



## AGENDA ITEM: 6

### SUMMARY

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<b>Report for:</b>	<u>Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee</u>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	12 October 2016
<b>PART:</b>	1
<b>If Part II, reason:</b>	

<b>Title of report:</b>	Preventing and Tackling Homelessness – Dacorum Borough Council Homelessness strategy 2016-2020
<b>Contact:</b>	Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing  Natasha Brathwaite – Strategic Housing Group Manager
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	The purpose of this report is to provide the committee with an overview of the proposed Homelessness strategy 2016 - 2020. This includes the approach taken to develop the strategy and an update on national and local trends, key changes in legislation and the council's commitment to achieving a Gold Standard homelessness service.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 For members to review the proposed strategy and offer further feedback ahead of presentation to Cabinet for final approval</li> <li>2 For members to note the implications of the outlined challenges and trends impacting Dacorum's response to preventing and tackling homelessness, particularly the demands on the councils homelessness service.</li> <li>3 For members to consider their role in monitoring the performance of the homelessness service by receiving an annual report against the five commitments set out in the strategy.</li> </ol>
<b>Corporate objectives:</b>	Preventing and tackling homelessness contributes to the follow corporate objectives; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clean, safe and enjoyable environment</li> <li>• Building strong and vibrant communities</li> <li>• Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need</li> </ul>
<b>Implications:</b>	<u>Financial implication</u>

	<p>Proposals have been made in preparation for 2017/18 budget review, to support recommendations made to further improve the service delivered to customers. These proposals will be subject to the Chief Officer Group assessment and considered through the usual annual budget review process.</p> <p><u>Value for money</u></p> <p>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</p>
Risk Implications	Housing Risk Assessment is presented to the committee on a quarterly basis
Equalities Implications	Community Impact Assessment carried out – see appendix 2
Health And Safety Implications	There are no direct Health and Safety implications from the strategy.
Consultees:	<p>Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing</p> <p>Mark Gaynor – Corporate Director Housing and Regeneration</p> <p>Elliott Brooks – Assistant Director Housing</p> <p>Julie Still – Group Manager Residents Services</p> <p>Cynthia Hayford – Strategic Housing Team Leader</p> <p>Emily-Rae Maxwell – Policy &amp; Participation Team Leader</p> <p>Homelessness Forum partners</p>
Background papers:	<p>The Housing Allocations Policy</p> <p>Housing Strategy 2013 - 2018</p> <p>Localism Act 2011</p> <p>The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011)</p> <p>The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012</p>

Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	H&C OSC – Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee NPSS – National Practitioner Support Service AST – Assured Shorthold Tenancy LHA – Local Housing Allowance MARAC – Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Consultation

## 1 Background

- 1.1 Each local housing authority is required to consider housing needs within its area; this includes the needs of homeless households, to whom local authorities have a statutory duty to provide assistance. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, local housing authorities must have a strategy for preventing homelessness in their district. The strategy must apply to everyone at risk of homelessness, not just people who may fall within a priority need group for the purposes of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. Authorities are also encouraged to take steps to relieve homelessness in cases where someone has been found to be homeless but is not owed a duty to secure accommodation under the homelessness legislation.
- 1.2 In March 2016 Dacorum Borough Councils homelessness service successfully passed a peer assessment conducted by the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS).
- 1.3 Following this, the council has committed to achieving a Gold Standard homelessness service by completing ten local challenges set out by the NPSS. By completing these challenges along with recommendations captured from the peer assessment the service can embed more efficient and modern practices for preventing and tackling homelessness.
- 1.4 To support the achievement of the NPSS gold standard service, the council took the decision to replace the previous Homelessness strategy 2013 -2018 and develop a new one that considers the increasing demand for the service, potential changes in legislation and the requirements set out by the NPSS.
- 1.5 This report will outline the key changes within the proposed strategy and the approach taken to develop it.
- 1.6 The report will also provide members with an overview of current challenges within the service, national and local trends regarding homelessness and how analysing these issues have influenced the proposed strategy.

