

Notice of:	EXECUTIVE
Relevant Officer:	Andrew Foot, Head of Housing
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Mrs Christine Wright, Cabinet Member for Housing
Date of Meeting:	16 April 2018

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY 2018-2023

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 This report seeks approval to adopt a new Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018-2023 as set out in Appendix 4a following public consultation.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To approve the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018-2023, as attached at Appendix 4a.

2.2 Subject to 2.1 above, to delegate authority to the Head of Legal to enter into any legal documentation that may be required to implement the strategy.

2.3 To note the development of a detailed action plan with partners through Blackpool Homelessness Partnership.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 There is a statutory requirement to have an up to date Homelessness Prevention Strategy and new duties on local authorities following the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 come into force from April 2018. Continuing to prevent and respond effectively to homelessness in Blackpool is central to reducing transience and establishing more resilient communities.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

None.

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The relevant Council Priority is: “Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience”.

5.0 Background Information

5.1 There are a number of reasons why it is important for the Council to develop and adopt the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018 at this time:

- Homelessness is a prominent issue locally and nationally, with increasing demand for support from people at risk of homelessness across the country, including Blackpool.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduces from April 2018 significant new duties on local authorities in how they respond to people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.
- Local authorities must publish a homelessness prevention strategy at least every 5 years to meet statutory requirements, and Blackpool’s last strategy was adopted in 2014.

5.2 As part of a Homelessness Prevention Strategy, Councils must also publish a review setting out an update on the homelessness issues locally. The Review in the 2018 Strategy has found that:

- Blackpool Council receives around 80 homelessness applications a month. While 78% were found to be eligible and homeless, only 7% were found to be homeless and in priority need. This means that while Blackpool had over 3 times the national average number of homeless households per head of population, it had lower than average numbers of homeless households in priority need and owed a duty of immediate housing. This is because most people who are homeless in Blackpool are single people and the rules around priority need focus on families with children. The number of households presenting to the Council as homeless has increased slightly over the last 3 years.
- The most common reasons for homelessness in Blackpool are people being evicted by relatives or friends or parental exclusions. This is different from the national picture where the breakdown of private tenancies is the most common reason. This reflects that social issues are a more important driver of

homelessness in Blackpool than the unavailability of accommodation. But among people in priority need, an increased proportion of households (over 20%) was homeless and in priority need because of violent relationship breakdown.

- The number of rough sleepers is rising in Blackpool, although at a slower rate than national rises. The reasons for rising numbers of rough sleepers are likely to be the impact of welfare reform and reducing support services.
- The number of households who have had homelessness prevented as a result of the work of Blackpool Council has also increased in recent years, with an 8% shift from the number of cases of homelessness to the number of prevention cases.

- 5.3 There has been significant progress in the provision of homelessness services in Blackpool since the adoption of last strategy, but also a more challenging environment of increasing demand and a reduction in the availability of supported housing following recent funding cuts. Temporary accommodation hostels owned by the Council and managed by Blackpool Coastal Housing have had very high levels of occupancy for the last 24 months, and this has led to fairly frequent use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- 5.4 Rough sleeping has become more prominent in Blackpool in the last couple of years, linked to begging and street drinking. Multi-agency teams have been established to address these issues in the town centre, balancing enforcement with support. Around a third of people found on the streets during the day time are rough sleepers, with the November 2017 count identifying 13 rough sleepers in the town at that point, and this is consistent with the numbers who have been given shelter over the winter. Frequent outreach offers help to get into housing with support for people with a local connection, and support to return home for people who are new to the town. A new Housing First project that provides a home and intensive support for rough sleepers has been introduced over the last 6 months with funding from Blackpool Fulfilling Lives; early signs are that the project has been very successful in overcoming entrenched issues and it has recently been agreed to increase funding to support 18 individuals in this way.
- 5.5 Increased resources have been secured through a successful Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer bid for additional funding to March 2019, and the Council has also received Flexible Homelessness Support Grant funding for the first time from 2017/18.
- 5.6 The new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduces significant new statutory duties on local authorities that can be summarised as requiring local authorities to work to prevent and relieve homelessness for everyone regardless of priority need.

The work under the new duties is focussed on agreeing and working through Personal Housing Plans with every person at risk of homelessness, so although the Council has always sought to assist everyone with a local connection, there is likely to be an increased workload from the new formal requirements. New Government reporting requirements will monitor the detailed circumstances and outcomes for every individual but there are no specific targets set by Government.

5.7 The Strategy sets out some key principles. These are:

Prevent people becoming homeless in the first place by working with partners to identify risk and intervene earlier.

The targets under this theme are for an increasing proportion of households to stay in their own home without ever becoming homeless, an increasing proportion to have homelessness prevented, and for even fewer households to need support again within a year (the current baseline is 11%).

Resolve homelessness rapidly when crisis occurs, so that harm is minimised

The targets are for people placed in temporary accommodation to move to permanent housing more quickly than the current average of 56.5 days, and for an increasing proportion of people who are homeless to have their homelessness relieved within 56 days (the statutory period of the new relief duty).

