reached with no 16/17 year olds being accepted as homeless over the period, indicating the success of the new Holistic Temporary Accommodation Support Service (HTASS) tasked with providing emergency supported housing and support to assist young people to return home.
- 28 The emerging trend in households presenting due to financial hardship reflect the implications of welfare reform for housing which are far reaching and will impact hard on lower income households. Taken together with the changes to personal benefits, over the short term (next 12 – 24 months), there is a significant risk that households affected will be at risk of homelessness due to their inability to afford their housing costs whilst trying to manage reductions in household income alongside managing other debts.
- 29 Welfare Reform will result in significant challenges for households across the County. This will include both in and out of work households as reductions in benefit entitlement reduces households ability to afford their housing costs at

a time of increasing costs in utility bills, food costs and the rise in access to expensive forms of credit via pay day lenders as families struggle to make ends meet.

- 30 A further report is to be presented to Cabinet regarding Welfare reform update and review of Local Council Tax Support Scheme.
- 31 The Council, together with its partners, will continue to work together to assist those households vulnerable to the consequences of the welfare reform changes and seek to support them to avoid the loss of their home.

County Durham Homelessness Strategy 2013-18:

- 31 Over the past 3 months the County Durham HAP has been developing the strategic objectives for the Homelessness Strategy 2013-18. The following objectives have been developed to meet current and future trends.
1. To prevent homelessness for all in housing need across County Durham.
 2. To ensure that services work in partnership to meet the holistic needs of all clients, including those with complex needs and / or those at risk of rough sleeping.
 3. To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
 4. To provide housing advice and housing options to those in housing need in County Durham.
 5. To tackle the wider social and economic causes of homelessness by supporting people to access health, employment, training and associated services.
 6. To achieve Gold Standard in meeting the 10 local authority challenge (*Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness*)

Consultation:

- 32 On the 17 June 2013, the Council hosted a consultation event at County Hall. In addition to this event the draft strategy sent to various partners, posted on the internet and intra net to enable a wide range of stakeholders the opportunity to contribute towards our strategic objectives.
- 33 56 people attended the consultation event from a range of partners, including the Police, NHS, Registered Providers and the voluntary sector.
- 34 Five workshops were delivered enabling participants to contribute their views to how we can meet housing need across County Durham. These views have been considered and where appropriate, actions added to the strategy action

plan. Please see Appendix 3. All actions within this action plan are considered achievable in context of the MTFP savings

Reasons

- 35 Over the past five years the Council and its partners, have made significant progress following Local Government Reorganisation to improve services to people across County Durham in Housing Need. This has included the development of a range of services established to respond to the changing needs of customers resulting in a 281% increase in households prevented from becoming homeless avoiding over £85 million of related costs.
- 36 The Council and its partners have worked hard to ensure service delivery is consistent and accessible across the County. Presentations have increased by over 100% to 6,281 households seeking assistance in 2012/13 alone. Whilst homelessness applications have increased by 70% over the period, this is against the need for the service to offer a consistent approach, and once this has been achieved homelessness applications have stabilised with a small 2% decrease in 2012/13.
- 37 Whilst investment in homelessness prevention and improved outcomes for customers has been encouraging, households across County Durham face significant challenges.
- 38 Over the past year we have noted a 249% increase in claims for possession across rented accommodation and a 103% increase in cases of rent arrears. With current and future implementation of welfare reform measures, both in work and out of work households face increased pressures on their income. Due to the behavioural changes welfare reform measures aim to achieve, in encouraging people to seek training and employment opportunities, it is difficult to provide a definitive prediction to assess trends in presentations over the coming months and years. However, we need to ensure that Durham County Council and our partners continue to work together to provide advice and support to those who seek our help and maintain our focus on homelessness prevention and increasing access to provide support for people to enter training and employment opportunities to break the cycle of homelessness.

Recommendations

- 39 It is recommended that the Cabinet approve the Homelessness Strategy for County Durham 2013-18

Contact: Andrew Burnip Tel: 03000 262543

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance –

Prevention services are funded from DCLG Homelessness Grant allocation. This grant is in place to 2015. Increased presentations to the service are constantly monitored and future resource / financial implication will be addressed where appropriate.

Staffing –

There are no staffing implications

Risk –

None

Equality and Diversity –

An equality and diversity impact assessment is currently being developed to underpin the findings of the strategy review.

Accommodation –

N/A

Crime and Disorder –

N/A

Human Rights –

N/A

Consultation –

The consultation process has been undertaken with views for a wide range of partners considered.

Procurement –

N/A

Disability Issues –

N/A

Legal Implications –

It is a statutory requirement for the authority to develop, publish and review the homelessness strategy. Failure to comply would leave the authority open to Judicial Review.

Appendix 2: Service Developments:

Over the past five years the Housing Solutions Service has developed the following services as part of an approach which emphasises on early intervention and prevention of homelessness.

Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme: To assist clients to find and maintain accommodation in the private rented sector linked to tenancy support. The scheme guarantees a bond up to the equivalent of four weeks rent.

Homelessness Prevention Fund: Offering financial assistance to prevent homelessness, part of a wider “spend to save” policy.

Enhanced Housing Support Protocol: Bringing advice, support and accommodation services together to tackle the causes of homelessness and create sustainable tenancies for vulnerable adults.

County Court Duty Scheme Referral Protocol: Enabling clients at risk of homelessness to access free, specialist legal advice at court to defend claims for possession.

Joint Protocol for 16-17 year olds: Ensuring a joint assessment of young peoples’ housing, advice, support, training and emotional needs, by Housing Solutions, Children and Young Peoples Service, One Point and the Youth Offending Service, to enable young people to return home, if safe do so, or to plan for independence.

Mortgage Rescue: Part of a national scheme to offer shared equity or conversion to social rented tenure for home owners who are struggling with their mortgage payments.

Possession & Repossession Loan Fund: Interest free loans for homeowners at risk becoming homeless through repossession or eviction to enable them to recover their position and remain in their home.

CLASP: Care Leavers Accommodation & Support Protocol. Ensuring a partnership approach to planning for young people leaving care.

Welfare Rights Worker: Service Level Agreement with Welfare Rights Service to provide a dedicated officer within the Housing Solutions Service to support clients to access appropriate benefits to ensure accommodation is affordable and sustained.

Hospital Discharge Protocol: Protocol developed with Lanchester Road Hospital in Durham to ensure early intervention and referral for patients with undergoing

assessment and treatment for mental health problems to ensure appropriate accommodation is secured prior to discharge.

Personalisation Budget: Agreed protocol with supported housing and floating support providers to assist clients with high support needs to access supported housing or their own home with additional support as required. The protocol ensures those who may be excluded from services are able to gain access with additional support to manage any identified risk.

Specialist Debt Worker: Two year contract with Chester-Le-Street Citizens Advice Bureau for a specialist debt worker to be based within the Housing Solutions Service offering specialist debt advice to clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to debt related issues.

In House Remain Safe Service. From June 2012 the Remain Safe Service has been delivered by Direct Services following a review of the DISC service resulting in decommissioning to provide increase value for money and outcomes. The new service is jointly funded with the Safe Durham Partnership.

Step Forward: Accommodation & Support Service. Tender awarded in May 2012 to Stonham seeing 14 x two bed roomed properties leased and managed by the service provider offering floating support to young people moving on from supported housing and those in need of an intermediate supported housing offer.

Adults Facing Chronic Social Exclusion Pilot: 12 month pilot delivered by the Cyrenians from June 2012 delivering street outreach services in Durham City to rough sleepers to ensure those facing chronic social exclusion are supported to access a range of services and safe, supported accommodation. The service will further develop an understanding of the needs of rough sleepers across the County to inform any future commissioning of services. The Cyrenians have now been successful in securing two years funding from the Homelessness Transitional Fund to expand the service across County Durham.

Regional through the Gate Service: Service jointly commissioned by the 12 regional Local Authorities and the Regional Offender Management Service. The service will ensure support to maintain and secure accommodation for those who have a history of repeat offending and homelessness if delivered to clients leaving HMP Durham, Holme House and Low Newton. The service was awarded to Foundation and commenced in November 2012.

Emergency Supported Lodgings: Following a review of the Night Stop Service, it was decided to decommission and reinvest funding in an Emergency Supported Lodgings Service operated by Children and Young Peoples Service for 16-17 year olds. This resulted in an increase in providers and the potential to increase the

ability for placements to increase from three nights to three weeks. The service will further be extended to accommodate those 18-35 years old from 1st July 2013.

Life Wise / Peer Education Services: Highlighting the causes and consequences of homelessness and how to prepare for independence and avoid homelessness for young people aged 16-25 has been operating across County Durham by Centre point for the past 3 years a funding contribution from Housing Solutions. This contract ended in March 2013. A service will be developed within the Family Intervention Project called STEPS that will offer training aimed at tenancy sustainment.

Service Review & Diagnostic: With assistance from Planning and Performance, the service participated in a service review and diagnostic assessment to determine overall performance, recommended improvements linking into the continuous service improvement plan. The resulting report and recommendation have been adopted in the service plan for 2013/14. Resulting from this work a new post of Service Development & Improvement Manager was created to ensure recommendations for continuous improvement are adopted by the service.

Mortgage Rescue Officer: A dedicated Officer to assist home owners at risk of repossession by way of referral to the Mortgage Rescue Scheme or allocation of Repossession Loan Fund.

Allocations Policy: A review of the allocations policy has been completed to reflect new statutory guidance and provisions within the Localism Act. The new allocations policy has now been adopted together with the power to discharge homeless duty into the private rented sector.

Housing Solutions Officer: Integrated Offender Management: We have a dedicated Housing Solutions Officer based with the Integrated Offender Management Service offering advice and support to secure accommodation for Priority and Prolific Offenders.

Housing Triage: Protocol with a range of partners, including Housing Providers and Customer Services to ensure households affected by Welfare Reform changes are referred to the most appropriate solution, including advice and support on training, employment, debt, welfare rights and Discretionary Housing Payments.

HTASS: Holistic Temporary Accommodation and Support Service is to provide a flexible person centred accommodation and support service that meets the authority's temporary accommodation duties under the homelessness legislation and provides added value which addresses the broader needs of the client to prevent future homelessness, maximise life opportunities, reduce social isolation and

exclusion and promote improved health and wellbeing. HTASS includes:

- Temporary Accommodation & Support
- Joint Protocol for 16/17 years olds
- Crash Pads, including provision for care leavers
- Private Sector accommodation development

Appendix 3 Action Plan



Durham County Council: Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2013-2018:

This homelessness strategy has six objectives:

1. To prevent homelessness for all in housing need across County Durham.
2. To ensure that services work in partnership to meet the holistic needs of all clients, including those with complex needs and / or those at risk of rough sleeping.
3. To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
4. To provide housing advice and housing options to those in housing need in County Durham.
5. To tackle the wider social and economic causes of homelessness by supporting people to access health, employment, training and associated services.
6. To achieve Gold Standard. This is a standard set by government as is aimed at being effective and efficient rather than and enhanced service. By demonstrating with have achieved this standard may result in additional funding.

Each objective is then linked to the Gold Standard Challenges:

The **ten local challenges** the government has posed to the sector are to:

1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.
2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
4. Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
5. Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
7. Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
9. Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation

10. Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.

