



Homelessness Strategy Summary

Priorities and Action Plan For 2014-2018

Introduction

This is the summary document to the Council's 2014-2018 Homelessness Strategy, which is available in full on line at www.hertsmere.gov.uk

This short document is the working version of the published strategy, setting out a reminder of the top priorities for action, and crucially, the Delivery Plan for taking forward change. It is owned and updated every 6 months by the Councils Housing Services Manager

Priorities for Action

We know that homelessness is rising. We are concerned about the impact of welfare reform, generally, and specifically on those who are not working. We are concerned about affordability generally for people.

We are also concerned about rising demand and the need to manage expectations, on line, if possible. For those we owe a duty to assist, we intend to use the private rented sector. Before we can do this, we need to stimulate that sector and ensure a steady supply of properties. There are challenges in doing this because of our proximity to London.

At the same time we want to continue to ensure we have an appropriate portfolio of temporary accommodation. We need to ensure there is an appropriate amount of support for people, and we need to ensure there is adequate throughput, bearing in mind the housing management implications of this.

We are concerned for those we do not owe a rehousing duty to and we want to ensure we provide good quality housing advice and assistance. We cannot do this alone and we must improve the co-ordination between agencies.

Taking on board all of the above, we have identified a number of areas where current services can be improved, or where new services are needed in order to prevent and reduce homelessness in the next five years. The following priorities have been identified in order to deliver high-quality, easily accessible services across all areas of the district:

The themes identified that require actions moving forward are:

1. Mitigating the impact of welfare reform

This is one of the key themes of the Homelessness Strategy, and will involve a number of different areas of work around accessibility to services, services to support those threatened with homelessness and seeking alternative

accommodation as well as actions around sharpening up homelessness prevention services. It will be important though to work closely with employment services to attempt to help lift clients out of the benefit cap by getting them into work

Getting unemployed service users into employment, and maximising the opportunity to discuss this as part of housing options interviews has been identified as one of the best ways of helping people through welfare reform. The Council will explore best practice opportunities that might bring employment services more closely into the housing options process, resulting in getting clients into training and work.

2. Increase access to the private rented sector

The review has identified a number of issues around access to the private rented sector including competition for properties from other local authorities, particularly London boroughs plus the need to ensure the rent deposit scheme is adequate in assisting in procuring accommodation. The Council will be discharging the homelessness duty into the private rented sector in the future and so an appropriate supply is critical.

3. Review of temporary accommodation portfolio

In the light of the ability to discharge homelessness duty into the private rented sector, we will need to review the existing portfolio of temporary accommodation to ensure it is used into the most appropriate way. Colleagues have raised the need for near 100% occupancy and we want to ensure we can deliver this, whilst providing move on for tenants, to ensure there is churn (and therefore availability) in TA stock. We also want to continue to explore more possibility of supported housing development for young males and females. We will explore the possibility of a local single room lodging scheme for 25 to 35 years olds, due to the changes in benefit rules in increasing the age of the rent single room rate from 25 to 35, and to support the Governments “No second night out” for single homelessness.

4. Review and monitor the impact of the new allocations policy on homelessness

The new allocations policy went live on 1st April 2013 and it is important that we ensure that homeless households have the opportunity to bid for permanent homes, without creating a “fast track” into social housing. We also need to ensure that through put in temporary accommodation is not overly quick so as to create too many voids, which will add to the cost of managing that accommodation.

Monitoring of the new Allocations Policy is a key part of this aim. By monitoring lets to homeless households and comparing to previous years we will be able to measure the effectiveness of the Allocations Policy in resolving

homelessness. These figures will need to be considered alongside other data such as homelessness prevention figures, data from the Private Sector Leasing and PLACE (Private Lease Agreement Converting Empties) schemes

5. Managing client expectations

We are concerned with two aspects of client expectations. The first is around publicity for the services to ensure that those threatened with homelessness are aware of the service and able to easily access advice and assistance. This will involve actions around promoting the Council services, and all other services available in the borough. The second aspect is ensuring that we give out good quality information that enables applicants to make informed choices about their housing prospects.

