



# Northumberland

## County Council

### CABINET

DATE: 9<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2019

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## **HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY FOR NORTHUMBERLAND 2019 - 2021**

**Report of** Paul Johnston, Interim Executive Director, Place

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor John Riddle, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing & Resilience

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### **Purpose of report**

The following report presents members with the refreshed **Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2019 - 2021**, updated following changes to legislation and requirements by Government to recognise and support the needs of Rough Sleepers. The strategy provides updated details of the strategic objectives for the Council's Homelessness & Housing Options Service for the following three years.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members approve the refreshed Homelessness Strategy, which supports the delivery of the Council's statutory obligations for our residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the "We want you to feel Safe, Healthy and Cared for" [LIVING] " priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021 which states

*Having a decent roof over your head is fundamental to this health and well being. None of you should be forced to live on the streets, or in a "home" that is a health hazard or physically impedes independence.*

## **Key issues**

1. The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and formulate and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on the findings from the review. The original strategy, adopted in 2016, was written in accordance with this legislation and statutory guidance.
2. The Housing Act 1996, Part 7 has most recently been amended by the **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA)**. This new Act represents fundamental amendments to the existing homelessness legislation. It introduces new requirements to prevent and relieve homelessness and in that context, sets out a range of new duties. These amendments came into force in April 2018.
3. The Northumberland Homelessness Strategy 2016-2021 has been refreshed to include measures set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 as well as responding to respond to the Government's vision set out in their **Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018)** *'to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home'*.
4. The Council has also taken this opportunity to review and refresh our current priorities, services and support ensuring they meet the needs of households in Northumberland who are either homeless or threatened with homelessness.
5. In July 2018 consultation was carried out with partners and stakeholders to establish whether our current objectives were still relevant and that they would enable the council to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in the County and meet the requirements of the HRA. The refreshed strategy reflects the consultation input.

## **Background**

The Council's Homelessness Strategy for Northumberland 2016- 2021 detailed 5 key strategic priorities for the delivery of homelessness and housing options support for Northumberland residents. These were;

1. Priority 1 - Reduce levels of homelessness through targeted prevention initiatives
2. Priority 2 - Make better use of all temporary accommodation to ensure that all household types are provided for
3. Priority 3 - Support people through Welfare Reform
4. Priority 4 - Improve access to permanent accommodation and support
5. Priority 5 - Prevent youth homelessness

Since the last Homelessness Strategy was published in 2016 changes in national policy have impacted on the services we need to provide.

**The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** is the most significant change to legislation relating to homelessness in over 40 years. It has transformed the way homelessness services are expected to be delivered and introduced new duties. The Act makes changes

to the current homelessness legislation contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, with a renewed focus on preventing homelessness.

It places duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. It requires local authorities to provide new homelessness services to all those affected, not just those who are protected under existing legislation. There is also a new duty on public services including NHS Trusts, prisons and Jobcentre Plus to notify the local authority if they come into contact with someone that they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, called the Duty to Refer.

**The Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018 (CoG 2018)** was published in February 2018 in readiness for the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The CoG 2018 must be considered alongside the legislation when assessing and dealing with applications for assistance under either the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 or Part 7 of the HA 1996.

The Government's **Rough Sleeping Strategy (August 2018)** sets out the 2027 vision to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home. This the beginning of Government plans to meet their 2027 ambition, when the ambition is that no one has to sleep rough again.

### **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Northumberland 2019 - 2021**

The refreshed strategy supports the Council's priorities for the delivery of our statutory obligations to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness whilst also supporting the delivery of the Council's Corporate Priorities and the delivery of the principle within the Housing Strategy for Northumberland that having a decent home is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Northumberland.

The priorities identified within the updated strategy are;

1. Prevent homelessness by improving support to vulnerable client groups
2. Increase options for, and ensure access to, suitable temporary accommodation
3. Support people through Welfare Reform, particularly Universal Credit
4. Remove barriers to permanent accommodation
5. Prevent youth homelessness
6. Develop Services for Rough Sleepers

### **Priority 1 - Prevent Homelessness by improving support to vulnerable client groups**

Consultation with partners and stakeholders identified that improved support to vulnerable households would enable them to remain in their current home where they are likely to have established support networks and community links.

To improve support to vulnerable client groups, the Council will:

- Work in partnership with other organisations such as health services (including mental health and drug and alcohol services); advice agencies; money advice; voluntary and community sector groups; the Police and other emergency services; and domestic abuse services to set up an early warning system to identify those at risk of homelessness;
- Review support services throughout the County and understand how to access these services; and
- Understand the client groups that services work with and how they can work more closely with the Council

### **Priority 2 - Increase options for, and ensure access to, suitable temporary accommodation**

The consultation found that the previous objective (Make better use of all temporary accommodation to ensure that all household types are provided for) was still relevant but that it should be amended to reflect the importance of the temporary accommodation being appropriate to the clients needs.

