



**AGENDA ITEM:
SUMMARY**

Report for:	<u>Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee</u>
Date of meeting:	5 July 2017
PART:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Preventing and Tackling Homelessness – Dacorum Borough Council Homelessness Strategy update
Contact:	Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing Natasha Brathwaite – Strategic Housing Group Manager
Purpose of report:	The purpose of this report is to provide the committee with an update on the housing service’s progress against the commitments set out in the Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2020. This will include a review and update of the Temporary Accommodation Policy for members to approve.
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For members to receive a full progress update on the p housing service’s approach to preventing and tackling homelessness, and review this in line with the commitments set out in the strategy. 2. For members to note the implications of the outlined challenges and trends impacting Dacorum’s response to preventing and tackling homelessness; in particular the growing demands on the council’s homelessness service. 3. For members to review the Temporary Accommodation Policy and consider its role in meeting the new duties set out be the Homelessness Reduction Act.
Corporate objectives:	<p>Preventing and tackling homelessness contributes to the follow corporate objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clean, safe and enjoyable environment • Building strong and vibrant communities • Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need

<p>Implications:</p>	<p><u>Financial implications</u></p> <p>This report will offer an overview of the financial implications on the homelessness service of both increasing demand, and the introduction of new duties through the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017), and will set out how this strategy and review of the Temporary Accommodation Policy will help to offset this.</p> <p>A further report will be submitted to Cabinet for approval in July 2017 outlining the proposed use of the Flexible Homeless Support Grant. This grant has been ring-fenced to prevent homelessness. These proposals have been developed to ensure that the Council is able to fulfil its statutory duty to support people experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>Additionally, the service is likely to receive a small amount of funding to support the implementation phase of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017). It is unlikely r this will cover the total cost and therefore the service has made a number of changes in its approach to preventing homelessness over the past year to reduce future financial pressures.</p> <p><u>Value for money</u></p> <p>Throughout the Preventing and Tackling Homelessness Strategy there is a commitment to streamlining processes and taking a preventative approach so value for money can be achieved. One area that is key to this is raising standards in the private rented sector.</p>
<p>Risk Implications</p>	<p>Housing Risk Assessment is presented to the committee on a quarterly basis.</p>
<p>Equalities Implications</p>	<p>Community Impact Assessment carried out for 2016-2020 strategy</p>
<p>Health And Safety Implications</p>	<p>There are no direct Health and Safety implications arising from the strategy.</p>
<p>Consultees:</p>	<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>Cynthia Hayford – Strategic Housing Team Leader</p> <p>Emily-Rae Maxwell – Policy and Participation Team Leader</p> <p>Homelessness Forum partners</p>
<p>Background papers:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness Strategy 2016-2020 • Homelessness Forum Service Standards • Homelessness Forum Newsletter • Temporary Accommodation Policy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness Reduction Act Briefing paper • Flexible Homeless Support Grant publication
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<p>H&COSC – Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>NPSS – National Practitioner Support Service</p>

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2016 the new Preventing and Tackling Homelessness Strategy 2016 – 2020 was presented to the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (H&COSC).
- 1.2 It was agreed that H&COSC would take ownership of this strategy and monitor the housing service's performance against the five commitments set out within the strategy.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide members with a progress update for each of the commitments and outline both national and local considerations that impact upon the council's homelessness service.
- 1.4 This update will include key pieces of work undertaken over the past year by the housing service, including a review of the Temporary Accommodation Policy and commitment to achieving a gold standard homelessness service, by completing ten local challenges set by the National Practitioners Support Service.