Recover - Help more people avoid repeat homelessness by getting them back on their feet by providing long term solutions

The targets are to have fewer rough sleepers who end up on the streets again, and for more households who receive tenancy support to remain in their tenancies for at least 12 months.

5.8 The Strategy sets out a number of actions to achieve these targets but a more detailed action plan will be developed with partners to ensure that there is ownership and consistent delivery between agencies across the town.

5.9 The Strategy has been subject to consultation with partner public and voluntary sector agencies as well as being available for the public to comment. In general there was support for the Strategy, with some of the key points and raised and the strategic response set out below:

- More services and emergency accommodation for rough sleepers are required, including daytime activities.

There are already day time services provided by the Salvation Army through The Bridge project and the strategy is to further expand the Housing First project that provides permanent independent accommodation with support.

- Substance misuse and recovery services need to be better linked to rough sleeper outreach and the response to homelessness, and local connection should be reviewed for recovery housing.

These are issues that are best taken forward through the development of the new drug and alcohol strategies and the Council will ensure that the link is made.

- Voluntary sector services need to be well linked in, and there were a number of offers of support for further development of the action plan.

There will be on-going dialogue on the development and delivery of the action plan through Blackpool Homelessness Partnership.

5.10 In summary, the Strategy provides a clear vision and policy direction for a range of homelessness prevention and related services provided by the Council and partner agencies. The development of a more detailed action plan with partners through Blackpool Homelessness Partnership will ensure that the Council continues to address the wide-ranging issues that can lead to homelessness and provide an effective response. The plan will be kept under review to respond to on-going changes in local demand.

5.11 Is the Corporate Delivery Unit aware of this report? Yes

The Corporate Delivery Unit has been central in the development of the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Prevention Strategy. It will be further involved in the development of a monitoring framework.

5.12 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

5.13 **List of Appendices:**

Appendix 4a – Homelessness Prevention Strategy

6.0 Legal considerations:

6.1 Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires a local authority to carry out a homelessness review and formulate and publish a strategy based on that review. The local authority must take a strategy into account in the exercise of their housing and social services functions. The purpose of the homelessness strategy is to prevent

homelessness in the authority's area, secure that sufficient accommodation is and will be available in the area for people who are or may become homeless and provide support for such people or those who have become homeless and need support to prevent it recurring. Section 153 of the Localism Act 2011 provides that the local authority must have regard to its current allocation scheme and current tenancy strategy when formulating the strategy. Before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy the authority shall consult such public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons as they consider appropriate. The outcomes of the consultation must conscientiously be taken into account when a decision is made.

7.0 Human Resources considerations:

- 7.1 The total staff resource within the Housing Options service has been slightly increased recently, enabled by extra Government funding and in anticipation of the additional legal duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The staff resource will be kept under review as the new duties and consequent new ways of working take effect from April 2018 to ensure that they continue to be sufficient.

8.0 Equalities considerations:

- 8.1 The Strategy has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment and there are no adverse impacts on people with protected characteristics. One of the more contentious aspects of the Strategy is the continuing maintenance of a robust local connection policy for access to social and private rented housing sourced through the Council. It is important to maintain this position so that the resilience of Blackpool communities is protected. The approach to local connection is consistent with the new duties of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

9.0 Financial considerations:

- 9.1 The Strategy can be delivered within existing levels of resource. The Council's budget for Housing Options services has been maintained, with some additional resources provided by Government over the last 3 years.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

- 10.1 The principal risks are in reductions to budgets of both the Council and its partners, and a risk of the Council failing to meet the new legal duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Government has made some new funding available to help meet the additional burdens which together with extensive training of staff and investment in new systems will enable the Council to meet its new legal duties. But there are financial pressures on the continuing provision of supported accommodation, including both hostels and support for chaotic people housed independently. These

will be kept under review.

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 Responding to homelessness is not just a legal but also an ethical issue. The Strategy helps to ensure that the Council and partners continue to use their resources to prevent and relieve homelessness effectively.

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

12.1 In accordance with the legal requirements, public and voluntary organisations were contacted to give their views on the draft Strategy, and members of the public were given the opportunity to comment over a six week period ending on 20 March 2018. A summary of the comments received and a response are included in Paragraph 5.9 of this report.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 Consultation responses as summarized at Paragraph 5.8
Equality Impact Assessment

14.0 Key decision information:

14.1	Is this a key decision?	Yes
14.2	If so, Forward Plan reference number:	9/2018
14.3	If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days?	No
14.4	If yes , please describe the reason for urgency:	

15.0 Call-in information:

15.1	Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process?	No
15.2	If yes , please give reason:	

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

16.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):

Date informed: 6 April 2018 Date approved:

17.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):

17.1

18.0 Executive decision:

18.1

18.2 Date of Decision:

19.0 Reason(s) for decision:

19.1 Date Decision published:

20.0 Executive Members in attendance:

20.1

21.0 Call-in:

21.1

22.0 Notes:

22.1