There is a concern over the ability of the service to manage the future levels of demand, given the likely impact of welfare reform on homelessness and requests for housing advice. The Council intends to develop a strategy that can help manage demand by:

- Providing information to customers about what realistically the Council can do to provide social housing
- Provide quality information on waiting times – in housing reception areas and online
- Provision of online housing advice, and exploring how information technology can be used to act as effective triage into the service
- Debt Advice and signposting to agencies such as CAB, and money advice which is directly sponsored by the Council

6. Ensuring appropriate support is available for homeless people

Given the anticipated increased use of private rented sector we are keen to ensure that households are supported into appropriate accommodation and that they are given enough support to ensure tenancies continue and are successfully renewed. We recognised that support is critical if tenancies are to be sustained successfully. We recently introduced the new role of Tenants Liaison Officer to provide support to those moving into the private rented sector. We are keen to continue to monitor the successes that this delivers.

A number of stakeholders have raised the issue around support in moving into accommodation and we are keen to take this aspect forward and work to make sure this support is in place.

7. Working towards Gold Service

Essentially Gold Standard is a DCLG sponsored programme, focusing on a 10 step continuous improvement approach that starts with the pledge for local authorities to “strive for continuous improvement in front line housing services” and culminates in an application for the Gold Standard Challenge. The standard itself is based around the report from the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness – “Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to the

Prevention of Homelessness”. Working towards this will drive service quality upwards.

8. Improve move on provision

We are keen to review move on from supported housing schemes and from temporary accommodation. This links closely to the work we want to do in ensuring we have an appropriate portfolio of Temporary Accommodation. We are aware of issues with partner housing associations accepting nominations for tenants moving on from TA and we intend to work jointly to resolve these.

9. Increased partnership working

We do work in partnership with colleagues in other departments and other agencies, but we recognise that there is scope to achieve more in this area. We will review the partnerships we have and explore opportunities for increased gain. We are also keen to ensure that partners are involved in the delivery and the monitoring of this Strategy and will establish a forum to enable effective review to take place.

10. Increase housing supply

Increasing the supply of affordable homes in the borough is a key aim for the Council. One of the aims in the 2009-2014 Housing Strategy is to increase the supply and quality of housing from all sources. Activities include working with Private Sectors Landlords, Housing Association and Registered Providers to deliver new affordable homes and bring their existing stocks to a condition better than decent.

The Council will use its own resources to assist in the delivery of affordable homes, where viable helping to set Affordable Rents at below 80% of market rents and ensuring affordability for low income working households.

With limited land supply in the borough we will also find innovative solutions to increasing the supply of affordable homes. This will include working in partnership with Housing Associations/ Registered Providers to make best use of existing Land and assets, such as extensions/conversions and continuing to support our voluntary sponsored moves scheme which supports under-occupiers in housing association property to move to smaller properties.

Delivery Plan

The Delivery Plan is the tool by which we will translate these priorities into action. The latest version is attached overleaf.

Homelessness Strategy 2014 – 2018 Delivery Plan

Task	Details	How	When	Resources	Targets	Key Officers	Comments / Progress
Priority 1: Mitigate the impact of welfare reform							
Research further opportunities for homelessness prevention	Provision of debt advice referrals	Map existing provision of existing service & arrange effective referral routes	By December 2014	Within existing	Increased levels of prevention of at least 10% per year	Housing Services Manager	
Develop mechanisms to monitor the impact of welfare reform	Be part of a group that assesses the impact of welfare reform, monitors outcomes and introduces services / initiatives to mitigate negative impact	Part of Group Focus on financial inclusion	Ongoing	Within existing	Minimize negative impact of welfare reform	Housing Services Manager Benefits Manager	
Monitor expenditure on social fund budget	Social Fund of £10k is available to tackle welfare reform	Set up monitoring & reporting mechanisms, in partnership with RP's to assist those affected to move.	By Dec 2014	Within existing	Mitigate impact of welfare reform	Housing Services Manager	
Map provision of financial & benefits services	Create awareness amongst all agencies of provision across the borough	Pool knowledge and existing information to create up to date directory / resource	By Dec 2014	Within existing	Increased awareness of financial inclusion services amongst staff & agencies	Housing Services Manager	
Explore options to link employment &	Explore what services exist Identify scope for joint	Means will be identified though the options appraisal	December 2014	Derived from joint working	To get housing applicants not into work into	Housing Options Manager	

