

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

8 December 2015

Title:	Draft Homelessness Strategy 2016/21		
Report of the Housing Strategy and Advice division			
Open Report		For Decision	
Wards Affected: All		Key Decision: No	
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Summary: <p>Under the Homelessness Act 2002 local authorities are statutorily bound to review their homelessness services every five years, setting out a comprehensive assessment of emerging trends and examining interventions employed to prevent homelessness in the first instance and tackle crisis presentations when they occurred.</p> <p>On the basis of the review the Council is expected to prepare a prevention strategy charting activities to tackle and mitigate against homelessness over the next five year period.</p> <p>The Draft Homelessness Strategy 2016/21 seeks to comply with that duty and is attached as part of the public consultation process due to end on 16th December 2015. The final version is expected to be approved by Cabinet in January 2016.</p>			
Recommendation(s) <p>The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to note and comment upon the Draft Homelessness Strategy as part of the public consultation process.</p>			
Reason(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enabling social responsibility• Growing the borough			

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 mandates the local authority to conduct a five-yearly review of current trends and homelessness, illustrate prevention activities and interventions and examine the offer of advice, services and resources.

- 1.2 Subsequently the borough is expected to produce a new homelessness strategy co-ordinating efforts to tackle and mitigate against homelessness in the next five year period.
- 1.3 There has been significant change since the publication of Barking and Dagenham's previous homelessness strategy in 2008 and the Council has taken stock of the changing policy context of homelessness when providing services to tackle it. The introduction of the Localism Act 2011 and the on-going reforms to welfare have been major influences in how local authorities approach housing need, homelessness, benefit entitlement and the delivery of affordable housing. Fiscal consolidation at a national level has led to reduced funding, requiring the Council to target its prevention strategy around carefully managed and finite resources.
- 1.4 The Homeless Review of 2015 concentrated on the impact of welfare reform, public funding reductions and a challenging housing market which heightened the demand for housing advice services and lead to the subsequent rise in housing applications over the last three years. Footfall and calls to the housing options team doubled to 2,449 by 2015; the total number of homeless decisions in 2014/15 stood at 1,900 and dwarfed the 408 recorded in 2011/12 while the number of preventative interventions against homelessness accounted for almost 2,000 cases.
- 1.5 Barking and Dagenham has responded to the increased volume of need by continuing to build on existing partnership arrangements, training staff and tenants alike on the impact of welfare changes and sustaining tenancies, reshaping its allocations policy and planning for new models of housing provision in response to reduced resources.
- 1.6 Through various data sets the statistical review examines the current climate around crisis presentations and homeless preventions to provide an analysis of the pressure points in homeless policy and create the subtext for the prevention objectives of the strategy. The review examines:
 - The Council's duties and the main causes of statutory homelessness;
 - Interventions and resources to prevent homelessness
 - non-priority homelessness and support for vulnerable households
 - temporary accommodation
 - housing supply issues
- 1.7 The headline figures of the review suggested that residents seeking homelessness advice continues to rise. By November 2015, almost 3,000 people had contacted John Smith House for support. However the number of applications accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless, in priority need and therefore owed a duty fell from 853 in 2013/14 to 764 in 2014/15.
- 1.8 A summary of the main homeless trends suggested:
 - termination of assured short-hold tenancies in the private rented sector has become the largest cause of accepted homelessness

- parental ejection from the family home or the inability of the owner to continue to accommodate the client is the second largest cause
- the highest cohort of clients in priority need were households with children or with someone pregnant
- lone parents with dependent children made up the greatest number of acceptances
- applicants deemed homeless, eligible for advice but not in priority need rose dramatically.

2. Proposal and Issues

2.1 Planning services for the next five years requires an appreciation of the current and emerging trends:

- Second phase of welfare reform is likely to create greater demand
- Loss of private rented sector accommodation continues to squeeze supply
- Parental ejection from the home is on an upward trajectory
- Rough sleeping appears to be on the rise
- Lone parent households in priority need have increased dramatically
- Demand for supported housing options and services is developing.

2.2 Tackling these problems has to be balanced against diminishing resources and the cultivation of a different ethos to housing crisis resolution. This has to recognise:

- Local authority resources are likely to be squeezed much further
- Prevention initiatives and self-resolution will be critical in managing demand
- Housing advice services will have to be creative and integrated
- That resources and support has to be targeted at the most acute circumstances
- Partnerships with external providers and the voluntary sector needs to become robust
- Innovation in housing supply and choice is essential.

2.3 Despite the financial constraints, the borough aspires to continually improve its housing advice services and ensure that our approach to homelessness is fit-for-purpose and creates a customer journey that provides appropriate housing solutions.

2.4 As part of this process, the Council will be seeking Gold Standard accreditation for its services in 2016, of which this homelessness review and the strategic actions below form the strategy going forward, requiring annual appraisal.

2.5 The strategy sets out fifty two strategic actions for consideration or improving services to meet nineteen expected outcomes under the following four strategic objectives:

- **Reducing demand through prevention**
- **Enabling pathways away from homelessness**
- **Creating an integrated service at first contact**
- **Providing appropriate accommodation options**

2.6 The strategy will be monitored and evaluated by the re-established Homelessness Forum and will be appraised and refreshed on an annual basis to comply with the requirements of Gold Standard accreditation. Further reporting to the Health and Wellbeing Board will be tabled throughout the period of the strategy.

3 Consultation

3.1 The draft strategy has been compiled with a significant input from a number of council services and organisations involved in delivering services including Housing Advice Services, Housing Strategy, environmental health, NELFT, mental health services, adult commissioning, children's services, private sector housing, regeneration, Elevate, the East London Housing Partnership to name but a few.