Action 1:				
Objective: 1	To prevent homelessness for all in housing need across County Durham.			
Gold Standard 1:	We have adopted a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services			
Lead Agency/Agencies	Andrew Burnip: Durham County Council			
Project Manager	Andrew Burnip			
Key Partners	Adult & Children Service / RED / Resources.			
Resources	DCLG Grant -			
Action	Start Date	Completion Date	Output	Status
All service groups are signed up to the homelessness strategy with a corporate commitment to deliver the aims and objectives	September 13	January 12	Identify relevant departments Draft report to seek commitment	
Lead member foreword within the local preventing homelessness strategy makes explicit commitment to early intervention and prevention	July13	August 13	Briefing note to Member and Head of Service	
Provide quarterly briefing sessions, including joint training across local authority services and VCOs, regarding the local response to homelessness and the importance of preventing homelessness, via prevention champions training.	September 13	On-going	Develop internal / external training plan for prevention champions.	
Provide briefings to elected members on the local strategic response to homelessness	September 13	On-going	Develop internal briefing programme & regular attendance at scrutiny committee.	
Provide quarterly updates to Housing Forum highlighting progress and blockages in delivery of strategic objectives to assess additional resource allocation	September 13	On-going	Agree reporting timeline	
Ensure Preventing Homelessness Grant allocation is fully utilised for the delivery of the Housing Options/Prevention Services	September 13	On-going	Seek Head of Service agreement	

Continue Corporate agreement to carry forward any under-spend in preventing homelessness grant funding	September 13	On-going	Seek Head of Service Agreement	
Ensure Government contribution to DHP is being used in a targeted way to prevent homelessness via incorporating assessment and triage into Housing Solutions Service.	September 13	On-going	Review triage service to ensure target group access DHP	
Continued support to Homeless Action Partnership and Third Sector Forum.	September 13	On-going	Ensure programme of HAP & Third Sector meeting developed	

Action 2				
Objective: 5	To tackle the wider social and economic causes of homelessness by supporting people to access health, employment, training and associated services.			
Gold Standard 2:	We actively work in partnership with your Voluntary Sector stakeholders and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs.			
Lead Agency/Agencies	Andrew Burnip: Durham County Council			
Project Manager	Andrew Burnip			
Key Partners	HAP – RED -			
Resources	Within current resources.			
Action	Start Date	Completion Date	Output	Status
Via homelessness strategy - service map all VCO and other key partners (specifically statutory services & registered providers) in the area.	September 13	Annual review	Review current directories to assess suitability.	
Ensure all partners are consulted with regarding any changes to policies or practice and in the review of the homelessness strategy action plan.	September 14	Annual Review.	Develop review programme via HAP and Third Sector Forum	
Develop and agreed homelessness contacts within each VCO & within all Registered Providers following delivery of Prevention Champions Training.	September 13	Annual review.	Seek SPOC in each organisation and include in prevention champions training.	
Develop and agree Named homelessness contacts within LA services (specifically), Housing Benefit, Children's Services, Adult Services, Environmental Health, Supporting People)	September 13	Annual Review	Seek SPOC in each Department and include in Prevention Champions Training programme.	
Develop and agree Named homelessness contacts within other statutory services (Police, Probation, JCP, CMHT,)	September 13	Annual Review	Seek SPOC in each Department and include in Prevention Champions Training programme.	

Ensure Housing Solutions represented on local Health & Wellbeing Board	TBC	TBC	TBC	
Ensure via DKO that Housing Solutions is engaged with Registered Provider Community Investment programmes and services to tenants and residents of social landlords, including job clubs, training and skills opportunities for tenants and support providers in the delivery of housing options as required, for example via Enhanced Housing Options Wizard.	September 13	Annual Review	Ensure action included in DKO action plan to be monitored via Steering group	
Ensure Housing Solutions continue to develop and support Partnerships include enabling access to Furniture/white goods and food banks	April 14	April 15	Review current provision and assess gaps / possible funding routes.	
Develop Joint working or SLAs with credit unions in regard to referrals of clients and possible allocation of repossession loan fund.	October 13	April 14	Review current providers and seek agreement.	
Map and review delivery of LSC contracts across the County to identify provision and areas lacking access to social welfare advice and develop appropriate partnership response.	October 13	April 14	Review current provider's gaps and seek appropriate referral routes.	

Action 3				
Objective: 1	To prevent homelessness for all in housing need across County Durham.			
Gold Standard 3:	We offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients			
Lead Agency/Agencies	Andrew Burnip: Durham County Council			
Project Manager	Andrew Burnip			
Key Partners	RED			
Resources	Within current resources.			
Action	Start Date	Completion Date	Output	Status
Review service standards for housing solutions service delivery in partnership with key partner agencies (including VCOs) and service users	October 13	April 14	Review current standards. Consider wider regional minimum standards. Include in HAP & Third Sector action plans.	
Provide regular training updates to customer service staff on housing solutions services, including effective referrals.	November 13	Annually	Review current training materials and agreed delivery programme.	
Seek to establish regional common service standards with all Local Authorities setting minimum service standards for all clients approaching housing solutions / options services.	October 13	April 14	Review via regional homelessness group.	
Review internal procedures to ensure offer effective guidance to delivery of consistent service.	September 13	Annually	Review all current procedures to ensure effective and up to date.	
Ensure individual and team training plans include housing law and skills based training	September 13	Annually.	Include in HSS service plan	
Ensure effective delivery of procedures in regard to case allocation, quality of advice, corrective actions, and customer feedback reviews.	September 13	Annually	Review current training and quality assurance systems.	
Develop process of quality checks including Team Leaders /	September 13	Annually	Agree regular	

Managers sitting in on customer interviews to ensure consistent, quality service is delivered.			programme of quality checks to be included in HSS service plan.	
Promote the use of NHAS, training, mortgage debt advice and information resources	September 13	Annually	Review current resources and promote to front line.	
Ensure Baseline offer continues to include access to the private rented sector and all prevention tools for people who do not fulfil the statutory homelessness criteria.	September 13	Annually	Ensure cost effectiveness of prevention services are monitored and highlighted to ensure continued investment.	
Review access arrangements (including home visits, outreach surgeries, comprehensive online advice and information via web and EHO Wizard)	Septmeber13	April 14 Annually	Implement recommendations form service & diagnostic review.	
Update Equalities impact assessment.	September 13	April 14. Annually.		
Review options for development of triage service promoting self help, access to private rented sector via Durham Key Options and enabling resources to be targeted to those in greatest need.	Nov 13	April 14		

Action 4				
Objective: 3	To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.			
Gold Standard 4:	We have adopted a <i>No Second Night Out</i> model or an effective local alternative			
Lead Agency/Agencies	Andrew Burnip: Durham County Council			
Project Manager	Andrew Burnip			
Key Partners	HAP - RED			
Resources	Regional Grant Within current resources.			
Action	Start Date	Completion Date	Output	Status
Complete annual street counts / estimates in accordance with DCLG guidance and with reference to Homeless Link toolkit	October 13	Annually	Agree rough sleeper count / estimate process via HAP	
Continue to support the development of Adults facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) in response to rough sleepers.	September 13	On-going	Continue to support steering group / review / implement findings of prompt report.	
Ensure reporting of new rough sleepers feeds into regional monitoring process.	September 13	On-going	Update HS Staff / ACE Project staff on reporting of rough sleepers via No Second Night Out (NSNO) provisions.	
Complete annual health needs audit and ensuring finding informs service developments.	May 13	Annually.	Review guidance and implement audit. Upload action plan with findings.	
Develop a regional single service offer that is consistent across local partners, including an effective and robust reconnections policy.	April 14	September14	Agree and develop SSO with regional Las. Implement and monitor	
Ensure ACE pilot and NSNO response in County Durham is communicated to key partners and public via promotional activity and Prevention Champions Training.	September 13	Annually	Regular updated on ACE to HAP and incorporate response into Prevention Champions programme.	
Ensure ACE continues to provide direct access accommodation to	September	On-going	Continue to support	

rough sleepers.	13		development of ACE / The Fells to promote direct access for rough sleepers.	
Develop access to Crash pads and Emergency supported lodgings for rough sleepers.	September 14	April 15	Review current provision and assess possible access for rough sleepers.	
Develop options for female rough sleepers to ensure access to accommodation and support.	April 14	April 15	Review current provision. Map gaps. Identity possible funding sources.	
Ensure ACE continues to provide a system for forming an assessment of rough sleepers within 72 hours of identification, including those with no local connection/entitlement.	September 13	On-going	Support future funding applications to continue response to rough sleeping	
Agree regional reconnections policy, including access to travel funds and plans to ensure accommodation and support is accessed.	September 13	November13	Develop and agree via regional Las group.	
Ensure NSNO offer in County is delivered in collaboration with key partners - Police and Community Safety, the local community, Outreach, faith groups, day services and others such as parks, parking and refuse collection as appropriate cooperating with local service offer and referring rough sleepers into local services	September 13	On-going	Continued to support NSNO Steering group across County Durham.	
Develop mediation services via FIP and / or relationship counselling services to reduce loss of accommodation due to relationship breakdown.	April 14	September 14	Map existing provision for mediation service. Review possible funding routes.	
Promote formal links between ACE other housing and support providers and Regional Through The Gate Service to promote early identification of those at risk of homelessness prior to release from custody.	September 13	April 14	Continue to attend Through the Gate Steering group to assist in integration and development.	
Ensure floating support is offered immediately following the securing of a tenancy by former rough sleeping to avoid breakdown of placement.	September 13	April 14	Review current support arrangements. Consider funding streams for additional floating support provision.	
Closure liaison between housing solutions / ACE and substance misuse	September	April 14	Consider options /	

teams to provide tailored advice and support.	13		models of working to support client group.	
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Action 5				
Objective:2,3,4,5	2. To ensure that services work in partnership to meet the holistic needs of all clients, including those with complex needs and / or those at risk of rough sleeping. 3. To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. 4. To provide housing advice and housing options to everyone in County Durham 5. To tackle the wider social and economic causes of homelessness by supporting people to access health, employment, training and associated services.			
Gold Standard 5:	We have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support			
Lead Agency/Agencies	Andrew Burnip: Durham County Council			
Project Manager	Andrew Burnip			
Key Partners	RED / Children & Adults / HAP			
Resources	Within current resources.			
Action	Start Date	Completion Date	Output	Status
Review and extend Hospital Discharge protocol and evaluate effectiveness.	September 13	Annually	Monitor effectiveness / review / amend and extend to other hospitals / departments if required.	
Review Enhanced Housing Support Protocol and evaluate effectiveness.	April 14	Annually	Monitor effectiveness / review and amend if required.	
Continue to monitor effectiveness of Joint Protocol and Care Leavers Accommodation & Support Protocol (CLASP) via Holistic Temporary Accommodation and Support Service (HTASS) Steering group.	September 13	On-going	Complete annual review and quarterly monitoring to ensure service is meeting desired outcomes.	
Review referral pathways offered by regional through the gate service to support accommodation and support needs of returning	September 13	Annually	Continue to support development of service and involvement in	

prisoners and their families.			service evaluation.	
Review Move-on arrangements with supported housing providers in light of welfare reform.	September 13	September 14	Review options, Developed shared tenant scheme.	
Review supported housing commissioning arrangements and the impact of HTASS on referral pathways and move-on plans to maximise effective use of resources.	April 14	September 14	Establish project group, evaluate current model, and recommend future arrangements.	
Review impact of HTASS on floating support services and ensure continuity of support is offered where appropriate following move-on from HTASS	April 14	September 14	As above.	
Review Pathways model for young people via HTASS to ensure effective and reducing use of B&B	April 14	September 14	As above	
Review move-on arrangements and support from TA offered by HTASS and potential increase in use of PRS.	April 14	September 14	As above	
Evaluate personalisation pilot to assess impact and recommendations for service improvement.	September 13	December 13	Continue to monitor use and effectiveness of service. Recommend improvements where identified.	
Develop referral routes into employment, education and training options advice and support is available to all customers.	September 13	April 14	Review current referrals routes and recommend / develop improvements.	
Ensure links are maintain and developed to ensure the Think Family approach is adopted across Housing Solutions and services developed in support of trouble families services.	September 13	April 14	Review current practice and develop in line with good practice.	
Ensure Priority and Prolific Offender (PPO) role continues to provide support for offenders to ensure accommodation options are available for, including access to private rented sector.	January 14	March 14	Evaluate role and make recommendations.	
Consider jointly commissioned services to respond to housing need across the authority, for example, health, criminal justice, DWP et cetera taking advantage of GP commission arrangements based on evidence of need established via health needs audit.	April 14	July 14.	Completed Health Needs Audit. Report findings to appropriate groups. Present Homelessness	

			Strategy priorities to relevant groups to seek corporate support to joint working	
Review options to provide peer education to young people to prevent homelessness.	April 14	June 12	Map existing provision. Identify possible funding routes. Develop options report.	