## 2 Proposed strategy for preventing and tackling homelessness 2016-2020

- 2.1 The vision for the proposed Homelessness strategy 2016 – 2020 (see appendix 1) is to create a borough where homelessness is not an option.
- 2.2 The strategy sets out five outcome based commitments for our homelessness service. These were developed in consultation with our partners and consider the recommendations from the NPSS.
- 2.3 Commitment one is to continue to build partnerships across different sectors and lead Dacorum's response to preventing and tackling homelessness. The key areas within this commitment require the service to;

- Increase effectiveness of the Homeless Forum by engaging with partners and ensuring there is a collective approach to achieving the commitments set out within this strategy.
- Improve partnership working to ensure that the Strategic Housing Service influence services commissioned within the borough to maximise opportunities to prevent homelessness
- Ensure that we are the single gateway for homelessness in Dacorum and prevent clients from slipping through the net and for agencies to effectively manage resources to tackle key issues.

2.4 Through commitment two we will work together with partners and residents to understand the causes of homelessness and increase the help Dacorum services can offer, this includes;

- Making effective use of our data and sharing data across the council to profile our clients and to map available services against any identified trends
- Working closely with our Residents Services team, the Police and voluntary sector partners, to further develop our No Second Night Out model and Housing First Model
- Utilising our management systems and data sharing to enable us to identify potential victims of Domestic Abuse earlier and implement appropriate interventions preventing further risk or homelessness.

2.5 By achieving commitment three we will improve access, security and stability within the private rented sector and help Dacorum residents to remain in their homes. Key areas within this commitment are;

- Using channel shift to improve access to detailed housing advice, via alternative options such as skype
- Developing our Help to Rent scheme and promote the increased benefits to landlords enabling more people to access the private rented housing
- Increasing the support offered for mortgage repossession prevention

2.6 In commitment four the strategy outlines how we will empower Dacorum residents to make informed decisions about their housing options. This includes;

- Improving communications with residents to manage expectations for social housing
- Developing the Council's Enhanced Housing Options toolkit and increasing the information that is available by local and national agencies to enable our clients to self-serve and obtain housing advice 24 hours/7 days per week.

- 2.7 Commitment five seeks to reduce the affect of homelessness on young people and families by;
- Increasing our offer of respite accommodation and mediation services to reduce breakdown in family relationships
  - Reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for young people and families with young children
- 2.8 Ensuring there is a multi-agency commitment to delivering this strategy the five commitments will be monitored by the Homelessness Forum and supported by the Housing Service and Strategic Housing Team plans.
- 2.9 It is also proposed that an annual progress report is submitted for the HCOSC to review.

### 3 Developing the strategy

- 3.1 A key factor when developing this strategy was the ten local challenges set out by the NPSS. The local challenges are considered best practice for delivering homelessness services and in order to achieve a Gold Standard service, the council is required to demonstrate a strategic commitment to the ten challenges.
- 3.2 By achieving the NPSS gold standard programme for homelessness 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. (For a full list of the challenges see appendix 1 – page 6).
- 3.3 The Homeless Forum consists of representatives from local statutory services and the voluntary and community sector. Members of the forum were consulted with throughout developments of the strategy and had a significant role in developing the five commitments. Once approved by the HCOSC and Cabinet, these organisations will be asked to formally sign up to the strategy enabling a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling homelessness.

### 4 National and local trends

- 4.1 In addition to the NPSS requirements, significant changes nationally and local trends regarding the demand for homelessness have influenced the development of this strategy. Themes within the strategy include; the private sector, supporting young people, addressing rough sleeping and domestic abuse. This is based on the evidence outlined in the following section of this report. By providing this evidence, the intention is to inform members of the current challenges impacting the service and provide context for the commitments set out within the Homelessness strategy 2016 – 2020
- 4.2 According to Government statistics, homelessness rose from 1,768 to 2,744 between 2010 - 2014. The rise means rough sleeping in England has risen by more than half during this period. This is reflective of local trends; homelessness has been steadily increasing in Dacorum over the last two years and is projected to continue increasing. There are a number of contributing factors to the increase in homelessness and risk of homelessness.

