

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

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Report Originator	John Conway Head of Housing	Fwd Plan Ref A16/007	
Wards Affected	All	13 th July 2016	
Title	HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2016-19		

Portfolio Holder: Councillor James Burton

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report seeks Executive approval of the Homelessness Strategy for 2016-19

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Kettering Borough Council has a Housing Strategy for 2015-20 which was adopted by Full Council in February 2015. This Homelessness Strategy will help to underpin the strategic framework within which housing services operate.
- 2.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced the statutory requirement for Local Authorities to carry out from time to time a review or assessment of homelessness in their area and to develop a Homelessness Strategy.
- 2.3 Local Authorities must have regard to the Strategy in the discharge of any duties under part VII of the Housing Act 1996.
- 2.4 Homelessness Strategies must deal with all homelessness, not just where there is a statutory duty.

3. HOMELESSNESS REVIEW 2015

- 3.1 Our Homelessness Strategy is underpinned by a homelessness review which was conducted in 2015 and is published on the council's website.
- 3.2 The homelessness review sought to understand trends in homelessness and the structural context of homelessness in the Borough. The main findings were:
 - Following a long period of stability, **homelessness is now rising** locally.
 - Over the last three years the majority of households accepted as homeless by the Council have been one person households, in contrast we are now seeing a trend of **rising homelessness from families**.

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- The most common cause of homelessness was the **ending of private rented sector tenancies**.
- **Homelessness preventions have dropped**, largely due to the increased difficulties in accessing the private rented sector.
- **Homeownership in increasingly unaffordable** and there are less housing options available for people.
- **Increasing use of temporary accommodation**, despite the opening of Wellington House.
- Increasing **numbers of households joining the housing register**. With welfare reform impacts and accessing private rents increasingly difficult, we expect this trend to continue
- Private lets are booming but so too are the private rent levels. We are seeing hardly any private sector rents fall within Local Housing Allowance levels. **Rents are on average 30% higher than LHA rates**

4. **SUCCESSSES SINCE THE LAST HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

- 4.1 We have been successful in maintaining a stable position over the course of the last Strategy despite an economic recession. In part this was due to the effective administration of new social lettings through Keyways, a buoyant private rental market and a steady stream of new affordable housing supply
- 4.2 Crucially the Council's emphasis on prevention has been successful in containing the incidences of homelessness across the Borough
- 4.3 Since the publication of our last Homelessness Strategy in 2012, there have been a number of successes in the delivery of our homelessness services against its priorities:
- 4.4 **1. Reduce and prevent homelessness in the Borough**
- Keyways **application processing times have improved** significantly from 28 days down to 12 days over a 12 month period.
 - Our innovative approach to offering **housing options assessments** to tenants requesting adaptations was recognised as **good practice** by the Chartered Institute of Housing in one of its briefings.
 - During 2014/15 **24 tenants were helped to downsize** to more suitable accommodation through the Council's HomeMove service.
 - During 2012 we joined the **Stepping Stones Project** which seeks to address bed blockages in local hospitals. Since July our temporary accommodation has saved the NHS over £145,000 in hospital bed days.
 - In 2014 we introduced **pre-court interviews** to prevent court action where possible and reduce rent arrears.
 - Our Tenant Passport scheme has enabled households to move on from supported, temporary or unsuitable accommodation into securing their own tenancies.
 - During 2014/15 our Tenancy Support workers supported 174 tenants to maintain their tenancies.

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4.5 **2. Provide appropriate support services to vulnerable people**

- The seventh **LifePlan Awards ceremony** was held in December 2015 to celebrate customers who have achieved personal success with the help of this service.
- **LifePlan helped 73 households** over the last two years complete Practical Housing Units.
- **New Introductory Tenancy procedures** have been implemented focusing on greater support during the first year
- The **LifePlan service has launched ‘Your Courses’** which provides first aid and DIY training.
- Accommodation Concern has leased a council property which is let to vulnerable single people, providing **intensive support to prepare for move-on.**

4.6 **3. Reduce and prevent homelessness amongst non-statutorily homeless households (including rough sleepers)**

- Funding secured from DCLG for a joint **Turning Point Transitions project** in conjunction with Corby Borough Council and East Northamptonshire District Council. The project intends to prevent homelessness amongst single non-priority homeless people with complex needs by supporting transitional moves from institutions to independent living.

