

These minutes are draft subject to change at a future meeting of the sub-committee

Housing Sub-Committee

11 February 2019

Present: Councillor A Newman (Chair)
Councillors K Bolger, L Darke, John Hunter, P
Mason, P Oliver, A Percy, S Phillips, M
Thirlaway and J Walker

HO24/02/19 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Kirwin and M Reynolds.

HO25/02/19 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members reported.

HO26/02/19 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest reported.

HO27/02/19 Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021

The sub-committee received a report which provided details of the proposed content of the North Tyneside Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018-2021. The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a statutory duty on all local housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their area and, in consultation with local partners and stakeholders, formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review, at least every 5 years. The strategy had to be monitored by a partnership, with clear links into the authority's corporate framework. The legislation stated that the purpose of the strategic approach was to prevent homelessness in the district of the authority; secure accommodation for local people who were and who may become homeless; and provide support for people in the district who were or may become homeless.

In addition to being a statutory requirement, a homelessness strategy was required to combat the detrimental effects homelessness could have on households and communities and the problems homelessness could lead to. With the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, there had been a greater focus on preventing homelessness rather than waiting for someone to become homeless before taking any action. The last Homelessness Strategy had been published in 2013. Development of the 2018-2021 homelessness strategy had been during a time of competing priorities, reduced funding and increased housing and support need from some of the authority's most vulnerable residents. As part of the process for refreshing the strategy, consultation was undertaken with a wide range of groups in order to identify any specific areas that needed to be addressed.

One area highlighted by the consultation was that people did not know where to go for advice or where to access services. In order to address this, an additional page had been created on the authority's website which was easy to access and contained lots of relevant information. The consultation had also highlighted a lack of available one bedroom properties. Providers had previously been encouraged to supply two bed properties as

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they had been in high demand. However, changes to legislation and the introduction of 'bedroom tax' and benefit caps had made these unaffordable, especially for single people. Members asked if people at risk of homelessness had access to mental health and drug and alcohol support services. It was noted that alcohol and drugs did contribute to homelessness and that the North Tyneside Recovery Partnership provided support. Waiting times for mental health services were long which was difficult in trying to prevent homelessness. Officers undertook to provide some information on the current waiting lists for accessing drug and alcohol support services.

The consultation also highlighted a number of aspirations for people facing the possibility of homelessness. This included good mental health, having positive family and friends networks, more appropriate and affordable homes, improved support services and a sense of belonging, by people having their own home and feeling part of a community. Officers highlighted that the strategic priorities for the authority in relation to homelessness were the successful implementation and delivery of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, meeting local housing need, supporting households to secure and sustain an affordable home and effective communication and robust partnership working.

These priorities had been identified following engagement and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, council officers, registered housing providers and third sector organisations that support people in a housing crisis. People who had experienced or been effected by homelessness had also been consulted. In relation to priority one, successful implementation and delivery of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, key tasks in meeting this were to review and explore options to increase prevention and intervention tools, review and monitor personal housing plans and regular engagement and information sharing with statutory and voluntary organisations to keep them up to date on the Act.

In relation to priority two, meeting local housing need, continuous engagement was taking place with registered providers and private developers to increase the supply of affordable homes. Engagement with the private rented sector to improve the housing offer was on-going and there was a review of the use of temporary accommodation, with a view to identifying alternative provision to meet need.

In relation to priority three, supporting households to secure and sustain an affordable home, a review had taken place of the outreach support work offer. Schemes would be introduced that would support both landlords and tenants in the private rented sector. Rough sleeping activity would be monitored to determine whether a specialist outreach service was needed. A member of the sub-committee asked whether rough sleeping occurred in North Tyneside. Officers stated that during the last annual survey of rough sleepers submitted to government, which is based on a snapshot taken on one particular evening, there were three rough sleepers identified. There were no known hotspots in North Tyneside and any notifications of rough sleepers received demonstrated that they were dispersed across the borough.

Members also asked whether there were any problems in North Tyneside with aggressive begging. It was noted that it did occur and that it was dealt with via the anti-social behaviour team. Members were also informed that between the 1st November and 31st March a severe weather protocol was in place where people would be placed in accommodation for the night if they did not have anywhere to sleep. So far 32 placements had been made, in B&B's and churches (13 people more than once). The authority was proactive in securing funding to support street pastors in their outreach work. It was queried whether the authority did any survey work in order to identify the number of sofa surfers there were in the borough. It was noted that hidden homelessness did exist but that it was difficult to get a definitive number of people who were sofa surfing.

In relation to priority four, effective communication and robust partnership working, it was noted that promotion of services and sign posting was key. There was continuous engagement with partners to strengthen relationships and tackle homelessness and on-going prevention work was taking place in primary and secondary schools. A member of the sub-committee suggested that if a pack of materials was prepared for secondary schools, most would be likely to deliver this in school as part of citizenship type lessons. This would save some resources for the local authority once a pack had been devised by not having to go into schools to deliver the resource.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentation and for the good work that was being undertaken in relation to homelessness.

It was **agreed** to note the presentation.