To make better use of all temporary accommodation to ensure that its is appropriate to the needs of all household types the Council will:

- Review the provision and range of temporary accommodation options, especially for those with complex needs to minimise spending on Bed and Breakfast; and
- Increase the amount flexible temporary accommodation options for single homeless people

### **Priority 3 - Support people through Welfare Reform; particularly universal credit**

The consultation found that Welfare Reform is still regarded as an issue that could impact on homelessness, particularly in light of the full rollout of universal credit in Northumberland.

To support people through Welfare Reform, the Council will:

- Work with partners to effectively support those affected by Welfare Reform;
- Raise awareness of Discretionary Housing Payments to assist people who are affected by cuts to remain in their home;
- Monitor the impacts of Universal Credit, respond with actions if possible and keep under review;
- Investigate different ways of communicating to tenants and landlords about the potential impacts of Welfare Reform; and

- Improve early information and advice making sure that it is available through appropriate and accessible channels

#### **Priority 4 - Remove barriers to permanent accommodation**

Accessing private sector housing for homeless households can be difficult in the North, West and Central areas of Northumberland due to affordability issues and the availability of suitable properties. The private rented sector is vital for those households who cannot afford to buy their own home or cannot access social housing.

The consultation contributors thought that this was still important and that access to social rented property was also an issue that should be addressed

To remove barriers to permanent accommodation and support, the Council will:

- Review the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme and other incentives offered to landlords;
- Investigate the practicalities of negotiating longer term tenancies for households placed into the private rented sector;
- Work with Registered Providers to ensure that vulnerable clients are linked into their tenancy support schemes when rehoused; and
- Continue to promote quality property and management standards through the Council's Private Rented Sector Accreditation Scheme.
- Work with local registered providers to find solutions to excluded households
- With partners develop an accredited 'tenancy ready' scheme that will be accepted by registered providers

#### **Priority 5 - Prevent youth homelessness**

The consultation reaffirmed that youth homelessness remains a priority for Northumberland. Young people aged 16 to 25 are Northumberland's second highest priority need group accounting for 20% of all homeless cases.

Although the threat of restrictions to 18-25 year old housing benefit has been removed, this age group, and up to 35 years olds, still find it difficult to rent in the private rented sector due to the Single Room Rate of the Local Housing Allowance rate.

To prevent youth homelessness, the Council will:

- Review the joint protocols between Strategic Housing Service and Children's Services and implement changes or develop new procedures;
- Develop a range of information aimed specifically at young people with regard to their housing options and the implications of Welfare Reform;
- Review permanent housing options for young people including move-on from temporary accommodation or supported housing;
- Identify opportunities to work with young people at an earlier age i.e. schools; and
- Identify mediation training courses for staff to work between the family and the young person.

## Priority 6 - Develop Services for Rough Sleepers

The reported number of people sleeping rough within the County is low, but it is still too many. No one should have to sleep rough and we need to ensure we have sufficient provision in place to promptly support anyone doing so.

To prevent people from sleeping rough the Council will:

- Collaborate with other services to tackle the root causes of homelessness
- Understand the reasons for non-engagement and develop policies for prevention, intervention and recovery for rough sleepers
- Work across the region to establish reconnection policies and develop cross boundary services
- Develop emergency access accommodation to offer a safe, secure hub where people can stay overnight.

The Council's refreshed Homelessness Strategy sets out the priorities and future actions for tackling homelessness over the next five years. A detailed action plan will be produced to further explore how the priorities can be implemented and monitored to ensure delivery of the identified priorities.

The Council will ensure services are delivered with a renewed strategic focus on preventing homelessness and rough sleeping, through the development of this refreshed strategy and associated action plan which will identify the resources, prevention and relief activity and the supply of settled and temporary accommodation required to meet local needs.

### Implications

<b>Policy</b>	Supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2019-2021
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	n/a
<b>Legal</b>	none
<b>Procurement</b>	none
<b>Human Resources</b>	none
<b>Property</b>	Details the council's ambitions for homelessness & housing options services. This is likely to lead to an increase in council-owned stock being used as temporary accommodation.

<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	As part of the consultation an EIS will be completed to ensure that fair access to housing for all residents is considered.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	none
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	none
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Enables provision of suitable accommodation for all residents
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	none
<b>Wards</b>	All

**Background papers:**

none

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

	initials
Monitoring Officer/Legal	
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	n/a
Relevant Executive Director	PJ
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Portfolio Holder(s)	JR

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