- 4.3 Rising property prices within the private rented sector have seen an increase in households being rendered homeless due to termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) the standard form of tenancy used in the private sector. This is currently the most common cause of people presenting themselves as homeless.
- 4.4 Private rented properties are becoming less affordable due to landlords letting their properties on the open market, at a significantly higher value than set at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) level. For example, a 2 bedroom property LHA rate is £853.49 per month; however 2 bedroom properties can be let via the private market for as much as £1000 per month. In 2009 and 2015 this reason for homelessness accounted for 11% and 50% respectively of all homeless duties awarded by the council.
- 4.5 This has contributed to an increase in demand for Housing Advice & Options service and in 2016 a total number of 366 homeless applications, of which 200 applications were accepted a full duty and termination of AST's accounted for 45% of acceptances.
- 4.6 This trend has continued so far into 2016/17 with a total of 123 applications (as at 31 August 2016) and 74 acceptances, of which termination of AST's accounted for 46% of acceptances.
- 4.7 There is increase demand to source affordable private sector accommodation. The Council currently has 141 tenancies via our Help to Rent scheme. This scheme works with landlords in the private sector to utilise their properties and enable people actively bidding on the housing register to access private sector properties.
- 4.8 It is becoming increasingly difficult to encourage new landlords to sign up to the Help to Rent scheme. This is due to improved benefits being offered within the local High Street Letting agent market, a local Registered Provider has also implemented a Private Sector Leasing Scheme with full management, guaranteed rent, repairs up to the value of £300 with no management costs.
- 4.9 Additionally other local authorities are offering high value financial incentives than those offered by the council, to attract landlords within Dacorum to enable them to place applicants in affordable housing outside of their local area. The impact of the proposed freezing of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) until 2020 will continue to enable other local authorities to access the private housing sector within Dacorum.
- 4.10 This has a significant impact on our service and reduces the opportunities available to us to grow the scheme and prevent homelessness, which in turn increases demand on temporary accommodation and discharge of duty into social housing.
- 4.11 Implications of this increase in demand could lead to the following;
  - A further reduction in the availability of affordable housing within the borough;
  - Increased risk of people living in poor housing conditions e.g. overcrowding;
  - A negative impact on the economic investment within the borough due to high house prices;
  - And a direct impact on the Council's General Fund ability to fulfil its statutory duty due to limited resources

- 4.12 In addition to trends within the private sector accounting for homelessness within Dacorum, the services must consider how it will address the needs of young people that are experiencing homelessness or at risk.
- 4.13 A July 2015 article, commissioned by Homelessness charity Crisis, warns. *“We are particularly worried about cuts to housing benefit for 18-21s. Under-25s already make up a third of homeless people and there is a real danger these changes could make things even worse.”* Nationally, it is estimated 83,000 homeless young people have had to rely on councils and charities to provide a roof over their head in the past year. This is over three times the 26,852 young people recorded in homeless figures released by the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- 4.14 This view is echoed by that of our statutory and voluntary partners across Hertfordshire and has featured as a top strategic issue for discussion at the Homelessness Forum. All partners reported increases in the numbers of young people that are homeless and there for service demands.
- 4.15 Alongside the increase in young people presenting as homeless, the number of rough sleepers across both Dacorum and Countywide has increased.
- 4.16 In the 2014 the council identified 7 known rough sleepers within the borough. Through our close work with partners evidence has shown that this number was thought to be as high as 30.
- 4.17 As a result of the increase DBC undertook a formal homeless count for the first time on 26 November 2015; this was supported by Homeless Link, DENS and other statutory and voluntary partners.
- 4.18 The council continued to gather further evidence regarding rough sleeping, and the above figures have ranged between 4-15 rough sleepers on any given night.
- 4.19 The service has also seen an increase in clients seeking housing advice or making a homelessness application as a result of Domestic abuse.
- 4.20 The council has seen an increase in homelessness as a result of Domestic Abuse as in 2014/15 homelessness acceptances were below 10%, however in 2015/16 and 2016/17 this has increased to 15% and 17% respectively.
- 4.21 Close work with the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Consultation Panel (MARAC) and our Resident Services team suggest this is likely to be as a result of heightened awareness of Domestic Abuse issues, increased staff training, which enables earlier detection of the signs of abuse and more joined up working between agencies.
- 4.22 There is a distinct correlation in the casework conducted by the housing service households presenting with issues, such as financial difficulty and poor physical and mental health and Domestic Abuse.
- 4.23 Domestic Abuse is the second most common reason for homelessness within Dacorum after Termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy and ahead of parental evictions.

