



Appendix 1

Homelessness Strategy 2014 – 2018

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Foreword

I am pleased to present Wigan's third Homelessness Strategy which has been developed at a time of unprecedented change in national policy and continuing uncertainty within the public sector. This includes ongoing reductions in public expenditure and changes in national policy in areas such as welfare reform and the reform of social housing.

Homelessness is on the increase at a national level and although locally levels are being kept at manageable levels I am concerned about the impact homelessness can have on many areas of life, for example putting extra demands on health services, undermining educational achievement and acting as a barrier to those seeking and keeping employment.

There is growing evidence that the impact of welfare reform is putting additional pressure on households to find and sustain suitable affordable accommodation and this in turn will generate an increase in demand for housing advice, support and homelessness services in the forthcoming years.

This Homelessness Strategy will continue with the successful and cost effective prevention approach and our objectives will be: to target resources earlier to those most at risk of homelessness; to minimise the use of temporary accommodation; work towards the end of rough sleeping; strengthen partnerships in the public, private and voluntary sector and continuous improvement in homelessness and housing options services and housing related services.

I look forward to working with our partner agencies over the next five years to realise our aim of preventing homelessness within the borough.

Councillor Chris Ready

Cabinet Portfolio Member for Housing, Leisure Client/Communications.

Introduction and Overview

The Homeless Act 2002 places a statutory obligation on Local Authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy at least every five years and to take it into account when discharging its functions. It also requires authorities to undertake annual reviews of homeless services.

This is Wigan's third Homelessness Strategy and it builds on the achievements delivered through the last Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013 "A Place for All" which shifted the approach from dealing with the effects of homelessness to a proactive preventative approach in tackling the main causes of homelessness through:

- Early and timely intervention
- Providing choice and options
- Arranging housing support

Preventing homelessness is far more cost effective than dealing with its consequences and the new strategy will continue to focus on prevention and early intervention. It will also focus on gaining a better understanding and tackle some of the wider experiences of homelessness that make households and individuals susceptible to it.

Homelessness figures across the country are increasing, and there are fears they will continue to increase due to the economic downturn and welfare reform changes. Although locally incidences of homelessness have been kept to manageable levels there are indications that pressures are building as more people are approaching prevention services and the length of stay in temporary accommodation is on the increase.

There has also been a notable increase in the numbers of homeless cases with complex needs, along with numbers of rough sleepers increasing and people accessing rough sleepers services.

In addition there is growing evidence of people facing real difficulties in managing their income and housing as a result of the downturn in the economy and its impact on the housing market, as well as the changes taking place around the future of social housing and welfare benefits as more people are approaching the homelessness prevention services with multiple debt problems.

Scope of the Strategy

This strategy focuses on preventing homelessness and meeting the needs of homeless people in Wigan.

Homelessness Review

Between October 2012 and June 2013 the Council's Housing Services team undertook a comprehensive review of the current Homelessness Strategy to determine:

- An up to date understanding of homelessness and housing need in Wigan

- Research into the areas of need, including impact assessments to determine current and likely future levels of homelessness and homelessness trends.
- Services currently provided to prevent homelessness, to secure housing for homeless people and to provide them with support
- The resources available to the Council, other statutory organisations and voluntary organisations to provide services for homeless people.
- Gaps in provision

Consultation Process

To ensure that we had identified all the issues we consulted with residents, the Homelessness Forum and the Housing Partnership on the findings of the homelessness review and priorities for the new strategy. Both stakeholders and service users were consulted via a variety of methods including surveys to agencies and service users, focus groups at homeless hostels and a workshop attended by over 20 homeless agencies.

National Context

Homelessness is increasing across the country, and there are fears it will continue to do so. To address this, the Government has published *Making Every Contact Count: a joint approach to preventing homelessness*¹ which recognises that intervening earlier to prevent homelessness is key to its ambitions on social justice, particularly in terms of supporting the most disadvantaged individuals and families by tackling many of the underlying problems that, if left unchecked, can contribute to homelessness.

The Government is clear that for many people, becoming homeless is not the beginning of their problems; it comes at the end of a long line of crises, interactions with public and voluntary services and missed opportunities, which must be changed. Their aim therefore is a simple one; **‘to make sure every contact local agencies make with vulnerable people and families really count’**.

