



'Preventing and Tackling Homelessness'

Homelessness Strategy 2016-2020

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce Dacorum Borough Councils Homelessness Strategy for 2016-2020.

Homelessness has continued to increase in Dacorum and changes in legislation mean we must work in partnership to prevent and tackle homelessness.

With our commitment to achieving a gold standard service we can help to keep people in safe, secure and affordable homes.

Using the five commitments set out in the strategy we can capture the difference we as a housing service along with our partners make to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Councillor Margaret Griffiths

Page 2

Introduction and vision

Page 3

National and local context

Page 4

Delivering a great service

Page 7

Our Commitments

Page 10

Conclusion

Introduction and vision

Introduction

Dacorum Borough Council is committed to working in partnership to prevent and tackle homelessness within the borough.

This strategy sets out how we as a housing service will consider the needs of homeless households and offer assistance to those who we have a statutory duty to support under The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, Housing Act 1996, and the Homelessness Act 2002.

It will also detail the approach taken to prevent homelessness within the borough. This includes helping people to address their housing needs to avoid becoming homeless. Additionally, the strategy sets out how we as a housing service will, where possible work with those people who we have no statutory obligation to support find accommodation. This strategy explores the impact of local and national changes on homelessness in Dacorum and sets out five commitments which it will deliver in partnership.

For the purpose of this strategy a person is considered homeless if they are;

- have nowhere to stay and are on the streets
- have been evicted, illegally evicted or forced to leave their last place of residence
- have been released from prison or discharged from hospital with nowhere to go
- are at risk of losing their home within 28 days
- have a priority need for housing e.g. care leavers

Vision

In Dacorum, preventing and tackling homelessness is more than addressing peoples housing situation. It is about helping them to fulfil their potential and live a quality life. Our vision is to create a borough where homelessness is not an option. We will work together with our partners to help every person that is homeless or at risk of homelessness to gain the right skills and resources to improve their lives and *'get back on track'*.

This strategy supports the councils corporate vision of *'...working in partnership to create a borough that enables Dacorum's communities to thrive and prosper'*.

To deliver this vision it is essential that we work with our residents to create strong and vibrant communities that enjoy safe and clean environments. We will continue to provide good quality affordable homes, particularly to those in need and ensure the economic growth and prosperity of our borough so our residents can support themselves. As a council we will explore how we can create more efficient and modern services so those who need help can access it through multiple channels.

National Context

This strategy will take into consideration how decisions made at a national level can affect individuals living in Dacorum. We recognize that all people will at some point have experiences that could lead to homelessness. Poor life skills, relationship breakdown, mental or physical ill health and the ending of a tenancy can all contribute to this. For many people, they are able to resolve these issues themselves; however, it is important for us to acknowledge that not everyone has the ability to cope or the resources to support themselves through these hard times. It is these experiences that often result in individuals becoming homeless.

Welfare Reform and Universal Credit

To prevent and tackle homelessness it is important for us to understand how changes to legislation such as Welfare Reform and the introduction of the Housing and Planning Act (2016) affect Dacorum residents.

The move towards Universal Credit means people will receive benefits on a monthly basis. This will put more pressure and responsibility on individuals to manage their money and budget for the month. Receiving a lump sum can also lead to complex social issues such as financial abuse for vulnerable people and the risk to individuals with drug and alcohol dependencies. This change highlights the importance of improving people's life skills to allow them to live independently.

Housing and Planning Act

Additionally, The Housing and Planning Act 2016 marks the end of local authorities offering lifetime tenancies. Local authorities will now offer tenancies up to ten years, with some exceptions being made for families with young children and other households considered vulnerable. Alongside the benefits created for us as a council when managing our housing stock, this will require us to consider how we can support people whose tenancies are not renewed to access alternative housing and prevent them from becoming homeless.

A changing landscape

Changes in legislation can often cause the increased risk of homelessness for individuals. Based on this, the council is committed to regularly reviewing this homelessness strategy and shape services according to both local needs and national requirements.