2. Preventing and Tackling Homelessness in Dacorum

- 2.1 The vision for the Homelessness Strategy 2016 – 2020 is to create a borough where homelessness is not an option.
- 2.2 To achieve this vision, the service has committed to delivering five outcome based commitments, 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 help Dacorum residents to remain in their homes
 - Commitment Four: Empower Dacorum residents to make informed decisions about their housing options
 - Commitment Five: Reduce the affect of homelessness on young people and families

- 2.3 For a full copy of the strategy - see appendix 1
- 2.4 These commitments are supported by the NPSS ten local challenges. To date the housing service has successfully undertaken a full peer assessment, which produced a robust continuous improvement plan for the homelessness service. Additionally, the service has achieved the bronze standard with the completion of two local challenges. With a further four having been submitted for review, this would indicate the service is on track to achieve the silver standard by August 2017.
- 2.5 The aim is to achieve a gold standard service by October 2017.
- 2.6 Due to the amount of best practice highlighted by the NPSS in Dacorum's local challenge submissions, and development of the Preventing and Tackling Homelessness Strategy, DBC has been asked to run a workshop at the annual NPSS conference for a second year.
- 2.7 This is a great opportunity for the council to raise its profile and be seen as leading in an area that is high on the national agenda for housing.

3 Meeting National Requirements and Statutory Duties

- 3.1 Throughout 2016/17 the development of the Homelessness Reduction Bill saw the introduction of proposals that would dramatically change the roles of local authorities in tackling homelessness.
- 3.2 The Homelessness Reduction Bill received Royal Assent and became an Act of Parliament on 27 April 2017.
- 3.3 The introduction of this legislation places new legal duties on local authorities to provide meaningful support to everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness, regardless of whether they are in priority need or 'intentionally homeless'.
- 3.4 It is estimated that the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) will increase the demand on the homelessness service by 26%. Central government will be offering a small amount of funding to support local authorities with the implementation of the Act, however the increase in demand is expected to be met by the service.
- 3.5 For a full report outlining the details and impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) for Dacorum see appendix 2 Homelessness Reduction Act CMT Report.
- 3.6 The housing service intends to meet the majority of the increase in demand using the new 'Flexible Homelessness Support Grant' see appendix 3. This grant replaces the previous funding allocated to local authorities for the provision of temporary accommodation.

- 3.7 This funding is ring-fenced and must be spent on preventing homelessness. However it offers more flexibility to authorities in providing intervention services, moving away from exclusive funding for procurement and funding of temporary accommodation.
- 3.8 A full report outlining proposals for the use of this funding will be presented to Cabinet at their meeting in July for approval.
- 3.9 With the introduction of this replacement grant, and a need to move away from temporary accommodation and invest in preventative approaches to homelessness, the housing service took the opportunity to review the Temporary Accommodation Policy see appendix 4.
- 3.10 It is important for members to note the housing service has been proactive in absorbing this change in legislation. This has been demonstrated by the review of the Temporary Accommodation Policy, review of the services structure (to ensure resources are effectively allocated) and an evidence led approach to developing the proposals for the use of the Flexible Homelessness Grant Funding.
- 3.11 The development of these proposals, which include investment in driving up standards in the private rented sector and additional resources for housing advice will not only help the council to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) but will also align with the commitments of Dacorum's Preventing and Tackling Homelessness Strategy.
- 3.12 This however would not have been possible without the additional resource of Flexible Homeless Support Funding. Without it the council would be at significant risk of not being able to fulfil its statutory duties as detailed in the Housing Act 1996, Part 7.

4 Strategy update

- 4.1 To deliver Commitment One: Continue to build partnerships across different sectors and lead Dacorum's response to preventing and tackling homelessness, the housing service has;
 - Conducted a full review of Dacorum's Homelessness Forum, which included developing a new service standard, see appendix 5 and approach to providing strategic updates across the partnership. The Forum are now jointly responsible for the delivery of all the commitments set out in the Preventing and Tackling Homelessness Strategy and review progress on a quarterly basis.
 - Developed a 'single non-priority case' sub group to support the implementation of new duties for non-priority people through the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017).
 - Conducted a review of the housing service's approach to giving housing advice in line with best practice, resulting in the development of a personal housing plan tool.
 - Taken a leading role in county-wide approach to homelessness at a strategic level with the Group Manager, Strategic Housing taking the role of Chair for the Hertfordshire Heads of Housing Group.
 - Continued to support the NPSS and other local authorities by sharing best practice within Dacorum.