Task	Details	How	When	Resources	Targets	Key Officers	Comments / Progress
training & volunteering opportunities with Housing Options	working / protocols / co-location / shared training etc. Develop systems Establish a project to implement				employment. Establish a baseline in year 1 and increase year on year		
Priority 2: Increase access to private rented sector							
Review current capacity of the deposit scheme in relation to discharge of duty for homeless households (possible future policy)	Develop a package for discharge of duty in PRS so it can be used in certain cases	Review existing scheme & identify any improvements Review incentives Review advice & information to clients Consider out of area placements as necessary Produce standard paperwork etc. Involve landlords in the review	Sept 2014	Within existing	Increased numbers of applicants placed under Localism Act, each quarter.	Housing Options Manager	
Explore methods to improve standards in the PRS	Develop an accreditation scheme if appropriate	Produce paper on costs /benefits Meet with stakeholders Develop a training and implementation plan	Sept 2014	Within existing	Target each year for number of landlords awarded accreditation	Housing Services Manager	
Consider developing a local lettings agency	Carry out options appraisal (council run service? Existing partner? New procurement?)	Research current best practice Analyse local market Conduct full options appraisal Reach decision &	2014-16	Within existing or identification of new through spend to save		Housing Services Manager	

Task	Details	How	When	Resources	Targets	Key Officers	Comments / Progress
		implement					
Increased the availability of PRS Properties	Explore options including local newspaper, radio and provision of additional services e.g. named support.	Explore further publicity and marketing to attract more landlords Scheme	December 2014	Within existing	10% increased of PRS quarter on quarter	Housing Services Manager	
Develop closer links with HB to assist in expansion of PRS schemes	Monthly meetings with HB colleagues Increased access to DHP	Joint working	Ongoing	Within existing		Housing Services Manager	
Ensure partner agencies are aware of the financial packages available to assist clients into PRS	Develop checklist / guidance for all staff & partners	Map existing financial support available	Oct 2014	Within existing	Increased awareness by agencies of packages available. Test at Homelessness Monitoring Group regularly	Housing Services Manager	
Priority 3: Review of temporary accommodation portfolio							
Carry out a suitability appraisal of B&Bs currently used	Develop a tool for assessing B&Bs and visit to carry out assessment	Use template Conduct inspection Produce report\ Reach decisions on unsuitable B&Bs & cease to use	By The end June 2014	Within existing	Only use suitable, fully inspected B&Bs	Housing Services Manager	
Ensure maximum occupancy	Meet with RP providers to understand the issues	Face to face meeting & brainstorming solutions and any areas needing	Ongoing	Within existing	Maximum occupancy in al TA schemes –	Housing Services Manager	

Task	Details	How	When	Resources	Targets	Key Officers	Comments / Progress
levels in TA stock, to minimise voids	relating to occupancy & voids	operational change			monitored monthly		
Explore options for increased supported housing options for under 25s	Consider a rent a room scheme and other viable alternatives	Discuss with partners Carry out small feasibility study	July 2014	Within existing	Increase provision for this age group	Housing Services Manager	
Priority 4: Review and monitor the impact of the new allocations policy on homelessness							
Develop clear policies and procedures for implementation of new policy	Review what is in place and what needs to be drafted	With Herts Choice Homes	Sept 2014	Herts Choice Homes partnership & within existing	Consistent policy implementation across the sub region	Housing Options Manager	
Monitor lets to homeless households	Monitor lets to homeless households to identify any trends of unintended consequences of the new policy	With Herts Choice Homes	Start Aug 2014 then every quarter	Herts Choice Homes & within existing	Ensure no fast track into housing loophole	Housing Options Manager	
Monitor RP stock being advertised through CBL	Ensure the correct % of stock is going into CBL and the impact this has on transfers / those affected by bedroom tax	With Herts Choice Homes	Aug 2014 ongoing	Herts Choice Homes	100% of stock going into CBL as agreed Increased transfers / down sizing	Housing Options Manager	
Priority 5: Managing client expectations / demand							
Develop methods for disseminating	Article in council magazine	Develop a communications plan	Start Aug 2014 & ongoing	Within existing	Clients better informed about waiting times &	Housing Services Manager	