3.2 Public consultation on the draft began on 16 November inviting comment and responses from the general public, interested parties, housing providers, voluntary sector groups and the clinical commissioning group by 16 December 2015. The public response page can be found on Barking and Dagenham's website here: <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/residents/housing-and-tenancy/homelessness-strategy/overview/> . Invitation for comment can also be found on the Council's Facebook page and Twitter feed as well as through the e-newsletter, One Borough.

3.3 In addition the draft has been presented to various management teams within the Council and is tabled for discussion at the Health and Wellbeing Board, Community Safety Partnership, Landlords and Letting Agents Forum and Corporate Strategy Group.

3.4 Following the close of consultation and further revision and amendment of the draft, the Homelessness Strategy is expected to be approved by Cabinet in January or February 2016.

4 Mandatory Implications

4.1 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

Homelessness is a key indicator in the JSNA's annual assessment of current and future health and social needs of the population and includes recommendations for public policy commissioners on strategic outcomes in reducing homelessness. This is reflected in the strategy

4.2 Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Housing, homelessness and fuel poverty are recognised as determinants of public health and critical to increasing the life expectancy of people living in Barking and Dagenham. The homelessness strategy links with the health and wellbeing pledges to close the gap in life expectancy and to improve health and social care outcomes through integrated services.

4.3 Integration

Developing an efficient seamless, multi-agency approach to homelessness has been a key driver of national and regional policy. The Government's papers on Making Every Contact Count, No Second Night Out and the Cost of Homelessness encourages the design of locally integrated services which tackle the root causes of homelessness such as health inequalities, troubled families and improving access to employment.

The Strategy recommends a more robust approach to creating integrated services at first contact for homeless clients and draws on ways to improve the work of the Council in preparing links, pathways and referrals between support services to prevent homelessness in the first place or minimise its impact when it happens.

4.4 Financial Implications

(Carl Tomlinson, Group Manager, Finance and Resources)

There will be a full financial assessment undertaken alongside the development of the Strategy.

The gross General Fund Housing budget for 2015/16 is £18.056m and comprises of Housing Advice, Temporary Accommodation, Hostels, Landlord services and Housing Strategy. The net budget totals £97,000 once rental income and recharges have been taken into account. The direct homelessness budgets are Temporary Accommodation and Hostels and these are currently projecting to spend in line with budget in the current financial year. However, there is a risk to this position, due to the demand led nature of this service. Demand over recent months has been steadily increasing and is likely to be further exacerbated by ongoing Welfare Reforms and cuts in funding. Current levels of bed and breakfast placements are above the budget assumption and if this trend continues the budget will be under increasing pressure.

The primary risks to the homelessness budgets are the level of Bed and Breakfast placements and managing arrears. Significant savings are expected to be delivered through a reduction in temporary accommodation placements within Bed and Breakfast accommodation together with the renegotiation of Bed and Breakfast nightly rates.

The service currently employs a mix of Private Sector Landlord properties, bed and breakfast accommodation, nightly lets, homes with multiple occupancy and Council hostels in order to meet current demands.

The actions that are in place will hopefully ensure that the levels of expenditure incurred on temporary accommodation remain within budget going forward into 2016/17. This projection, however, needs to be viewed in the context of the increases in homelessness numbers that are being experienced nationally and there are clear risks to the position that is currently being projected

4.5 Legal Implications

(Martin Hall, Housing Solicitor/Team Leader, Legal Services)

There are no legal implications arising from the draft Homelessness Strategy.

4.6 Risk Management

There are no risk management implications at this stage of the consultation.

4.7 Patient / Service User Impact

A review and preventative strategy for homelessness and housing advice related services will have significant impact upon user groups and clients. The aims of the strategy seek to improve the customer journey by integrating services and ensure the provision of comprehensive quality advice.

The strategy details issues relating to service user and patient impact in various parts of the report.

5. Non-mandatory Implications

5.1 Crime and Disorder

The strategy and review examines the relationship between certain client groups at risk of being homeless, current support services and crime and disorder issues. The strategy looks at victims of domestic violence and the role of the Sanctuary scheme; the impact of rough sleeping; ex-offenders and those suffering from substance and alcohol misuses.

5.2 Safeguarding

In consultation with adult commissioning, NELFT, children's services and teams dealing with mental health, people without recourse to public funds, looked after children and leaving care teams the draft strategy has a dedicated section relating to support for vulnerable households and individuals. Recommendations in the strategy look at improving outcomes for vulnerable persons at risk of homelessness.

5.3 Property / Assets

The strategy looks at the Council's use of accommodation, stock and assets and suggests ways in which to utilise them better as part of a more innovative approach to relieving homelessness.

5.4 Customer Impact

The impact on patients, clients and user groups has been highlighted previously in the report. A full equality impact assessment will be carried out following the conclusion of the consultation process and subsequent amendments to the strategy.

5.5 Contractual Issues

Where the Homelessness Strategy indicates a procurement or contractual solution this will be delivered with best practice and in consultation with corporate procurement services.

5.6 Staffing issues

Any staffing related implications arising from this strategy will be dealt with through the policies, procedures and consultative processes agreed between the Council and the trade unions.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

- Making Every Contact Count report 2012:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7597/2200459.pdf
- No Second Night Out:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6261/1939099.pdf
- Cost of Homelessness review
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7596/2200485.pdf

List of Appendices:

Appendix A - Draft Homelessness Strategy 2016/21