Action 6				
Objective:3	To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.			
Gold Standard 6:	We have developed a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord			
Lead Agency/Agencies	Andrew Burnip: Durham County Council			
Project Manager	Andrew Burnip			
Key Partners	Registered Providers / HAP			
Resources	Within current resources.			
Action	Start Date	Completion Date	Output	Status
Ensure bond scheme / prevention fund continues to provide access to Private rented Sector (PRS) is not restricted to only those households in priority need	September 13	March 14	Review current policy and identify / implement improvements to increase sector take up	
Review PRS strategy to ensure it is linked to the homelessness strategy, wider housing strategy tenancy strategy and allocations strategies.	March 14	September 14	Evaluate PRS discharge policy to ensure effective.	
Review joint working arrangements with Housing Renewals Team to increase access to PRS.	January 14	March 14	Ensure protocol maximises outcomes for all clients.	
Ensure PRS tenants gain access to Discretionary Housing Payments via emerging triage service.	September 13	November 13	Review and evaluate triage process.	
Review Welfare Reform liaison officer role to maximise access to PRS.	September 13	March 14	Evaluate role and effectiveness in increasing access to PRS	
Develop referral routes into warm front type services to minimise fuel poverty.	September 13	March 14	Establish current offer and embed in service options	
Review involvement in Landlord hotline facilities operated by	January 14	March 14	Ensure referrals to HSS	

renewal team.			to increase opportunity for prevention.	
Develop Ring before you serve notice service in partnership with renewals team for private landlords seeking possession.	March 14	April 14	As above	
Work with partners to develop availability of shared accommodation for under 35s at the LHA level	July 13	November 13	Research options and develop implementation plan	
Assess support available to landlords to convert or improve their properties for sharing and for managing shared tenancies.	July 13	On-going	As above	
Develop PRS offer via DKO to ensure PRS is accessible to those registered via Durham Key Options.	July 13	March 14	As above	
Consider availability of additional incentives to assist social tenants unable to afford their homes due to under occupancy charge to access to the private rented sector.	July 13	March 14	As above	

Action 7				
Objective:	1. To prevent homelessness for all in housing need across County Durham.			
Gold Standard :7	We actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme			
Lead Agency/Agencies	Andrew Burnip: Durham County Council			
Project Manager	Andrew Burnip			
Key Partners	HAP			
Resources	Within current resources.			
Action	Start Date	Completion Date	Output	Status
Provide briefings for Housing Solutions and Customer Service to ensure basic knowledge of all options available to homeowners in debt via online Prevention Champions.	July 13	September13	Review and update current training materials and develop delivery plan	
Provide briefing to partner agencies, stakeholders, and elected members on service to prevent repossessions.	September 13	Quarterly	As above	
Review website to ensure up to date - advice and information is accessible and available in a range of formats, including leaflets and posters that are available on reception and at partner agency receptions	November 13	March 14	Establish baseline / update and agree regular review.	
Ensure MRS and prevent repossessions in included in prevention champions training provided to reception staff / switchboard / call centre staff have a basic understanding of the local response to people who are in mortgage arrears	July 13	September 13	Review and update current training materials and develop delivery plan	
Review media campaign promoting early intervention to assess effectiveness and Value for Money.	November 13	December 13	Review and evaluate current communications strategy and develop / implement improvements.	
Continue engagement in court users group to increase referrals	July 13	On-going	Review and update current training materials	

from County Court Duty Scheme.			and develop delivery plan	
Continue regular meetings with zone agent to ensure access to MRS completions for DCC.	July 13	On-going	Confirm SPOC for HSS	
Review repossession loan fund and consider options for Credit union to deliver project further to include financial capability training.	July 13	September 13	Evaluate current scheme and consider options to ensure VFM	
Review any large scale closure of employers and ensure ability to offer onsite support to those facing redundancy	July 13	on-going	Work with Economic Development Team SPOC to monitor any employers.	

Action 8				
Objective:	1. To prevent homelessness for all in housing need across County Durham.			
Gold Standard 8:	We have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs			
Lead Agency/Agencies	Andrew Burnip: Durham County Council			
Project Manager	Andrew Burnip			
Key Partners	HAP / RED / Regional Homelessness Group			
Resources	Within current resources.			
Action	Start Date	Completion Date	Output	Status
Review homelessness strategy annually with partners.	June 13	Annual	Establish process via HAP	
Review homelessness policy.	June 13	September 13	Review current policy and update to reflect service developments	
The document is 'live' and regularly updated on progress and this is available on the Council's website and monitored via the HAP	June 13	TBC	Agree review process with HAP, Third Sector & Housing Forum	
Review all leaflets and literature promoting access to the Housing Solutions Service.	July 13	August 13	Evaluate current material and update / disseminate	
Achieve Gold Standard Status:	November 13	March 15	Agree peer review process with 2 regional Las. Evaluate evidence form review and adopt in continuous improvement plan prior to application of GS	

Action 9				
Objective:1,2,3	1. To prevent homelessness for all in housing need across County Durham. 2. To ensure that services work in partnership to meet the holistic needs of all clients, including those with complex needs and / or those at risk of rough sleeping. 3. To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.			
Gold Standard 9:	We do not place any 16 or 17 year olds in B&B accommodation			
Lead Agency/Agencies	Andrew Burnip: Durham County Council			
Project Manager	Andrew Burnip			
Key Partners	HAP / Children & Adults			
Resources	DCLG Grant / within current resources.			
Action	Start Date	Completion Date	Output	Status
Continue to review effectiveness of JP via HTASS Steering group including provision of crash pads for 16/17 year olds.	January 14	March 14	Agree evaluation via HTASS commissioning group. Implement service improvements.	
Review Emergency Supported Lodgings Service to ensure no 16/17 year old is placed into B&B.	January 14	March 14	Agree evaluation via HTASS commissioning group. Implement service improvements	
Review Life Skills training, mediation and peer education services across the county to identify gaps and develop countywide service provision to localities with greatest need.	April 14	June 14	Review current provision. Agreed preferred delivery model. Locate funding and commission.	
Family Intervention Project continues to target families in need of holistic support and intervention.	July 13	September 13	Review referrals routes from HSS to FIP/ Family wise to increase training and employment outcomes.	
Review HTASS, Step Forward and Emergency Supported Lodgings Service to ensure effective in providing temporary accommodation	January 14	March 14	Agree evaluation via HTASS commissioning	

options and move-on.			group. Implement service improvements	
Establish a pre eviction protocol panel for all supported housing providers.	September 13	October 13	Review current draft / establish consultation / implement improvements and monitor.	
Support the work of Youth Homelessness North East.	September 13	on-going	Review DCC pledges from Youth Homelessness Charter and agree actions.	
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Appendix 4:



Durham County Council
Homelessness Strategy

2013-2018

Consultation Draft
June 2013

Forward by Cabinet Member for Housing & Rural Issues:

Welcome to Durham County Councils Homelessness Strategy for 2013-18. This is the second Homelessness Strategy for the authority since Local Government Reorganisation in April 2009.

As Cabinet Member for Housing and Rural Issues, I recognise how important it is for residents to be able to access good quality housing and housing related services. Not only is housing important for the health and wellbeing of individuals and families, but it is key to building and maintaining strong communities and to the overall economic prosperity of the County.

I am proud of the progress made by the authority, alongside our many partners, to prevent homelessness and respond to the causes of housing need across the County. However, there is more to do in the challenging times ahead.

Working in partnership is essential to enable us all to meet the needs of our residents. To provide services to prevent our residents from experiencing the misery of homelessness and to enable individuals and families to fulfil their potential and to ensure our communities thrive. The Homelessness Strategy provides the framework demonstrating our continued commitment to partnership working to prevent homelessness for the residents of County Durham.

I hope you find this strategy informative and look forward to working with you all over the coming years as we continue to provide excellent services to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness across the County.

Cllr Eddie Tomlinson:
Cabinet member for Housing and Rural Issues:

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Section 8: Summary & Next Steps:	Page 41
Appendix 1: County Durham Youth Homelessness Charter	

Section 1 Introduction:

Homelessness has a detrimental effect on individuals, families and communities and can undermine social cohesion. Homelessness is linked to alcohol and drug abuse, poor physical & mental health, crime and anti-social behaviour, poor educational attainment, debt, unemployment and the breakdown of support networks. Tackling the effects of homelessness can be costly to the public purse when compared to the costs associated with proactively seeking to prevent homelessness in the first place. Homelessness can happen to anyone at any time so it is important that services are available to all in housing need, in addition to those at greatest risk due to social or economic influences.

Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to formulate a homelessness strategy by carrying out a homelessness review for the area. Section 2 of the Homelessness Act 2002 prescribes the considerations that local authorities should undertake in conducting a review of homelessness and the purpose of the review in terms of informing a future preventing homelessness strategy.

The Homelessness Act 2002 determines that local authorities must formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review – the life of the strategy should be no more than five years, and when the strategy expires or is due for expiry, the authority must publish a new homelessness strategy.

Homelessness strategies must include plans for:

- the prevention of homelessness;
- ensuring there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or who may become homeless;
- Ensuring there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.
- For a homelessness strategy to be an effective and relevant document, housing authorities need to ensure that it is developed in partnership with all stakeholders and service users.

Benefits of Preventing Homelessness Strategies

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) continues to recognise the importance of preventing homelessness and set out 10 “Local Authority Challenges” in the recently published “*Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness*” report. The Government’s ‘Gold Standard’, based around these 10 challenges, sets the bar for local homelessness services. A sector led peer review scheme underpinned by support and training, is designed to help local authorities deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services.

Developing effective local strategies in partnership, to prevent & tackle homelessness *proactively* is a positive step towards achieving the “Gold Standard” represented by the 10 challenges. The challenges emphasise the importance of robust local preventing homelessness strategies, and a comprehensive housing options offer to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. One of the challenges specifically relates to effective local homelessness strategies to meet emerging need.

The **ten local challenges** the government has posed to the sector are to:

- 1 Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.
- 2 Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
- 3 Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
- 4 Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
- 5 Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
- 6 Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
- 7 Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme

- 8 Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
- 9 Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- 10 Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.

The Council will seek to secure Gold Standard over the life time of this strategy. To ensure services and partnerships develop to reflect best practice the strategy action plan will be aligned to incorporate actions identified to assist in this goal. Cross cutting actions have also been included where required.