4.7 **4. Increase the supply of permanent accommodation for homeless households**

- In 2013/14 and 2014/15 we delivered **223 new affordable homes** in the Borough in partnership with housing associations.
- In 2014 we held a **Keyways event** which was attended by over 50 households. 27 Keyways applications were made ‘live’ on the day.
- We have worked with the County Council Drug and Alcohol team, the DoH and Orbit Housing to deliver **five specialist supported housing units as part of the PHaSE project.**

4.8 **5. Provide suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households**

- **Opening of a new single person’s hostel** – Wellington House in 2015. This provides 16 rooms and five flats for temporary accommodation and is managed by Stonham. Residents are supported through the Council’s LifePlan service. This provision has helped to reduce the expenditure on bed and breakfast.
- The **Transitions project provides a HMO property** in the Borough where intensive housing management and outreach is provided
- In 2013 a **training house project for an entrenched rough sleeper** was piloted resulting in successful move on into settled accommodation.
- In 2013 a young person’s **tenancy training flat project** was piloted in partnership with Accommodation Concern and Home Group.

5 THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

- 5.1 The Changing Policy landscape presents a number of threats and opportunities to our Homelessness Strategy.
- 5.2 The Government has indicated that we need to think differently about how we tackle homelessness – whether for rough sleepers, people struggling to move on from hostels, or families facing a homelessness crisis.
- 5.3 It's not about doing more of the same but about doing things differently and ramping up prevention activity.
- 5.4 In December 2015 the Communities Minister made a public commitment which confirmed that the Government was committed to working with local authorities, homelessness organisations and across departments to consider options, including legislation, to prevent more people from becoming homeless in the first place. There is no information on the precise nature of any changes to statutory duty however it is possible that a duty to prevent homelessness akin to that of the Welsh model is being considered. There are currently on-going informal meetings between DCLG and some local authorities to test out new ideas and take soundings on whether there is support for a new duty.
- 5.5 To prepare for a new prevention duty local authorities should think about making a commitment to work towards it. At Kettering we already do a lot of work on prevention activity.
- 5.6 Our overarching priorities in this Homelessness Strategy have largely remained the same to those in the last Strategy (albeit condensed into three priorities) however there have been a number of changes that have had to be considered which are summarised below:

Change	Considerations
<p>National Strategic Context</p> <p>Forthcoming Private Members Bill on Homelessness</p>	<p>Potential subject of legislation. Offers a chance for the government to take the lead on tackling the homelessness crisis, by introducing a homelessness bill. Focus would be on prevention. The Government is keen that it is not about doing more of the same, but about doing things differently and ramping up prevention.</p> <p>Pathways would potentially be at the heart of a new prevention approach.</p>

<p>Welfare Reform and Work Act (2016)</p> <p>Housing and Planning Act (2016)</p> <p>Temporary Accommodation</p> <p>Funding of new affordable homes</p>	<p>Detailed in section 5 of the Strategy – in summary: Universal Credit entitlement, Housing Benefit caps, 4 year freeze on working age benefits and LHA levels,</p> <p>Detailed in section 5 of the Strategy – in summary: ‘pay to stay’, RTB extension to housing associations – sale of higher value council properties to fund, fixed term tenancies.</p> <p>Changes to the way the management of temporary accommodation is funded. Current arrangements end in 2017/18.</p> <p>Reduction in grant for rented housing. Majority of new funding to 2021 will be for starter homes and shared ownership. Registered Provider Business Plans are being updated with more emphasis on delivery of intermediate tenures.</p>
<p>Local Strategic Context</p> <p>Housing Strategy 2015-20</p> <p>Localised Council Tax Support</p>	<p>We published our Housing Strategy for 2015-20 in – focus on 3 main strategic aims. This provides the strategic framework for our work within housing.</p> <p>Financial assistance with paying Council Tax (Council Tax Benefit) was abolished in April 2013 when a Localised Council Tax Support scheme was introduced. Kettering’s revised scheme has seen the minimum amount that a customer has to pay increasing to 45%</p>
<p>Resources</p>	<p>Within the Housing Service a new Housing Solutions structure has been implemented which covers Housing Options, Allocations and Private Sector Housing. We now have a dedicated Homelessness Manager managing the Housing Options service.</p> <p>In the wider Housing Service there are two Tenancy Support Advisors.</p> <p>In 2015 DCLG announced that the Homelessness Prevention Grant will be protected until 2020 through the provisional local government finance settlement.</p>

	<p>The Council was awarded a grant from the DCLG in 2015/16 to deliver the Transitions Turning Point project focusing on single non-priority homeless households. This will run until June 2017.</p> <p>Discretionary Housing Payments fund pledge by DCLG for five years however this may not be sufficient to compensate against the extension of LHA rates in the social sector.</p>
Changing Housing Market	<p>Since the publication of the last Homelessness Strategy, the housing market has changed considerably as has been highlighted in our Housing Strategy and more recently the East Midlands Housing Review 2016.</p> <p>The changing demography of our communities and far reaching structural changes within the housing market are combining to make it more difficult for families and individuals to find a home of their own.</p> <p>The private rental sector is booming however the majority of rents in Kettering are now above LHA levels. This is significant as it restricts our ability to discharge our homelessness duty into the private rented sector. Our new Homelessness Strategy will look at our offer to this sector.</p> <p>House prices in the Borough remain unaffordable for a significant proportion of the population. The average sold price in the borough is now £173,891. Sold prices are 11% higher than the previous year and up 17% on 2007 levels. At the time of the last Strategy, prices were falling.</p> <p>The supply of new homes in both the market and social sectors has not kept pace with demand.</p>
Homelessness Trends	<p>Homeless applications are increasing</p> <p>More vulnerable people approaching us with multiple and complex needs.</p> <p>Families with children are now featuring more strongly amongst homeless households</p> <p>Increasing pressure on temporary</p>