The following ten local challenges have been set, which the government has recommended local authorities should take forward. Wigan have made a commitment to adopt these challenges and are working towards gold standard in recognition of what we have already achieved and the work which is underway to strive for continuous improvement in homeless prevention and tackling the underlying causes of homelessness in the borough.

1. adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
4. adopt a *No Second Night Out*² model or an effective local alternative
5. have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
6. develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
7. actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme

¹ Making Every Contact Count: a joint approach to preventing homelessness – DCLG August 2012

² Vision to end rough sleeping No Second Night Out – DCLG July 2011

8. have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
9. not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

Supporting this, the new Public Health Outcomes Framework³, which sets out the desired outcomes for public health and how these will be measured also includes two indicators on homelessness (Statutory Homeless Acceptances and Households in Temporary Accommodation) as well as others which encourage a focus on the health of the local homeless population. There is real commitment through this framework to ensure health services do more to help identify those at risk of and prevent homelessness by 'making every contact count'.

The Localism Act 2011 has given new flexibilities and powers to local housing authorities and providers of social housing to meet local needs more effectively and from April 2012 all registered providers can choose to introduce fixed term or continue with flexible/lifetime tenancies. These tenancies could be as short as two years but this should be an exception.

The Local Context

At the last census the boroughs population had increased to almost 318,000. The number of households (across all tenures) is 136,386 with 92,890 living in privately owned housing and 25,803 living in social housing stock.

Since the sharp fall in housing delivery rates in 2009, completions of new housing has remained low in Wigan and across the country as a whole. In 2012/13 there were just 317 housing completions recorded, far short of our trajectory target of 1,000 homes a year. There is an annual net shortfall of affordable accommodation in the borough currently estimated to be 277. . Delivery of additional affordable homes has averaged at around 157 homes per annum, including new social rented homes, affordable home ownership and partnerships with the private rented sector to increase affordability and accessibility,

Despite continued low house prices and interest rates, making Wigan an attractive location to buy in Greater Manchester, affordability is still an issue for many first time buyers with the current affordability ratio of lower quartile house prices to earnings being 4.54 in 2012.

The private rented sector provides an important role in meeting housing needs in the borough and the growth has helped to provide an alternative to social housing as evidenced by the 40% increase in Local Housing Allowance claims from the sector over the last three years.

There is a high probability that pressures on social housing demand have been contained at their current levels because of this private rented option being available. However, the impact of welfare reforms could start to reduce the numbers of properties available as landlords feel the risks are too high and therefore move away from applicants reliant upon benefits. We could therefore see an increase once again

³ Public Health Outcomes Framework – Department of Health January 2012

in the demand for Council and Registered Provider / or social rented accommodation as a result.

The current demand and supply stock imbalance for 1 bed properties is only likely to get worse with the impact of welfare benefit reform and population projections for smaller household formation. The restrictions to Housing Benefit for people under-occupying social housing will affect circa 4500 households; the increased age threshold for the Shared Room Rent means the maximum Local Housing Allowance (LHA) that can be paid for a single person under 35 is limited to the rate for a single room in a shared property or bedsit.

As at 1st April 2013 there are around 5021 on the social housing register (including transfers) with 3077 (61%) of applicants waiting for 1 bed accommodation against a turnover of just 33%.

We anticipate that all of these pressures will generate an increase in demand for housing advice, support and homelessness services in the forthcoming years.

Understanding Homelessness and Housing Need in Wigan

The number of people being accepted as statutory homeless has decreased over the last 5 years from a high of 715 in 2007/08 to 219 in 2012/13, with the main cause of homelessness being due to violent breakdown of relationship involving partner and exclusions from family or friends' homes.

The number of homeless preventions have increased from 376 in 2008/9 to 1404 in 2012/13.

The profile of households accepted as homeless has remained the same over the past few years with the 25-44 age group making up 53% of households accepted as homeless, 16-24 representing 30% of households and 45 – 64 12% of households. Older people make up 2% of homeless acceptances and there are extremely few cases of older people aged 75+.

The majority of households accepted as homeless are lone, female parents representing 45% of homeless acceptances.