Homelessness Strategy Objectives:

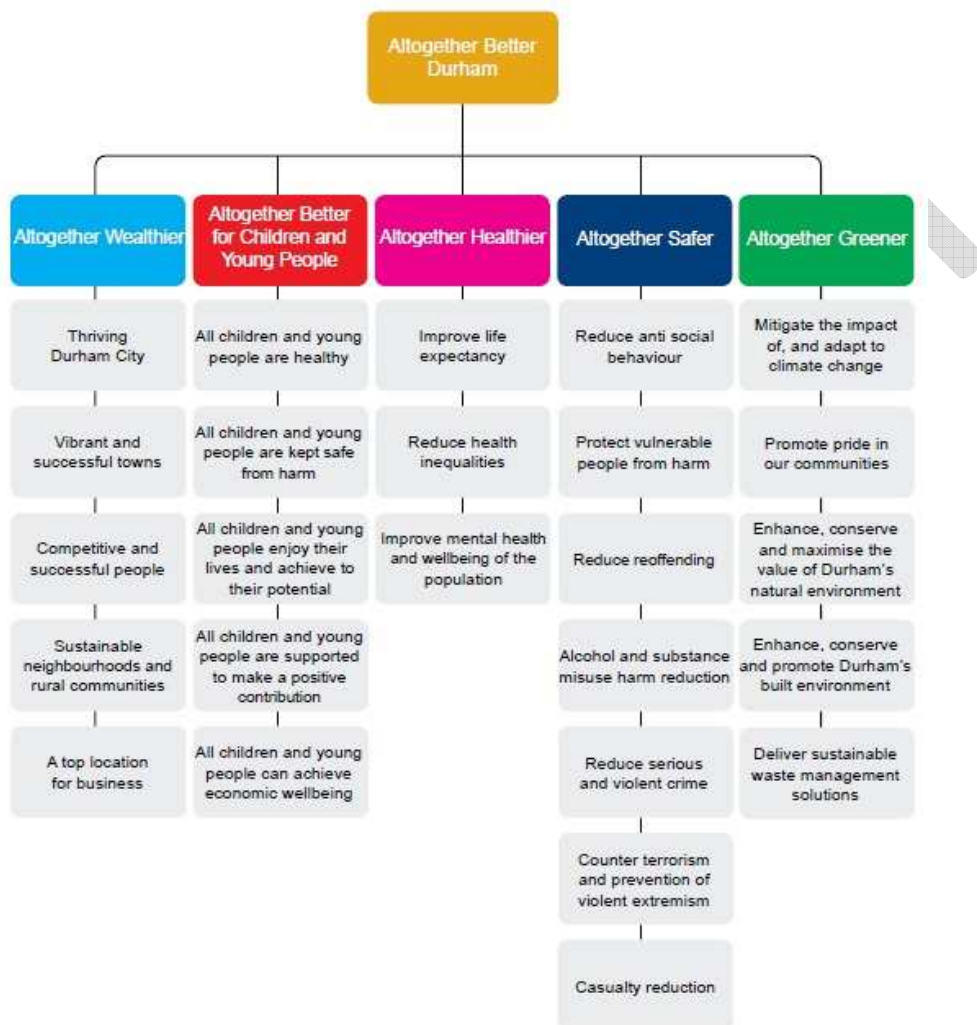
Within this context, this homelessness strategy has six objectives which will be delivered through a partnership approach

- 1 To prevent homelessness for all in housing need across County Durham.
- 2 To ensure that services work in partnership to meet the holistic needs of all clients, including those with complex needs and / or those at risk of rough sleeping.
- 3 To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- 4 To provide housing advice and housing options to those in housing need in County Durham.
- 5 To tackle the wider social and economic causes of homelessness by supporting people to access health, employment, training and associated services.
- 6 To achieve Gold Standard in meeting the 10 local authority challenge (*Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness*)

Section 2 Local Policy and Partnership Framework

Altogether Better Durham – Altogether Wealthier

The County Durham Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) articulates the vision for County Durham which reflects the views and aspirations of the community and opportunities for improvement. This is focused around an ‘Altogether Better Durham’. This vision helps to provide a framework which guides all of our detailed plans and programmes which will turn our vision into a reality and comprises five priority themes.



The County Durham Regeneration Statement underpins the Altogether Wealthier strand of the SCS, focusing on shaping a County Durham where people want to live, work, invest and visit whilst enabling our residents and businesses to achieve their potential. The County Durham Regeneration

Statement 2012-22 sets out the long term aims and objectives for Altogether Wealthier which are to create:

- Thriving Durham City
- Vibrant and Successful Towns
- Sustainable Neighbourhoods and Rural Communities
- Competitive and Successful People
- A Top Location for Business.

The Regeneration statement not only underpins the Altogether Wealthier theme of the SCS, it also frames the the strategic policy and delivery framework for Durham County Council's Regeneration and Economic Development (RED) Service Grouping. The Housing Solutions Service sits within the RED service grouping with the County Durham Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy forming integral elements of this strategic policy framework.

In an overarching approach of ensuring that everyone has the opportunity of live in a decent home that they can afford, in a community where they want to live, the County Durham housing strategy 2010-15 concentrates on three key objectives: Housing Markets, Housing Standards and Housing People.

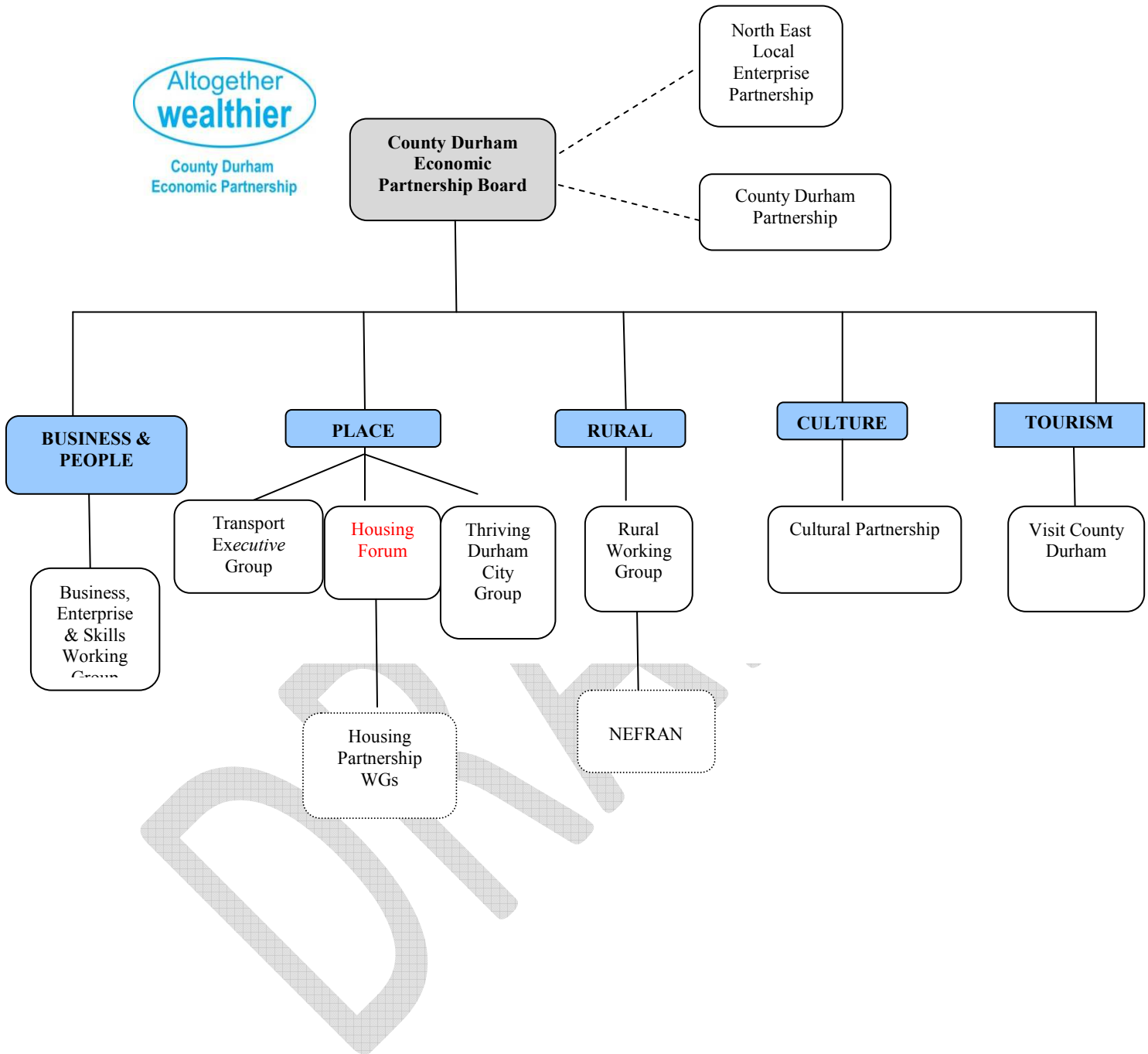


'Altogether Better Housing People' picks up the non-'bricks & mortar' elements of housing and concentrates on issues such as the provision of housing and housing-related support services to older people, vulnerable adults, gypsies & travellers, homelessness & housing options, care & support provision, and the provision of Housing services within the social rented sector, particularly the Council's Internal and Arm's Length housing Management Organisations.

An additional influence for the Homelessness Strategy is the County Durham Tenancy Strategy which provides the framework the individual Registered Provider tenancy policies and practices and sets the direction for letting affordable housing stock to meet local housing needs and improve the overall operation of the County Durham housing market. The Localism Act requires local authorities to produce a Tenancy Strategy that sits alongside and complements a local authority's Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and Allocations Policy.

The County Durham Homelessness Action Partnership is the main strategic group with responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy and providing the challenge for Durham County Council and other partners to respond effectively to emerging trends. The Homelessness Action Partnership is one of seven working groups which report directly to the Housing Forum, which in turn reports directly to the County Durham Economic Partnership Board. This Homelessness Strategy is the result of the collaborative approach of the Homeless Action Partnership.

The following tables demonstrate the strategic structure in which the HAP operates.



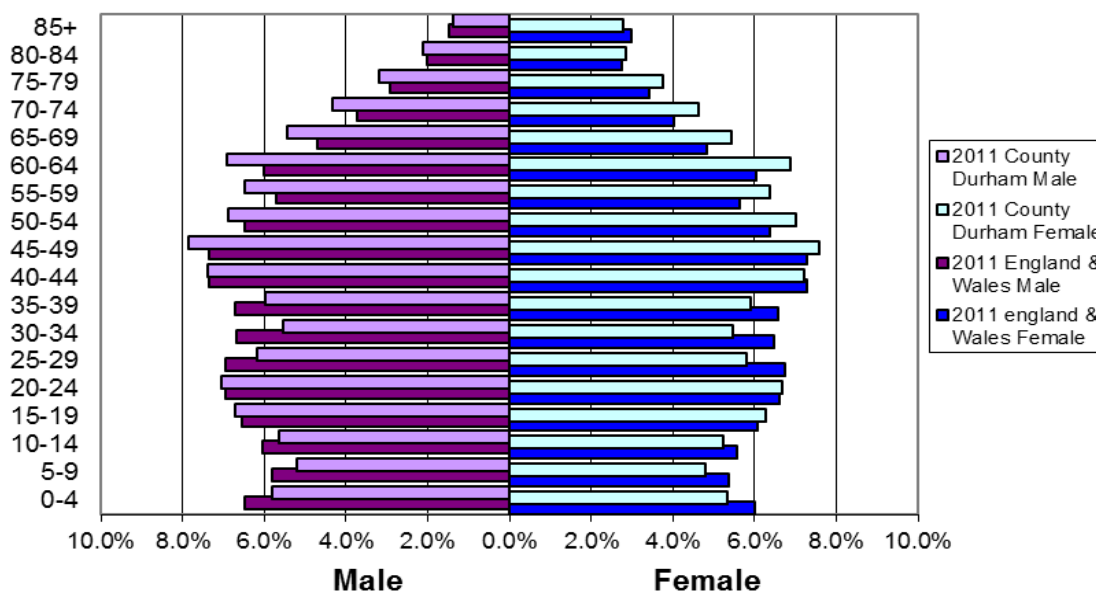
Section 3 County Durham

County Durham lies at the heart of the North East, connecting Tees Valley with Tyne & wear and Northumberland. With a population of 513,200 across a total area of 862 square miles and 12 major centres of population, County Durham has a diverse spatial geography and rich economic history arising from a strong industrial heritage.

The population of the North East on census day was 2.6 million, an increase of 2.2 per cent from 2001 when it was 2.5 million. The 2011 Census estimate for the county is 513,200 which is an increase of 19,400 since 2001 or 3.9%.and higher than the 2010 population estimates. The 2011 census population estimate for households in the county is 223,800, which is a rise of 7.9% since 2001 (207,400 households).

The following table details the population age structure for the County compared to England and Wales.

Age Pyramid – Population age structure Census 2011: County Durham compared to England & Wales



Homelessness is caused by a complex interplay between a person's individual circumstances and adverse structural factors outside their direct control. Structural causes of homelessness are social and economic in nature, and are often outside the control of the individual or family concerned and can include unemployment, poverty, the state of the housing market and changes to government policy. The economic context is important in establishing the needs of people across a wide geographical area such as County Durham

and identifying the structural problems which may be contributing to homelessness. To provide an overview of the current economic environment and challenges facing the County, we provide a snap shot of current relevant data. This context is an important component in developing a Homelessness Strategy that is responsive, evolving and will respond to changing demands and trends over the coming years.