- Actively established a re-connection protocol and travel assistance fund to enable clients in housing need to access support within their own local area.
- Absorbed the Positive Futures programme with a new initiative called Tenant Academy, that aims to help anyone accessing the housing service to utilise opportunities within the borough by improving life skills, wellbeing and access to education, employment, training and volunteering.

4.2 To deliver Commitment Two: Work together with partners and residents to understand the causes of homelessness and increase the help Dacorum services can offer, the housing service has;

- Developed and launched a new 'No Second Night Out' policy to end rough sleeping in the borough. This included a borough wide campaign to raise awareness of available services and how to report people who appear to be sleeping rough.
- Obtained two County Court injunctions by working in partnership with colleagues across the council to prevent and deter rough sleeping and associated street activity to reduce the negative impact on Dacorum residents.
- Contributed to an internal Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Group to improve effectiveness of data and system management to enable early identification of domestic abuse.

4.3 To deliver Commitment Three: Improve access, security and stability within the private rented sector and help Dacorum residents to remain in their homes, the housing service has;

- Undertaken a full review of the Help to Rent scheme in partnership with landlords and produced a list of recommendations for implementation that will seek to improve standards and equip landlords and tenants to have successful and sustainable tenancies.
- Developed a partnership with the National Landlords Association to offer an accreditation to private sector landlords across Dacorum.
- Developed a better working relationship with environmental health services to improve the approach to enforcement action against rogue landlords.
- Kick-started the development of a Private Rented Sector Strategy, which will be developed in partnership with other corporate services.
- Successfully secured a growth bid for the role of Homelessness Prevention and Assessment Officer, to assist with providing additional support to prevent homelessness as a result of mortgage repossession. This post is currently pending recruitment.

4.3 To deliver Commitment four: Empower Dacorum residents to make informed decisions about their housing options the housing service has;

- Developed a new personal housing plan in consultation with the NPSS, which is issued to all applicants receiving housing advice. This enables applicants to have a clear understanding of the information provided to assist with their housing difficulty and the actions that are required by not only the council, but also the individual to address the situation.
- Improved the standard and accessibility of our communication, by making best use of the resources available, which includes social media.

4.5 To deliver Commitment Five: Reduce the effect of homelessness on young people and families, the housing service has delivered the following

- Conducted a full review of the Temporary Accommodation Policy, which clarifies the council's approach to providing temporary accommodation to those eligible and in priority need.
- Provided funding to Herts Young Homeless to provide homelessness education and awareness sessions to young people ages 16-26 years.
- Continued our commitment to not placing any young person or family into Bed and Breakfast accommodation, as a result of effective temporary accommodation management.
- Provided access to vital crash pad spaces within our temporary accommodation, providing urgent respite accommodation pending an initial assessment.
- Delivered tenancy sustainment training sessions across the housing service to improve understanding of living independently.
- Continued to work in partnership, in line with the Hertfordshire Joint Protocol, to ensure that young people have access to appropriate advice and assistance.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 The housing service is on track to deliver against the five commitments set out in the Preventing and Tackling Homelessness Strategy 2016 – 2020.
- 5.2 The housing service has successfully achieved two local challenges set out by the NPSS and has a further four pending, meaning the service is likely to achieve the silver standard by summer 2017.
- 5.3 There have been a number of changes introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) which could have impacted upon the progress of the strategy. These have been offset by the service being proactive and reviewing the Temporary Accommodation Policy, re-aligning current resources and the structure of strategic housing to reflect the new demands on the service and the introduction of the 'Flexible Homelessness Support Grant'.
- 5.4 Without the additional funding this would have increased the risk to the council to meet its statutory duties.
- 5.5 A significant amount of work has been undertaken over the past year against each of the five commitments and the service will continue to review its progress in partnership with the Homelessness Forum.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 For members to consider the update in full and offer comments on the housing service's progress towards meeting the five commitments in the strategy.
- 6.2 For members to review the Temporary Accommodation Policy and offer any comments on the council's position on temporary accommodation.
- 6.3 For members to note the changes introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) including the increase in demand for the service.