## 5 Current and Pending Legislation

- 5.1 The proposed strategy highlights the importance of understanding how changes to legislation such as Welfare Reform and the introduction of the Housing and Planning Act (2016) affect Dacorum residents (see appendix 1 page 4).



- 5.2 In addition to these legislative changes, a Homelessness Reduction Bill is pending. The Bill would amend Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, to make further provision about measures for reducing homelessness.
- 5.3 The Bill aims to set out more clearly the types of housing advice and information local authorities must provide to people before they become homeless or are threatened with homelessness.
- 5.4 This new duty would apply to all eligible households irrespective of priority need and intentional homelessness. It will also outline expectation for local authorities to intervene with private landlords to prevent evictions
- 5.5 Currently a person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that they will become homeless within 28 days. The Bill proposes to extend that period to 56 days to enable local authorities to respond to the threat of homelessness at a much earlier point, and provide help such as mediation with the landlord. The Bill's second is reading scheduled for late October. Should this Bill receive Royal Assent, the proposed strategy and homelessness service would be reviewed to coincide with any new legislative requirements.
- 5.6 This adds further risk to the pressure already facing the service.
- 5.7 In response to the numerous changes impacting people across the UK the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report '*We can solve poverty in the UK*' emphasises the role of social housing providers. It highlights the complexities facing all sectors to support people in need, emphasising the importance of joined up, localised approaches. The proposed strategy seeks to embed these principles across the council and services within Dacorum.

## 6 Conclusion

- 6.1 To conclude, if approved the proposed strategy will replace the existing Homelessness strategy 2013 – 2018. The purpose of this is to ensure the council's homelessness service maintains a clear strategic direction for preventing and tackling homelessness.
- 6.2 Through consultation with partner organisations and internal departments the new strategy includes five outcome based commitments that will be monitored by the Homelessness Forum.
- 6.3 The intention is to achieve a Gold Standard service through the NPSS whilst delivering this strategy.
- 6.4 The report provides both national and local trends for homelessness that have influenced the key groups focused on within the strategy. These include; the private sector, young people, rough sleepers and people fleeing Domestic Abuse.
- 6.5 It considers current changes in legislation such as the Welfare Reform and Housing and Planning Act 2016.
- 6.6 Additionally it outlines implications of introduction a Homelessness Reduction Bill.
- 6.7 Throughout the report the increase in demand and therefore pressures on the service have been outlined. This further supports the proposal to approve implementation of the new Homelessness strategy 2016 – 2020 and support the service to develop efficient and effective ways of meeting some of the challenges outlined

6.8 Overall it is anticipated that homelessness and the risk of homelessness will continue to grow in Dacorum.

## 7 Recommendations

7.1 For members to review the proposed strategy and offer further feedback ahead of presentation to Cabinet for final approval

7.2 For members to note the implications of the outlined challenges and trends impacting Dacorum's response to preventing and tackling homelessness, particularly the demands on the councils homelessness service.

7.3 For member to consider their role in monitoring the performance of the homelessness service by receiving an annual report against the five commitments set out in the strategy.