Index of Deprivation 2010

- A higher percentage of the population living in the county live in the top 10% and top 30% most deprived areas nationally, (11.4% and 45.4% respectively), when compared with the England (10% and 30% respectively), average.
- There are higher levels of deprivation in the Employment, Health and Education domains when compared to England, in the top 10% most deprived areas.
- In the top 30% most deprived areas there are higher percentages of the county's population suffering deprivation in all the domains except for the Housing, Crime and the Environment domains.

Economy

- County Durham currently has a low value-added economy, (around 61% if the national average). The types of jobs located in the County are generally not generating high levels of business productivity compared to the rest of the North East and the UK.
- Whilst business survival rates in County Durham are on a par with, and in some years better than, those for the North East and England, the number of registrations during 2011 at 30.7 per 10,000 resident adult population is below the North East at 33.1, and well below England at 54.0.
- Overall number of jobs in the County have increased from 162,836 in 2009 and 161,830 in 2010 to 163,412 in 2011. Biggest losses have been in Public administration & defence whilst all other sectors have seen both increases and decreases over the last couple of years.

Labour Market

- Areas that share the County's distribution of GVA (Gross value added) by industrial sector also possess lower employment rates. Unemployment and specifically youth unemployment has risen to its highest level in a generation.
- Prior to the recession, County Durham's employment rate had been rising and was converging with the national average at just under 73%.

Over the last few years the County's employment rate has fallen, currently at 65.8% in March 2013, a small increase to the rolling annual average in the previous quarter but a 1.2% decrease for the corresponding period in 2012.

- Between April 2012 and March 2013 the employmate rate in County Durham was 65.8% compared to 66.5% in the North East and 70.9% nationally. In the corresponding period in the previous year the employment rate in County Durham was 66.6% compared to 65.2% in the North East and 70.2% nationally. Regionally and nationally the employment rate has increased but in County Durham it has decreased in 2012/13 from a stronger than the regional position in 2011/12.

Unemployment

- In March 2012 unemployment in County Durham rose to 23,800 or 9.5% of the economically active population compared to 10.9% in the North East and 8.1% nationally. Of 15,894 Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimants in County Durham in March 2012 (4.8% of the working age population), 5,560 were aged 18-24 representing 11.1% of that age group. By March 2013, the rate of increase in unemployment had stabilised at 9.2% or 22,700 residents compared to 10% in the North East and 7.8% nationally. Of 15,634 JSA claimants in County Durham in March 2013 (4.7% of the working age population), 4,955 were aged 18-24 representing 9.9% of that age group.
- The proportion of long-term JSA claimants remains high with nearly 1/3 of JSA claimants claiming for more than 12 months. In March 2013 5,055 JSA claimants (1.5% of the working age population) were claiming for more than 12 months compared to 2,855 in March 2012 (0.9% of the working age population) and 520 in March 2008 (0.2% of the working age population).

Average Earnings

- The average weekly earnings for County Durham residents in 2012, was £458. This is slightly higher than the regional average for the North East which stands at £455. The national average is higher at £508.
- The average weekly earnings have continued to rise annually, with 2012 showing the highest annual increase in the last 4 years, with a 4.3% increase in weekly earnings.
- County Durham's median Household income in 2012 is £24,050 compared to £24,217 regionally and £28,318 in the uk. County Durham is at 99.3 % of the regional average and 84% of the national average
- Gross Disposable Household Income in County Durham in 2011 is currently £13,522 compared to £13,560 regionally and £16,034 in the

UK. County Durham is at 99.7% of the regional average and 84.3% of the UK average

Housing Market

- Gross mortgage lending in March 2013 reached £11.6bn, according to the Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML). The estimated total for 2012 is £143bn, up from £141bn in 2011. CML forecasts gross mortgage lending will reach £156bn in 2013. Improvements in the cost and availability of mortgage credit and the Government's Help to Buy scheme are underpinning a recovery in the housing market. In recent months the market has seen the strongest performance for mortgage lending since 2008.
- The average price of a house in County Durham fell to £81,822 in March 2013. In the North East prices also fell to £96,515 and nationally (England and Wales) there was a marginal increase to £160,556. There have been monthly variations in the number of houses sold in County Durham, the North-East and nationally but overall in 2012/13 there was a reduction in sales volumes compared to 2011/12. Compared to 2008, both sales volumes and prices have decreased by around 1/3 in County Durham and the North East.
- There were 1210 new housing completions (1129 net) in 2012/13 compared to 851 (842 net) the previous year

Summary

This snapshot pulls out some key messages about County Durham's economic conditions which impact on homelessness.

- The employment rate has fallen and is below the regional and national average
- The unemployment rate has been falling in recent months but long term unemployment has increased
- GVA in 2011 has increased but there is still a gap between County Durham and the regional and national average
- The number of jobs in the County has remained stable in recent years with fluctuations in individual sectors
- Average earnings are above the regional average
- House prices on average are below the regional average
- Housing completions have increased and mortgage lending nationally is also increasing.

Section 4 National & Local Context:

Since the general election in May 2010, the government has implemented a programme of change and reform. The national reform agenda has meant local homelessness services needed to adapt quickly to deliver services more efficiently, and to mitigate potential homelessness impacts arising from welfare reforms such as those affecting the national Housing Benefit scheme in England, and the introduction of Universal Credit from October 2013.

The list of developments in national policy contained in the box below pick out some of the key changes that have had - and will have - a direct impact on the way in which local housing authorities deliver allocations, lettings and homelessness services to their communities:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ■ Emergency budget - 22 June 2010 | ■ Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 – 1 May 2012 |
| ■ Comprehensive Spending Review - 20 October 2010 | ■ Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 – Consultation – 31 May 2012 |
| ■ Localism Bill -13 December 2010 | ■ Allocations Code of Guidance – 29 Jun 2012 |
| ■ Affordable Homes Framework – 15 Feb 2011 | ■ Making Every Contact Count – 16 Aug 2012 |
| ■ New Homes Bonus scheme design - 17 Feb 2011 | ■ The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012 - 24 Aug 2012 |
| ■ Welfare Reform Bill -17 Feb 2011 | ■ Supplementary guidance on the homelessness changes in the Localism Act 2011 and on the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 – 8 Nov 2012 |
| ■ Budget - 23 Mar 2011 | ■ The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 - 9 Nov 2012 |
| ■ No Second Night Out in London – 1 Apr 2011 | ■ The Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Former Armed Forces Personnel) (England) Regulations 2012 – 30 Nov 2012 |
| ■ No Second Night Out Nationwide – 6 Jul 2011 | |
| ■ Localism Act 2011 – 15 Nov 2011 | |
| ■ Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England – 21 Nov 2011 | |
| ■ Allocation of accommodation: Guidance for local housing authorities in England – Consultation - 5 Jan 2012 | |
| ■ Welfare Reform Act 2012 – 8 Mar 2012 | |
| ■ Social Justice – Transforming Lives – 13 Mar 2012 | |
| ■ Budget – 21 Mar 2012 | |

The Governments Housing Strategy

The Governments Housing Strategy 'Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England 2011' builds on existing policy through key measures and introduces reforms and initiatives in relation to housing and homelessness.

These are:

- Creation of new flexible tenancies to encourage the efficient use of social housing
- Introduction of Home Swap Direct to enable social housing tenants to identify properties they could exchange to anywhere in the Country
- Tackling rough sleeping through initiatives such as 'No Second Night Out' which targets support to people new to rough sleeping
- Establishment of a new multi-agency team to work around troubled families
- Introduction of the Social Sector Size Criteria to reduce under-occupation and create movement in the social rented sector
- Armed Forces service personnel with urgent housing need to receive additional priority within the Allocation Schemes of Local Authorities
- Providing support to home owners through independent debt advice, free legal advice at possession hearings and access to information and advice
- Encouraging social housing providers to tackle tenancy fraud in their stock as a way to release much needed stock for families who need it

Many of the reforms highlighted in the Government's Strategy will pose key challenges for the Local Authority in the delivery of this Homelessness Strategy.

Section 5 Welfare Reform

Welfare Reform:

Whilst the Coalition's reform agenda is wide ranging, by far the area with the most impact on people in housing need is Welfare Reform. It is therefore important that in developing this strategy, we review and try to understand the possible economic impact across County Durham and how reform will affect households. Whilst Welfare Reform is predicted to bring significant financial savings to the Exchequer (over £18 billion), the wider impact of reform is the intended behavioural change, seeking to provide incentives into work through structural changes to means tested benefits. As such, predicting how people will respond is therefore difficult but never the less, an understanding of the scale of the challenges across County Durham is important.

Overview of Welfare Reform Changes:

The Government's agenda for Welfare Reform

- The introduction of Universal Credit to provide a single streamlined benefit
- A stronger approach to reducing fraud and error with tougher penalties
- A new claimant commitment showing clearly what is expected of claimants
- Reforms to Disability Living Allowance, through the introduction of the Personal Independence Payment
- Creating a fairer approach to Housing Benefit to bring stability to the market
- Driving out abuse of the Social Fund system by giving greater power to local authorities
- Reforming Employment and Support Allowance to make the benefit fairer and to ensure that help goes to those with the greatest need
- Changes to underpin a new system of child support.

The table below describes the number of people claiming benefits in County Durham with the cost associated for each. (2012/13)

Benefit affected by Welfare Reform	People affected	Annual total £ (m)
Income based Jobseekers Allowance (JSAib)	10,200	34.3
Income related Employment Supports Allowance (ESAir)	3,660	13.1
Income Support (IS)	17,020	66.4
Tax Credits (TC) (People affected expressed by family count)	59,300	246.6
Housing Benefit (HB)	47,110	205.0
Disability Living Allowance (DLA)	23,440	85.9
Incapacity Benefit (IB) (Includes Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA))	24,640	94.6
Council Tax Benefit (CTB)	63,000	63.0
Disability Living Allowance (DLA) aged under 16 & 65+	16,880	67.3
Carers Allowance (CA) all ages	6,480	19.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>271,730</i>	<i>809.1</i>
<i>Monetary value per day</i>		<i>2.4</i>

In addition to reform of personal benefits, significant changes have already been made or are planned in relation to benefits to assist with housing costs.

The reform of housing benefit covers five key changes:-

- As from October 2013 payments for housing benefit will be made directly to the tenant in both the social and private rented sectors;
- In April 2013 a size criteria will be introduced for payment of housing benefit in the social sector which means that those tenants under occupying will have their benefit reduced;
- A number of changes to payment of housing benefit (Local Housing Allowance) in the private rented sector will be introduced resulting in

reductions for a number of client groups in particular single people under 35;

- Charges for non-dependants living in a property will increase and the amount of housing benefit therefore will be reduced;
- The integration of housing benefit into Universal Credit.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is continuing to add detail to the operational implementation of its initial policy reforms and the more recent cap on the future uprating of benefits, as announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. The Council will continue to monitor policy implementation and learning from pathfinder areas to limit the impact on households.

Challenges for County Durham:

The implications of welfare reform for housing are wide reaching and will impact hard on lower income households. Taken together with the changes to personal benefits, over the short term (next 12 – 24 months), there is a significant risk that households affected will be at risk of homelessness due to their inability to afford their housing costs whilst trying to manage reductions in household income alongside managing other debts.

The analysis suggests that £809.1m is spent annually in County Durham on benefits, that in turn equates to approximately payments of over £2m a day (£2.4m), with a consequential risk of loss to the local economy (money lost to the local economy) through direct expenditure and the local multiplier effect.

Welfare Reform will result in significant challenges for all households across the County. This will include both in and out of work households as reductions in benefit entitlement reduces households ability to afford their housing costs at a time of increasing costs in utility bills, food costs and the rise in access to expensive forms of credit via pay day lenders as families struggle to make ends meet.