More preventative work is required for the refugee and migrant community as there is evidence that they are over represented in homelessness presentations and acceptances. As at June 2013 there were 350 asylum seekers living in Wigan borough, compared to peak numbers of 921 in 2003. Although asylum seekers numbers have reduced significantly in the last few years, this group face particular challenges in accessing housing if they are granted a decision giving leave to remain by the Home Office. Asylum case decisions are now processed in a shorter period time and on receipt of a decision they have a limited time period in which to find a new home and access mainstream services following support being ceased by the Home Office. This is a difficult task for this group who experience difficulties including not being familiar with the area, language issues and have a lack of understanding of services they can access.

There has been a notable increase in the numbers with complex or multiple needs, with the rough sleeper estimate in November 2012 increasing to 15 from 11 for the previous year, along with 127 people accessing No Second Night Out between 20th October 2012 and 7th June 2013.

There are growing concerns arising over poor discharge planning for ex-offenders and those patients being discharged from hospitals with no fixed abode. Those with complex needs, mental health problems, addiction, negative behaviour, poor parenting and life skills face particular problems in attaining settled homes and can fall through the net of services and accommodation provided.

Demand for temporary accommodation has fallen during the past 12 months from 292 admissions in the previous year to 257 in 2012/13. However, the average length of stay has increased to 10 weeks.

Our Achievements Since the Last Strategy

The main 'headline' achievements since 2008 have been:

- Major progress in transforming the homelessness service has been made via preventative strategies. This is evidenced by dramatic falls in homeless presentations and acceptances (well in excess of northern / regional trends).
- Overall reductions in numbers of people presenting as homeless and repeat homelessness
- Fewer presenting cases being accepted as owed a statutory duty, and a significant increase in the number of presenting cases who have been prevented from becoming homeless.
- Reduction in the numbers of placements into temporary accommodation under statutory homelessness duties
- Roll-out of a range of repossession prevention measures, which has made a significant impact on reducing both landlord and mortgage repossessions
- Improved services for people affected by domestic abuse, including a new service contract for the refuge provision and outreach service, with increased client capacity
- New accommodation provided for women at risk of domestic violence funded through HCA and refurbished accommodation now provides 15 bed spaces.
- Integrated Safeguarding and Public Protection (ISAPP) Team is now established and is based within Bamfurlong Police Station to address domestic violence in a joined-up, quick response way. The team work to generate a daily response to incidents of DV, to stop them escalating further. Once domestic abuse processes are thoroughly embedded, the team are looking to address child protection and vulnerable abuse matters too.
- Improved services for people who are rough sleeping or living at no fixed abode, incorporating individual support plans, group activities and strong links with partner agencies, including commitment to No Second Night Out and extreme weather provision
- Protocol in place with Stephenson's solicitors to tackle illegal evictions and harassment.
- Provision of over 150 new council homes and a commitment to build further homes in coming years.
- Protocol in place between Peoples Services and Wigan & Leigh Housing regarding housing advice and options for care leavers
- New protocol in development between Peoples Services and WALH regarding 16 & 17-year-olds presenting as homeless, which takes into account statutory guidance.
- New supported housing scheme for young people with challenging backgrounds accessing training development in order to assist with future employability and gaining the life skills to achieve independent living.
- Production of 'WARM' strategy regarding the integration of refugees and migrants.

- Development of the Social Letting Agency and improved access to the private rented sector – an additional 820 affordable lettings in the private rented sector since 2009
- Housing Support Access Point (administered by Wigan and Leigh Housing) - introduction of a single point of access for temporary supported accommodation and floating support services so that clients are referred to the most appropriate accommodation for their needs with a view to moving them on from there when they are ready to manage their own tenancy.

Link with Other Strategies and Plans

The challenges of the homelessness strategy and the solutions needed to address them need to be considered within the wider context of national and regional policy and across a range of agendas including community sustainability, health and well being and economic regeneration.

As there are direct links between the objectives and priorities in the Homelessness Strategy and those in a wide range of other plans and strategies, it is essential that all of these plans and strategies are closely aligned and that all stakeholders work together to achieve common priorities.

Wigan Council's Tenancy Strategy sets out that the normal tenancy in the Borough will be "lifetime" tenancies, however it allows Wigan and Leigh Housing and Registered Providers to use fixed term tenancies for a minimum period of 5 years where the overall aim is to achieve strategic or operational objectives.