The potential introduction of a homelessness reduction bill would see local authorities' responsibility to prevent homelessness needing to be evidenced by a formal duty, placing additional pressures on the service to meet demand.

Delivering a great service

Equality and Diversity

As a Housing Service we believe everyone should have the opportunity to access our housing advice and options service regardless of; age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation (Equality and Diversity Act 2010). We are committed to being inclusive with our approach to preventing and tackling homelessness and will ensure our policies and procedures and working practices reflect this commitment.

We know that groups within our population are more likely to be at risk of homelessness. Through customer insight we can trend the profiles of people within Dacorum presenting as homeless and shape the services we and our partners offer to improve this.

Value for Money

It is important that we deliver value for money for local people accessing our homelessness support services. Increased demand requires us to explore new ways to improve efficiency within our housing advice and options service so we can target resources to improve service quality, enhance effectiveness and deliver positive outcomes for our clients. We are also committed to 'demonstrating the cost effectiveness of preventing homelessness'. By investing in preventative approaches we can support people to stay in existing accommodation.

Working in Partnership

An increase in demand for housing and limited resources, Dacorum Borough Council is committed to working in partnership to prevent and tackle homelessness effectively. Leading a borough wide Homelessness Forum, we create the opportunity to discuss strategic issues which cross-cut all sectors with our partners. The Forum will be used to monitor the progress and effectiveness of the strategy. Our homeless hostel 'The Elms' managed by a voluntary sector organization allows us to adopt a No Second Night Out policy. To effectively deliver this strategy, we will continue to maintain agreements with a variety of organizations to ensure our service can offer the highest quality advice and support to those in need. Taking an outcome based approach through the five commitments; we will monitor our performance and those of our partners to ensure by 2020, homelessness is not an option for people living in Dacorum.





Our commitments

To develop this strategy, we worked with a variety of stakeholders including service users, the local voluntary and community sector and other statutory services.

Using trend analysis, we also identified the key reasons people become homeless within Dacorum. This includes the termination of short hold assured tenancies due to increased rents in the private sector.

From this insight into local need and the requirements of the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) ten local challenges we have developed five outcome based commitments for delivering this strategy, these are;

- Commitment one: Continue to build partnerships across different sectors and lead Dacorum's response to preventing and tackling homelessness
- Commitment two: Work together with partners and residents to understand the causes of homelessness and increase the help Dacorum services can offer
- Commitment three: Improve access, security and stability within the private rented sector and allow Dacorum residents to remain in their homes
- Commitment four: Empower Dacorum residents to make informed decisions about their housing options
- Commitment five: Reduce the effect of homelessness on young people and families

Setting the Standard

To support the delivery of this strategy, the housing service will achieve the NPSS gold standard for homelessness. Our commitment to achieving this standard, demonstrates our desire to continuously improve and provide an excellent customer service. Achieving this, we will; improve our response to homelessness, identify opportunities that prevent Dacorum residents from becoming homeless and work with our partners to intervene at the earliest possible point. A gold standard homelessness service is achieved by completing the following ten local challenges;

1. To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice
4. To adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
5. To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support
6. To develop a suitable private rented sector, offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
7. To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness, reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging
9. To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks

Commitment One- Continue to build partnerships across different sectors and lead Dacorum's response to preventing and tackling homelessness

Commitment one seeks to build on the well established relationships between the housing service and the voluntary and community sector and other statutory services. By increasing our network and developing these relationships further we can address not only peoples housing needs, but help them to improve their lives by gaining the right skills. We will explore opportunities to reduce both long-term and short-term demand on services in Dacorum. To achieve this, we will;

- Increase the effectiveness of the Homelessness Forum using it effectively manage joint resources and tackle key issues to tackle homelessness
- Offer holistic support to people that are homeless or at risk of homelessness by improving pathways between services
- Review agreements between the housing service and external organisation against required outcomes and value for money achieved
- Lead a borough wide response to any national changes to ensure a consistent service
- Have a communications plan to ensure that our partners and residents are aware of our response to homelessness, which impacts on the whole community
- Utilise our travel assistance fund is used to allow reconnection of homeless clients with their local area, to prevent further demand on Dacorum's resources and services.