For people in receipt of Housing Benefit

The integration of Housing Benefit (HB) into Universal Credit (UC) and the end of direct payments to social housing providers may result in higher arrears and increased rent collection costs for housing providers. Proposed caps to HB could lead to increased demand for smaller, cheaper properties. Changes to Housing Benefit will see an average claimant in County Durham potentially face:

- Tighter restrictions on help with private rent;
- A 25% increase in the 'non-dependent contribution';
- Restrictions for single under 25 year-olds extended to under 35 year-olds.
- HB limits to family size will be extended to *social housing* from April 2013.

What are the implications?

The impact of changes to Housing Benefit entitlements will affect a number of residents resulting in financial hardship and inability to afford rent or mortgage payments therefore placing additional pressure on the Council's Housing Solutions Service.

The figures in brackets indicate the potential number of people affected in County Durham.

Welfare reform – housing benefit proposals

Private rented sector	Both sectors	Social sector
April 2011 Local Housing Allowance capped (11,200) People affected currently receiving transitional protection	Charges for non dependent increase of 27% (5,500)	April 2013 Housing benefit for social Housing tenant will be calculated according to the size of the property the household is assessed as requiring. Housing benefit claimants of working age (up to 61) living in accommodation considered to be too large will need to make up any shortfall (8392)
January 2012 Extension to shared room rate from under 25 to under 35's (790) Impact could be up to £40 per week reduction in benefit	October 2013 Direct payments	
April 2013 Local Housing Allowance up rated on the basis of Consumer Price Index rather than local rent levels	2013 – 2017 Introduction of universal credit (47,000 in receipt of HB)	

Housing Benefit & Size Criteria in Social Rented:

The introduction of the “size criteria” as part of Welfare Reform seeks to put “under-occupying” social housing tenants on an equal footing with those in the private sector in receipt of Local Housing Allowance. The DWP estimates that the change will result in reducing HB payments by £490m in HB payments. These reductions will only be achieved if under-occupiers remain in their current property. If they move to smaller accommodation they will claim HB/Local Housing Allowance (LHA) at the lower rate, and the vacated properties will be let to households entitled to claim the full rate. However, where households move to accommodation in the private rented sector, the eligible LHA rate may be higher than the rent in the social rented sector thus adding to and not reducing the cost to the tax payer.

Tenants affected by benefit reductions in the social sector will face several choices:

- Remain in their current accommodation and make up the shortfall from income or other savings which is unlikely
- Remain in their current accommodation but are unable to pay, this will place pressure on existing advice services, increase financial hardship, result in an increase in arrears etc.
- Move to a smaller dwelling, although this may not be an option to due limited supply of one bedroom accommodation.
- Move to the private rented sector with higher rents but also higher LHA entitlement.

The number of households affected in County Durham by the proposals for social housing is approximately 7,500 and at an average of £13 per week additional amount to pay, this will result in £97,500 per week shortfall to the local economy.

Under Occupation: Looking at how realistic it is for tenants to move to more affordable housing, the table below shows a breakdown of those identified as under occupying against property size:

Property Size	Under occupied by 1 room	Under occupied by 2 rooms	Under occupied by 3 or more rooms	Totals
2 bedrooms	4,148	-	-	4,148
3 bedrooms	2,430	1,209	-	3,639
4 bedrooms	113	69	30	212
5 bedrooms	4	0	0	4
Totals	6,695	1,278	30	8,003

This identifies that up to 5,387 tenants would require a one bedroomed property if they wanted to move to avoid the under occupancy charge.

To date, we know that 369 tenants have already moved to smaller accommodation in 2012/13. A further 174 tenants have expressed a desire to move since they were made aware of the government policy change.

The table below shows a breakdown by property size of the property that has become available for let through the Durham Key Options during the current financial year:

Properties available for let in 2012/13	1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4 bedrooms	Total
Number of properties	937	2,001	941	54	3,933

During the year 2011/2012, only 937 one bedroom properties became vacant. At this rate, it would take nearly six years for everyone to move if they chose to do so. In practice, in weighing up their options, people will consider that moving may also require leaving family and friends behind as well as a support network they have developed within the local community.

With demand for 1 bed roomed or shared housing increasing in both the social and private rented sectors and a lack of this type of accommodation

across the County, the options for single people and particularly those under 35 years old will be limited. There is therefore a need to develop suitable options for shared housing across both sectors and to consider conversions of larger property into shared units where appropriate.

A potential benefit of the housing under-occupancy changes is that it could, in theory alleviate overcrowding by freeing up larger houses through people moving to more affordable housing. However, in Durham this is unlikely to be a sizable benefit. Current waiting lists show 265 applicants who wish to move because their current home is not large enough.

Housing providers within the county are taking additional steps to help provide additional support to households at risk. Durham Key Options letting policy has been reviewed so that priority will be awarded to people suffering financial hardship because of the welfare reform changes. In addition, all housing providers in the county are in the process of adopting a 'Taking in lodgers' policy as well as a proactive approach to housing swaps to help those affected who wish to move where a suitable property is available.

The overall impact of these changes will be that more people will have to find the rest of the rent or move home to cheaper, more overcrowded properties. We can expect increased applications for one bedroom accommodation and not be in a position to assist due to lack of this type of accommodation. As a result, we expect increased arrears, hardship, homelessness and demands on debt advice and other services.

Discretionary Housing Payments:

While the government has increased the funding available for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) - for the council the funding will be £883,089 for 2013/2014 - it is clear that this is insufficient to meet the potential demand created by the withdrawal of and reductions in other welfare payments. If all of the households affected by the reductions due to under occupation in the social rented sector were to seek DHP support, this would amount to a demand of just under £100,000 a week. This would mean that the council would exhaust its total 2013/14 funding allocation in little more than eight weeks.

In many instances, DHP is seen as a preventative measure, which helps to avoid a household getting into rent arrears problems and becoming homeless.

An analysis of DHP spending over the last few years is provided below:

Financial Year	Government grant	Actual spend	No. of claims	No. of awards
2009/10	£102,053	£90,357	467	268
2010/11	£104,514	£117,317	359	229
2011/12	£177,361	£189,254	500	330
2012/13 *figures as at Jan 13	£333,398	£422,998*	793*	650*

Welfare reform measures will provide significant challenges for communities across County Durham. The impact will not be restricted solely to those in receipt of out of work benefits. In work benefit will also reduce and across the County, households in work and on low incomes together with those out of work will increasingly struggle to meet their living costs, placing increased pressures on household budgets and people's ability to afford their home. This will pose increased pressures on front line services tasked with assisting in the prevention of homelessness; at time of increased pressures on service budgets as the authority seeks to mitigate against Government funding reductions.

The Council is working with partners to implement a triage service to ensure those residents requiring access to Discretionary Housing Payments do so, alongside support and guidance to access more affordable accommodation where possible.

In April 2013, researchers at Sheffield Hallam University identified that those local authority areas with the greatest levels of deprivation stood to be most impacted by welfare reform, losing most income as benefit payments are withdrawn and reduced, whilst having insufficient economic growth and employment opportunities to enable benefits claimants to move into work and off welfare.

In terms of absolute losses, the researchers estimate that the County Durham economy stands to lose £188 million per year because of the welfare changes. This is equivalent to £565 per working age adult, slightly more than the regional average loss of £560 per working age adult and significantly more

than the average loss of £470 per working age adult for Great Britain as a whole.

Given the nature of the reforms and their impact on the county, the council continues to monitor and respond to the implementation of the government's welfare changes.

The council continues to prepare for the implementation of the welfare changes scheduled for this year (2013), including the introduction of a Welfare Assistance Scheme to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of the Social Fund from April 2013.

The Council will through this strategy, work with partners to support those effected by Welfare Reform to provide a partnership approach to support people to prevent homelessness wherever possible and increase access to training and employment opportunities.

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Section 6 Homlessness Trends

Homelessness Trends 2008 – 2013:

The Housing Solutions Service monitors presentations to the service and reports trends and outcomes on a quarterly and annual basis. Recording of outcomes generally sit within either statutory homelessness duties or homelessness prevention.

The Statutory Homelessness Duty:

Section 184 of the Housing Act 1996 states that where a local authority considers a person may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days, they shall make such investigations as are necessary to establish whether the person is eligible for assistance and if so what duty is owed to them (if any).

The principal duty is an obligation to secure that suitable accommodation is available for a person who is:

- Homeless or threatened with homelessness in 28 days. (S175 HA 1996)
- Is eligible for assistance. (S.185 HA 1996)
- Is in priority need. (S.189 HA 1996)
- Is not intentionally homeless. (S.191 HA 1996)
- Has a local connection. (S.199 HA 1996)

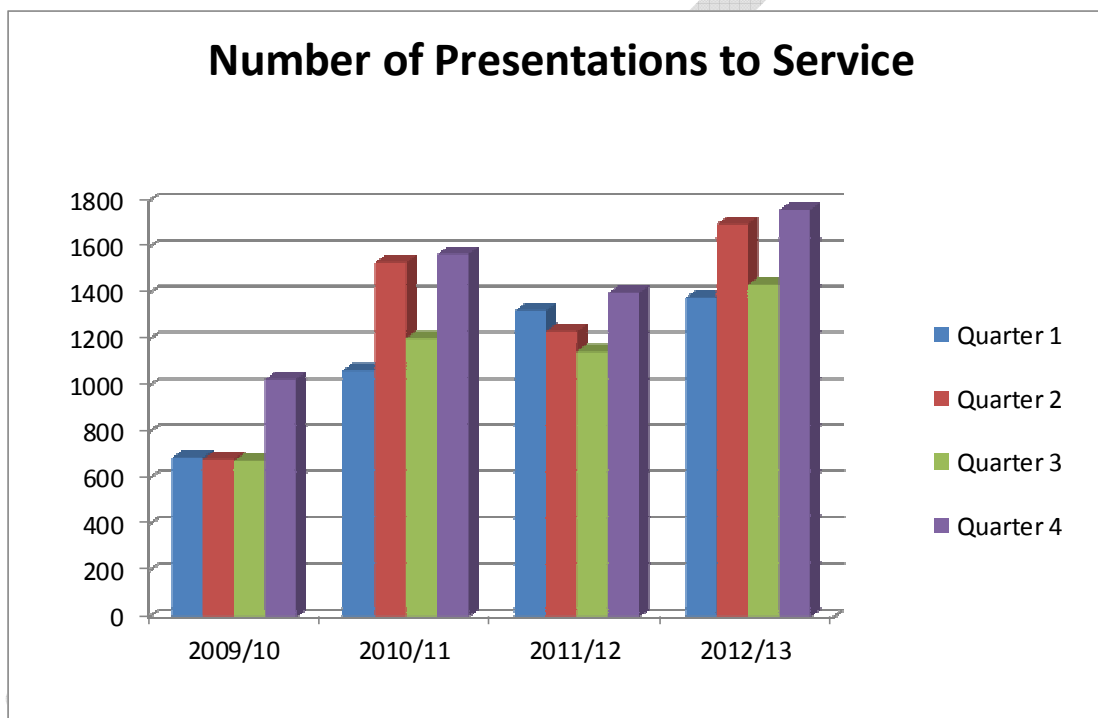
Homelessness Prevention:

Preventing homelessness means providing people with the ways and means to meet their housing and any housing-related support needs in order to avoid experiencing homelessness. Effective prevention will enable a person to:

- remain in their current home, where appropriate; or

- to delay a need to move out of current accommodation so that a move into alternative accommodation can be planned in a timely way;
- Or to sustain independent living.