Task	Details	How	When	Resources	Targets	Key Officers	Comments / Progress
information regarding realistic housing expectations	Make use of TV screens in reception Newspaper article				housing prospects		
Provide up to date information on housing prospects online and in customer service points		Collation & publication	July 2014	Within existing	Clients better informed about waiting times & housing prospects	Housing Options Manager	
Education in schools	Continue to work with & support Herts Young Homeless Group in the education in schools project	Joint working	Ongoing	Within existing	Increased knowledge amongst young people of the realism of being homeless	Housing options Manager	
Explore opportunities for online housing advice	Talk with IT colleagues and providers to assess opportunities and costs		July 2014	To be identified	Provision of a quality online housing advice service	Housing Services Manager	
Capture and monitor customer feedback	Ensure mechanisms are in place to capture feedback & use it to reshape services periodically	Develop customer feedback mechanisms (consider mystery shopper, use of volunteers to conduct telephone surveys, exit interviews etc.)	December 2014	Within existing	Establish a base point of customer satisfaction Aim to increase this by % year on year	Housing Services Manager	
Priority 6: Ensuring appropriate support is available for homeless people							

Task	Details	How	When	Resources	Targets	Key Officers	Comments / Progress
Monitor the workloads and outcomes of the Tenants Liaison Officer role	Establish key performance indicators and a baseline & complete data that demonstrates the need for / successes of the post	Working with key partners and landlords	Aug 2014 Ongoing	Within existing	Increased number of sustained tenancies	Housing Options Manager Housing Services Manager	
Review support available for clients moving in to temporary accommodation	Particularly in relation to ensuring successful tenancy set up	Review existing provision Identify other sources of provision Create referral routes	December 2014	Within existing?	No tenancy breakdown as a result of lack of resettlement support	Housing Options Manager	
Priority 7: Working towards Gold Service							
Access the Practitioner Support website and understand the journey to make in relation to Gold Service	Develop detailed action plan Speak to relevant DCLG Practitioner Support officer	Using tools available on website	July 2014	Within existing	Gold standard accreditation	Housing Services Manager	
Involve partner agencies in Gold Standard Award	Set up multi agency meeting to move forward	Joint working	July 2014	Within existing	Gold standard accreditation	Housing Services Manager	
Priority 8: Improve move on provision							
Explore options for greater "churn" within temporary	Explore use of quotas for providers Explore usefulness of	Options appraisal, reach decision, develop implementation plan	October 2014	Within existing	Effective move on from schemes	Housing Services Manager	

Task	Details	How	When	Resources	Targets	Key Officers	Comments / Progress
housing schemes	private sector leased properties for move on						
Review refusal of nominations from RPs involving people who are moving on from TA	Carry out review with a view to identifying issues to be resolved by joint working / discussion. Develop clear policies moving forward.	Meeting relevant RPs	July 2014 – ongoing	Within existing	Agreed procedure in place Fewer refusals by RPs	Housing Services Manager Housing Options Manager	
Priority 9: Increase partnership working							
Carry out a review of the current partnerships in place	Ensure each existing partnership is effective Identify additional partnership needs	Joint working	Aug 2014	Within existing	Effective partnerships & new partnerships where necessary	Housing Services Manager	
Establish a partnership / vehicle / opportunity for joint work on Homelessness Strategy delivery	Need to ensure partners are involved in delivery and monitoring	Joint working	July 2014	Within existing	Joint work on homelessness strategy delivery	Housing Services Manager Key staff from other agencies	
Review protocols that support joint working	Review all current protocols with other agencies. Strengthen links particularly with probation. Mental health services, drug & alcohol services	Review existing provision & develop new arrangements through joint working	Aug 2014 – Ongoing	Within existing	Effective protocols in place	Housing Services Manager	

Task	Details	How	When	Resources	Targets	Key Officers	Comments / Progress
Priority 10: Increase housing supply							
Build appropriate homes	Ensure the council builds the right properties to meet demand	Ensure mix of units is right & where required a Local Lettings Plan is in place	Ongoing	Within existing		Director of environment Housing Services Manager Planning Manager	
Build appropriate homes (2)	Effective monitoring of demand to ensure the Council can track what units are required in which locality	Establish tool for monthly monitoring	Sept 2014	Within existing		Director of environment Housing Services Manager Planning Manager	
Making best use of existing stock	Monitoring RP activity on Tenancy Strategy	Monitoring in accordance with guidance set out in Tenancy Strategy on fixed term tenancy	Start July 2014- Ongoing	Within existing		Affordable Housing Coordinator	
Maximise home swaps for existing under-occupiers	Make better use of home swap tools and promote them	Monitor the number happening Talk to providers Effective training on the tools available Hold promotion event	By July 2014	Within existing Joint working with RPs	Increased number of home swaps per month from implementation – 10% increase	Housing Options Manager	