Commitment Two- Through investments and improvements our assets generate income and support the housing service business plan

Commitment two is about understanding both the needs and the experiences of people that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Taking this informed approach, we can develop preventative approaches and reduce the number of people becoming homeless in Dacorum. To achieve this, we will;

- Use customer insight to map the services we offer against current and emerging need and effectively consult with customers to continue service improvement
- Develop a Housing First model to support people with complex needs experiencing homelessness into accommodation
- Eradicate rough sleeping by developing a No Second Night Out model
- Utilise our management systems and data sharing to enable us to identify potential victims of Domestic Abuse and people with mental health problems earlier and implement appropriate interventions preventing further risk or homelessness
- Support grassroots organisations to set up initiatives that tackle the causes of homelessness within Dacorum
- Develop our Positive Futures programme to provide increased opportunities for our clients to access support and achieve independence through developed life skills

Commitment Three: Improve access, security and stability in the private rented sector and help Dacorum residents remain in their home

Commitment three looks to improve access and security within the private rented sector for local people, increasing their housing options. This will also help to manage the demand for social housing. We will work with residents and landlords to improve stability and help residents to remain in their homes. We will achieve this by;

- Help people to stay informed by improving access to information on housing rights, new initiatives and how to access support through channel shift and signposting
- Work with private sector landlords to improve their relationships with tenant and act as a mediator to help people stay in their homes
- Develop our 'help to rent' scheme allowing people to access housing in the private sector
- Increase the support offered for mortgage repossession prevention

Commitment Four: Empower Dacorum residents to make informed decisions about their housing options

Commitment four focuses on helping people to stay informed about their housing options through high quality advice. We believe this is key to preventing homelessness. We will explore the use of channel shift so local people can access support at any given time. We will achieve this by;

- Tailor our communications so people can access information about their housing options easily
- Improve our Enhanced Housing Options toolkit and information that is available on website so people can access housing advice at all times
- Improve our contact channels so people can contact the right team and access advice at the earliest possible point
- Work with partners to increase access housing advice and options support through outreach work and pop-up events

Our commitments and Conclusion

Commitment Five: Reduce the effect of homelessness on young people and families

Commitment five looks to give young people and families experiencing homelessness the best possible start. We understand that homelessness is a stressful experience for all. We will explore all opportunities to help families stay together and prevent individuals, particularly young people from becoming homeless. Through education we will support the next generation to avoid homelessness and work to reduce the effects of those who do experience it. To achieve this we will;

- Increase our offer of respite accommodation and mediation services to reduce breakdown in family relationships
- Reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for young people and families with young children
- Improve young people's understanding of 'living independently' by offering life skills workshops and housing eligibility
- Ensure any young people or children have access to appropriate support following their experience of homelessness

Conclusion

Within this strategy we have set out how Dacorum Borough Council's housing service will work with strategic partnership organizations to prevent and tackle homelessness within the borough.

We are committed to considering the needs of homeless households, offering support to those we who we have a statutory duty to support and working with those in non-priority homeless households.

We will take a leading role in responding with key changes in legislation and work with partners when required to coordinate a local response.

Throughout this strategy we have emphasized the importance of partnership working and will continue to keep this at the core of our service delivery.

We will consider the needs and experiences of people that are homeless or at risk of losing their home to improve our services and effectively target resources.

Improving access to the private sector and working with private landlords we will seek to reduce demand for social housing.

By empowering local people to make informed choices about their housing options we will seek to prevent homelessness wherever possible.

We will help young people and families to reduce the effect of homelessness and ensure they stay in safe and secure temporary accommodation for a limited period of time. We believe these five commitments will support the service to achieve the NPSS gold standard.

Overall we will work towards a borough where homelessness is not an option.