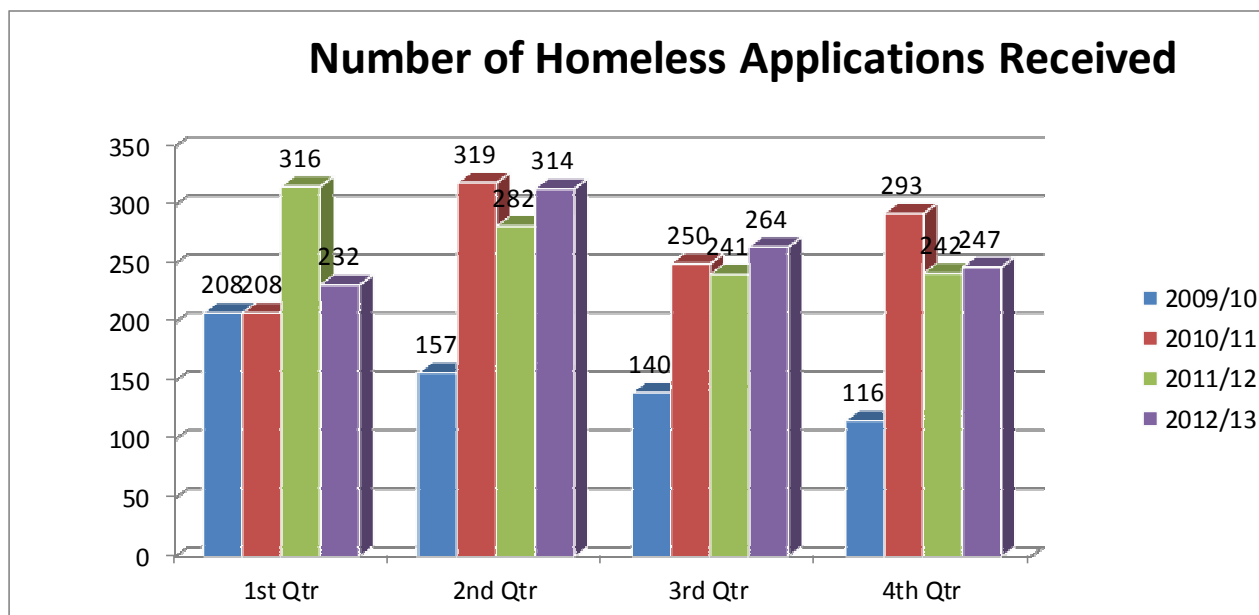
Prior to Local Government Reorganisation (April 2009) many of the former District Councils did not have computerised systems to record presentations or homelessness applications so we are unable to provide accurate data for this period. From April 2009 a new integrated system was available; as a consequence the review of trends will cover 2009/10 to 2012/13.



Total presentations to the service will include clients applying as homeless and those threatened with homelessness where the Housing Solutions Service is able to prevent the loss of accommodation; clients seeking advice on housing options and Durham Key Options; information regarding their housing rights; or one off assistance to enable clients to make informed choices about their future housing options.

Over the period presentations to the service have increased from 3075 in 2009/10 to 6281 in 2012/13 representing a 104.2% increase. This has been achieved against a 30% reduction in front line Officers as the service restricted to meets its contribution towards the medium terms financial plan to reflect central government funding reductions.

Over the period presentations to the service have been mainly concentrated in the East (Seaham and Peterlee) and to the North (Derwentside and Chester-Le-Street).



The number of homelessness applications relates to the number of households who have approach the Housing Solutions Service where we have had reason to believe that the statutory threshold for enquiries to commence under Part VII of The Housing Act 1996, (as amended Homelessness Act 2002), have been met. That is where Housing Solutions have reasons to believe the applicant is eligible for assistance and homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days.

Homelessness applications to the authority have increased by 70% from 2009/10 to 2012/13. However, over the past year 11/12 – 12/13 applications have reduced by 2.2%. Over the period significant work has been undertaken to ensure a consistent approach to homelessness applications, investigations and decisions leading to a more consistent trend in applications from 2010/11 to 12/13.

The total number of decisions represent statutory decisions made by the Council following applications under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended Homelessness Act 202). The decisions made by the council as a percentage increase or decrease from 2009/10 – 2012/13 is:

- Ineligible households -90%.
- Eligible, but not homeless +85%

- Eligible, homeless but not in priority need +29.3%.
- Eligible, homeless, in priority need but intentionally homeless +10.8%.
- Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need +28.4%

The three main reasons for homelessness over the period have been:

- Domestic Violence
- Loss of Rented accommodation
- Non-violent relationship breakdown.

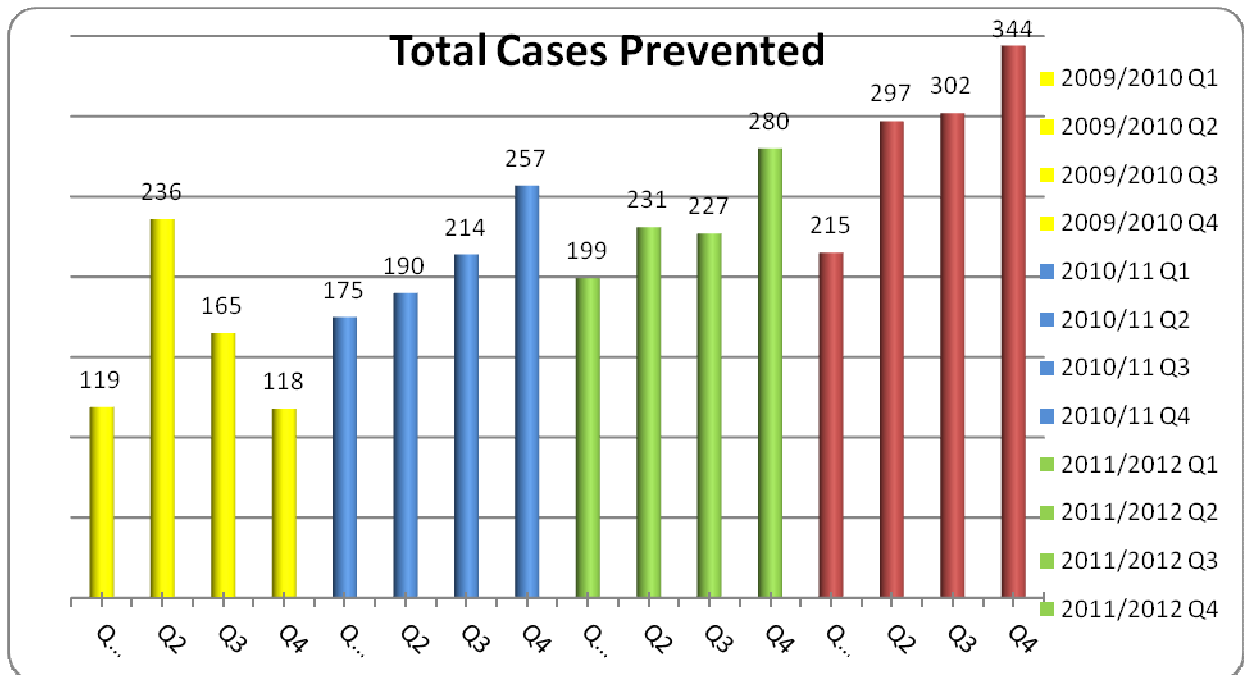
Whilst domestic abuse remains the main reason for homelessness across the county, there has been a 28.3% decrease in 2012/13 compared to 2011/12. This is a consequence of the on-going partnership work on reducing the prevalence of domestic abuse in County Durham and specialist training within the Housing Solutions Service in supporting victims of domestic abuse and a corresponding increase in supporting victims to remain in their own home if safe to do so through the Remain Safe project.

The top three reasons for priority need over the period have been.

- Households with dependent children
- Violence / threat of violence
- Mental illness

The main priority need groups broadly mirrors the main reason for homelessness with many households fleeing domestic abuse containing dependent children.

The predominant ethnic group requiring homelessness applications has been White British broadly in line with the demographic of the county. The predominant household type has been lone parents with dependent children followed by one person household and couples with dependent children. The predominant age group requiring homelessness assessment has been 25-44, followed by 16-24.



Over the period the Housing Solutions Service has prevented 3566 households from becoming homeless, an increase over the period of 281%. Over the past year the Housing Solutions Service has undertaken a diagnostic assessment with the assistance of the DCLG Specialist Advisor. This work concluded that the cost to the authority of processing a homelessness application is £924.20p, compared to the average prevention costing £741.36p – making prevention not only better for the family and individual, but also 28% cheaper. Over the period prevention of homelessness has therefore avoided costs to Durham County Council of approximately £652,000.

The local authority costs avoided do not include the wider social and economic savings of homelessness prevention. In August 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government report: Evidence review of the cost of homelessness: attempted to establish the cost of homelessness to wider government departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health, Ministry of Justice and to Local Authorities. Combining these wider social and economic costs, each homelessness case is estimated to cost the wider economy between £24,000 and £30,000. Taking this lower estimate, homelessness prevention has saved County Durham £85.5 million over the past 5 years.

Over the past 12 months (March 12 – April 13) the service has seen a 22.8% increase in presentations with over 6,200 people seeking advice and support. Cases resulting in the prevention of homelessness have increased by 24.2% to 1159, exceeding the local performance indicator. At the same time there has been a 2.2% decrease in statutory homelessness applications.

It is also noted that there has been an increase in households presenting due to inability to afford their housing costs. Rent arrears cases have increased by 103%, possession cases have increased by 249%. Over the same period homelessness due to domestic abuse has decreased by 28.3%, whilst at the same time prevention of homelessness following the provision of additional security measures to enable victims of violence to remain in their home, if safe to do so, have increased by 92%. A significant milestone has also been reached with no 16/17 year olds being accepted as homeless over the period, indicating the success of the new Holistic Temporary Accommodation Support Service (HTASS) tasked with providing emergency supported housing and support to assist young people to return home.

Durham County Council remains committed, through this strategy, to work with our partners to respond to the needs of our customers. We will continue to provide services that, wherever possible, will prevent homelessness, promote choice, facilitate access to training and employment opportunities to enable our residents to contribute to thriving communities.

Section 7 Approach

What has changed over the past five years?

Over the past five years significant changes have been made across the Council's Housing Solutions Service.

The Council works with partners to invest in and promote early intervention and prevention services. By doing so, we seek to support individuals and families across County Durham to avoid homelessness wherever possible. Alongside this The Officers fulfil a generic role providing a holistic assessment and a support and advice service enabling clients' needs to be assessed and met through prevention, housing options and the Council's statutory responsibilities.

Core to this approach has been to develop an early intervention, prevention focused service offering solutions to all in housing need with the prevention of homelessness the central focus.

In response to this commitment, over the past five years the following services have been developed:

Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme: To assist clients to find and maintain accommodation in the private rented sector linked to tenancy support. The scheme guarantees a bond up to the equivalent of four weeks rent.

Homelessness Prevention Fund: Offering financial assistance to prevent homelessness, part of a wider "spend to save" policy.

Enhanced Housing Support Protocol: Bringing advice, support and accommodation services together to tackle the causes of homelessness and create sustainable tenancies for vulnerable adults.

County Court Duty Scheme Referral Protocol: Enabling clients at risk of homelessness to access free, specialist legal advice at court to defend claims for possession.

Joint Protocol for 16-17 year olds: Ensuring a joint assessment of young peoples' housing, advice, support, training and emotional needs, by Housing Solutions, Children and Young Peoples Service, One Point and the Youth Offending Service, to enable young people to return home, if safe do so, or to plan for independence.

Mortgage Rescue: Part of a national scheme to offer shared equity or conversion to social rented tenure for home owners who are struggling with their mortgage payments.

Possession & Repossession Loan Fund: Interest free loans for homeowners at risk becoming homeless through repossession or eviction to enable them to recover their position and remain in their home.

CLASP: Care Leavers Accommodation & Support Protocol. Ensuring a partnership approach to planning for young people leaving care.

Welfare Rights Worker: Service Level Agreement with Welfare Rights Service to provide a dedicated officer within the Housing Solutions Service to support clients to access appropriate benefits to ensure accommodation is affordable and sustained.

Hospital Discharge Protocol: Protocol developed with Lanchester Road Hospital in Durham to ensure early intervention and referral for patients with undergoing assessment and treatment for mental health problems to ensure appropriate accommodation is secured prior to discharge.

Personalisation Budget: Agreed protocol with supported housing and floating support providers to assist clients with high support needs to access supported housing or their own home with additional support as required. The protocol ensures those who may be excluded from services are able to gain access with additional support to manage any identified risk.

Specialist Debt Worker: Two year contract with Chester-Le-Street Citizens Advice Bureau for a specialist debt worker to be based within the Housing Solutions Service offering specialist debt advice to clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to debt related issues.