	<p>accommodation despite the opening of Wellington House.</p> <p>Ripple effect from London – homeless households from elsewhere being placed in accommodation locally</p>
Focus on pathways	<p>A prevention duty would place at its heart a new concept of ‘Pathway Plans’ for vulnerable and more complex needs groups.</p> <p>Our draft Strategy details developing pathways under its priority 2 section, outlining the ways in which we will work to support vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Since our last Strategy we have further developed our intensive support and life skills training for our more vulnerable customers.</p>

6. OUR HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2016-19 PRIORITIES

6.1 The Homelessness Strategy for 2016-19 sets out three main priorities we have identified, the challenges being faced and proposed actions to address them.

6.2 The priorities are as follows:

6.3 Priority 1: Reduce and prevent homelessness in the Borough

We aim to prevent homelessness whenever possible through timely housing options advice and support. We will focus our homelessness prevention activity on tackling the common causes of homelessness locally, helping to mitigate against the impact of the Government’s welfare and housing reforms on our residents. We aim to develop and maintain effective partnerships with statutory and voluntary agencies to reduce and prevent homelessness and support our residents to maintain successful tenancies through training and support.

6.4 Priority 2: Ensure homeless households can access appropriate support services

We aim to ensure that homeless households can access appropriate support services through developing and maintaining effective partnerships with statutory and voluntary agencies. We will develop housing pathways for each key priority client group that include appropriate accommodation and support. We aim to ensure homeless households can access appropriate education, employment and training services.

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6.5 Priority 3: Ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary and permanent accommodation

We aim to enable homeless households to access permanent accommodation in the private and social rented sectors, alongside ensuring homeless households can access suitable temporary accommodation so as to minimise the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

6.6 We have developed a draft action plan for the course of the Strategy which has been informed by the key challenges facing us. This will be reviewed and monitored over the course of the Strategy by key stakeholders.

7. CONSULTATION & CUSTOMER IMPACT

7.1 Key partners were interviewed during 2015 to understand some of the main issues and challenges, these then fed into homelessness review and subsequently the draft Homelessness Strategy.

7.2 Officers of the Council have inputted into the Strategy prior to and during the consultation.

7.3 The draft Homelessness Strategy public consultation ran for 6 weeks from 25th April to 3rd June 2016. The Strategy was published on our website and also sent to key stakeholder partners for comment. We received a handful of comments back from partners which have been taken on board.

7.4 The Kettering Homelessness Action Partnership was established in May 2016 to ensure a joined up multi agency response to increasing levels of homelessness in a climate of significant changes to housing and welfare policies, and fast paced changes to the housing market. Both the Homelessness Review and the draft Homelessness Strategy were presented at the inaugural meeting of this group on the 26th May. Input was sought from all key partners in attendance.

7.5 The Kettering Homelessness Action Partnership agreed that it would provide the forum for contributing to and monitoring the Homelessness Strategy action plan. The group would also act as the sub-group for Kettering Futures Partnership, with key issues and priorities feeding back to the KFP Board.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 We need to build on the excellent progress already made in reducing homelessness locally by ensuring that housing options available to our customers continue to respond to changing needs and trends, although we recognise that we will need to work harder and smarter to achieve our objectives in the face of reduced resources.

- 8.2 Depending on what happens as a result of discussions at DCLG and in order to prepare for a potential Prevention Duty we will need to think about making a commitment to work towards it.
- 8.3 We need to build on existing partnerships so that we can continue securing the best possible outcomes for vulnerable people, and ensuring that we work collaboratively to prevent homelessness wherever possible, targeting scarce resources at areas of service where they are most needed. The establishment of the Kettering Homelessness Action Partnership is a step towards doing this.
- 8.4 The supply of new affordable homes will fail to meet the needs of homeless households. With the drop in new affordable housing supply, our Housing Allocations Scheme continues to have provision to discharge our duty to households accepted as statutory homeless in the private rented sector in all bar exceptional circumstances. There is work to do on improving our offer to the private rented sector.

9. FINANCIAL RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Resources are detailed in the Homelessness Strategy.

10. HR IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 None at this stage.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Local Authorities must have regard to their Homelessness Strategy in the discharge of any duties under part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

12. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Executive Committee approves the Homelessness Strategy for 2016-19.