The Council's new Allocations Policy has removed Group A priority to homeless or potentially homeless applicants and they are now given the same priority as other applicants based on their housing circumstances. A third of re let properties (one bed flats and 2 bed houses) are targeted at those tenants under occupying.

Strategic Priorities

Target prevention, earlier intervention and support services to those most at risk of homelessness

- We will continue to identify households most likely to be affected by the root causes of homelessness as part of housing needs assessments and ensure that everyone gets advice and support at the earliest possible stage to prevent them from reaching a housing crisis.
- We will focus on keeping people in their existing accommodation (wherever practical and appropriate to do so).
- We are committed to prevent mortgage repossessions and we will make repossession the last resort.
- Early contact with drug and alcohol treatment agencies and links with the criminal justice system will remain critical points for identifying and helping those at risk of homelessness.
- We will improve/develop clear housing pathways for each specific client group for example those leaving prison and those discharged from hospital which will include suitable accommodation and support.

- We will continue to support access to financial advice, skills and employment services and target households with financial problems to debt and money advice/financial inclusion services.
- We will develop educational work with young people about housing options, the skills needed to maintain independent living and the reality of homelessness.
- We will target limited funds to projects that meet strategic objectives, provide value for money and monitor their outcomes.

Strengthen partnerships and communications and improve pathways into accommodation

Wigan's Homelessness Forum will continue to meet to deliver and review the homelessness strategy and action plan, to deliver effective partnership working across the wide range of homelessness services and we will strengthen and develop partnerships as follows:

- We will work closely with health service colleagues to identify those at risk by making every contact count to reduce health inequalities. Our aim is to prevent homelessness, gain a better shared understanding of how early homelessness prevention results in much better outcomes for people and helps achieve significant financial savings for health and other budgets in the future.
- We will seek opportunities to pool resources, share good practice, co-locate and avoid duplication to make the best use of our resources; ensuring services are delivered in the most efficient and effective way, make a difference to people's lives and provides value for money.
- Homelessness agencies will work together to minimise the consequences of welfare reform.
- We will strive to make better use of the private rented sector.
- We will develop and deliver a Communications Plan with more targeted information about homelessness and housing options

Work towards the end of rough sleeping

- We will strengthen partnerships and co-ordinate services to clients with multiple needs and exclusions;
- We will carry out a review of services for rough sleepers
- We will review anti begging campaigns and messages and support organisations who work to get people off the streets.
- We aim to reduce the number of homelessness crisis situations arising from hospital discharge

Prevent the use of bed and breakfast/increase in temporary accommodation

- We will prepare, support and provide assistance to clients living in supported and temporary accommodation to ensure they are ready for independent living.
- All clients in supported accommodation will receive pre tenancy training including budgeting skills/money management and training on managing a tenancy.
- We will discharge our homelessness statutory duty into the private rented to limit the use of temporary accommodation/bed and breakfast accommodation.
- We will only use bed and breakfast accommodation as a last resort when there are no alternative temporary accommodation options available.

Continuous improvement in homelessness and housing options services, and housing related services

- We will carry out a review of the housing options services to enable, facilitate and encourage self serve so that staff resources can be targeted at the most vulnerable clients.
- We will strive to deliver excellent services and meet the governments gold standard

How we will implement and monitor the strategy

Key to the success and timely implementation of delivering the homelessness strategy are the partner agencies, community and voluntary groups that make up the Homelessness Forum. The action plan will be monitored and updated quarterly by the Homelessness Forum and appropriate sub groups who will also be responsible for ensuring the actions and outcomes contained in the action plan are implemented.

The Homelessness Forum will undertake an annual review of the Homelessness Strategy, to consider the progress made during the year and to look forward to the priorities in the new year and report the results to the homelessness steering group.

We will target limited funds to projects that meet our strategic priorities; we will assess the outcomes of funded projects and analyse the impact on homelessness prevention.

Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators will be measured quarterly:

Number of households in temporary accommodation
Number of prevention cases (per 1000 population)

Action plan

The multi agency action plan has clear timescales and lead officers to ensure the homelessness strategic objectives and key priorities are delivered. See appendix 1 for the multi agency action plan.