In House Remain Safe Service. From June 2012 the Remain Safe Service has been delivered by Direct Services following a review of the DISC service resulting in decommissioning to provide increase value for money and outcomes. The new service is jointly funded with the Safe Durham Partnership.

Step Forward: Accommodation & Support Service. Tender awarded in May 2012 to Stonham seeing 14 x two bed roomed properties leased and managed by the service provider offering floating support to young people moving on from supported housing and those in need of an intermediate supported housing offer.

Adults Facing Chronic Social Exclusion Pilot: 12 month pilot delivered by the Cyrenians from June 2012 delivering street outreach services in Durham City to rough sleepers to ensure those facing chronic social exclusion are supported to access a range of services and safe, supported accommodation. The service will further develop an understanding of the needs of rough sleepers across the County to inform any future commissioning of services. The Cyrenians have now been successful in securing two years funding from the Homelessness Transitional Fund to expand the service across County Durham.

Regional through the Gate Service: Service jointly commissioned by the 12 regional Local Authorities and the Regional Offender Management Service. The service will ensure support to maintain and secure accommodation for those who have a history of repeat offending and homelessness if delivered to clients leaving HMP Durham, Holme House and Low Newton. The service was awarded to Foundation and commenced in November 2012.

Emergency Supported Lodgings: Following a review of the Night Stop Service, it was decided to decommission and reinvest funding in an Emergency Supported Lodgings Service operated by Children and Young Peoples Service for 16-17 year olds. This resulted in an increase in providers and the potential to increase the ability for placements to increase from three nights to three weeks. The service will further be extended to accommodate those 18-35 years old from 1st July 2013.

Life Wise / Peer Education Services: Highlighting the causes and consequences of homelessness and how to prepare for independence and avoid homelessness for young people aged 16-25 has been operating across County Durham by Centre point for the past 3 years a funding contribution from Housing Solutions. This contract ended in March 2013. A service will be developed within the Family Intervention Project called STEPS that will offer training aimed at tenancy sustainment.

Service Review & Diagnostic: With assistance from Planning and Performance, the service participated in a service review and diagnostic assessment to determine overall performance, recommended improvements linking into the continuous service improvement plan. The resulting report and recommendation have been adopted in the service plan for 2013/14.

Mortgage Rescue Officer: Providing a dedicated Officer to assist home owners at risk of repossession by way of referral to the Mortgage Rescue Scheme or allocation of Repossession Loan Fund.

Allocations Policy: A review of the allocations policy has been completed to reflect new statutory guidance and provisions within the Localism Act. The new allocations policy has now been adopted together with the power to discharge homeless duty into the private rented sector.

Housing Solutions Officer: Integrated Offender Management: A dedicated Officer is based with the Integrated Offender Management Service offering advice and support to secure accommodation for Priority and Prolific Offenders.

Housing Triage: Protocol with a range of partners, including Housing Providers and Customer Services to ensure households affected by Welfare Reform changes are referred to the most appropriate solution, including advice and support on training, employment, debt, welfare rights and Discretionary Housing Payments.

HTASS: Holistic Temporary Accommodation and Support Service is to provide a flexible person centred accommodation and support service that meets the authority's temporary accommodation duties under the homelessness legislation and provides added value which addresses the broader needs of the client to prevent future homelessness, maximise life opportunities, reduce social isolation and exclusion and promote improved health and wellbeing. HTASS includes:

- Temporary Accommodation & Support
- Joint Protocol for 16/17 years olds
- Crash Pads, including provision for care leavers
- Private Sector accommodation development

Alongside the development of new, innovative prevention initiatives, the Housing Solutions Service has developed a range of internal procedures to ensure the effective and consistent application of casework across the County. This provides for quality assurance checks and support and supervision to officers engaged in complex casework seeking to prevent homelessness to all who present to the service.

Youth Homelessness:

Young people face significant disadvantages in the housing market and struggle to make the transition to independence against a backdrop of increased numbers not in education, training or employment and restrictions to benefit payments to assist in their housing costs.

Youth Homeless North East (YHNE) is a collective of providers, local authorities, young homeless people aged 16 to 25 years old and other organisations committed to working together to identify and promote solutions to address young people's housing needs. Durham County Council takes an active role in supporting YHNE to assess and address the housing needs of young people.

At the 'Strategy for Change' event held in December 2012, a consultation with members was undertaken to review and update the Housing Strategy priority solutions and actions for the period up to March 2014. The updated priority solutions are:

Priority Solutions

1. Improve the quality and range of temporary and supported accommodation *'good quality homeless accommodation which creates better tenants and changes lives.'*
2. Increase early intervention work in schools and with families.
3. To support member organisations to ensure sustainability and growth of the sector to address youth homelessness.
4. Improve the likelihood of young people living safely as contributing members of the community.
5. To ensure all services are accountable to the young people they serve.
6. Lobby policy makers and commissioners to prevent, tackle and resolve youth homelessness in the North East.

County Durham Young People's Charter:

In 2010 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) produced 'A young people's charter on housing' based on consultation with young people (JRF, 2012).

Youth Homeless North East was approached Durham County Council to produce a Youth Housing Charter for implementation by the Housing Solutions Team to ensure the specific needs and long-term aspirations of homeless young people in Durham are met.

The young people who took part in the research and whose experiences and opinions are presented in the charter wanted to know how The Youth Housing Charter would be used and if it would make a difference. In response to that question our intention is to encourage all local authorities and wider services providers in the North East to endorse the Youth Housing Charter to ensure housing and support services provided for homeless young people are informed and shaped by what young people want.

Durham County Council endeavour to combat homelessness by providing housing and support services that meet the needs and wants identified by young people within this charter.

Please see Appendix 1 (County Durham Youth Homelessness Charter)

Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out:

The statement of the Government's vision for tackling rough sleeping, No Second Night Out (NSNO), was published in July 2011. This built upon a programme of work launched in London in April 2011, already using the same heading. To assist Local Authorities to develop a response to rough sleeping, additional funding was allocated to the North East in 2012. Newcastle is the lead for Tyne and Wear and Northumberland and Durham County Council is the lead for Durham and Tees Valley. Since then, the 12 North East Local Authorities have been working together to develop services to meet the needs of rough sleepers and provide a response to meet rough sleepers accommodation and support needs.

The first step in ending rough sleeping is to make sure that people who are forced to sleep outside are identified quickly and helped in to services as soon as possible, so that they do not have to spend a second night on the streets.

In addition to No Second Night Out, there are three other elements to end rough sleeping:

- No one should arrive on the streets
- No one should return to the streets, including through eviction from supported accommodation

- No one should live on the street

No Second Night Out – the key principles

The Government identified five key principles in their vision:

- **Identifying rough sleepers:** new rough sleepers should be identified and helped off the streets immediately so that they do not fall into a dangerous rough sleeping lifestyle
- **Involving the public:** members of the public should be able to play an active role by reporting and referring people sleeping rough
- **Assessing needs quickly and safely:** rough sleepers should be helped to access a place of safety where their needs can be quickly assessed and they can receive advice on their option
- **Accessing emergency accommodation and other services:** they should be able to access emergency accommodation and other services, such as healthcare, if needed
- **Reconnecting to support:** if people have come from another area or country and find themselves sleeping rough, the aim should be to reconnect them back to their local community unless there is a good reason why they cannot return. There, they will be able to access housing and recovery services, and have support from family and friends.

Delivering No Second Night Out in the North East

All 12 Local Authorities, major providers of services and other key partners in the North East have signed up to this standard. Underpinning this will be a number of sub-regional and local protocols which ensures that NSNO is operational across the North East by mid-2012. These will set down the sub-regional approach and joint working mechanisms. All of the protocols will have in common:

- A local response to the five key principles of NSNO
- A joint approach, led by the local authority, which encompasses the voluntary sector, criminal justice agencies including the three police forces, health services including drug & alcohol treatment agencies, the retail & transport sectors and the general public.
- Joint working agreements that

- recognise that rough sleepers can move across Local Authority boundaries and a consistent approach to their support is needed from all agencies
 - share resources and put in place reciprocal agreements to ensure rough sleepers can access services quickly and safely
- A monitoring framework to collect information on the picture of rough sleeping in each area and the outcomes from NSNO.

Where appropriate, actions to ensure Durham County Council deliver on the regional statement unpinning the delivery of No Second Night Out will be included in the action plan appended to this strategy.

Resources (Support People & DCLG Homelessness Grant):

The provision of housing related support, formerly known as the Supporting People Programme, is now the responsibility of Children and Adults Service (CAS) and is funded from non-ring-fenced funding. There are approximately 40 providers delivering over 100 services to vulnerable people across the county, aged 16 to people who are in their 90's and to a diverse range of client groups including young people, teenage parents, offenders, domestic abuse, substance misuse, learning disability / difficulty, mental health, single homeless, and frail elderly.

Current services support approximately 15,000 clients at any one time, through either floating support services or accommodation based services and during 2012/13 supported in excess of 30,000 vulnerable clients. Outcome information from St. Andrews, for short term services, indicates that of the 628 departures 82.5% of these were positive, planned moves.

During 2012/13 approximately 32800 clients were supported through floating support and 1350 clients supported through accommodation based services. Overall the Council spends £10m on floating support, provided by 18 providers and spends £6.1m on accommodation based services delivered by 27 providers.

Since 2011, the funding for these services has been under pressure as the Council's medium term financial plan has had to account for significant reductions in Government spending. For those providers having to take these funding reductions into account we have endeavoured to give them sufficient time to respond in a strategic way and to explore other ways of delivering the

services which will minimise the impact of clients. Unfortunately, this is not always possible however we commend the providers in the way they have approached these challenging times.

The next few years (2013-2015) will see a further reduction of £2m from preventative services, which will impact on providers, service capacity and the number of clients services will be able to support. The future of funding for this sector remains at risk given the support provided is not statutory and the Council will focus on the delivery of statutory services. Having said this, the role of preventative services is growing in recognition within the Council and an option that will be explored is the alignment of preventative services to statutory service provision as a complete pathway for clients in line with the Health & Social Care Bill.

The Council receives a Homelessness Prevention Grant from Department for Communities and Local Government of £433,013 each year up to 2014/15. This grant allocation is not ring fenced; however, agreement has been achieved for the grant to be allocated to developing services to prevent homelessness. Currently all grant allocation is committed or spend identified to maintain current prevention services or in response to increased requests for assistance due to welfare reform.

Section 8 Summary & Next Steps

Over the past five years the Council and its partners, have made significant progress following Local Government Reorganisation to improve services to people across County Durham in Housing Need. This has included the development of a range of services established to respond to the changing needs of customers resulting in a 281% increase in households prevented from becoming homeless avoiding over £85 million of costs.

We have worked hard to ensure service delivery is consistent and accessible across the County. Presentations have increased by over 100% to 6,281 households seeking assistance in 2012/13 alone. Whilst homelessness applications have increased by 70% over the period, this is against the need for the service to offer a consistent approach, and once this has been achieved homelessness applications have stabilised with a small 2% decrease in 2012/13.

Whilst investment in homelessness prevention and improved outcomes for customers has been encouraging, households across County Durham face significant challenges.

Over the past year we have noted a 249% increase in claims for possession across rented accommodation and a 103% increase in cases of rent arrears. With current and future implementation of welfare reform measures, both in work and out of work households face increased pressures on their income. Due to the behavioural changes welfare reform measures aim to achieve, in encouraging people to seek training and employment opportunities, it is difficult to provide a definitive prediction to assess trends in presentations over the coming months and years. However, we need to ensure that Durham County Council and our partners continue to work together to provide advice and support to those who seek our help and maintain our focus on homelessness prevention and increasing access to provide support for people to enter training and employment opportunities to break the cycle of homelessness.

The following action plan has been developed, following consultation with our partners, and sets out how Durham County Council seeks to respond to housing need across Durham over the next five years. The action plan will be monitored by the HAP and reviewed annually to ensure we continue to meet the needs of our residents.