

**'A City Partnership to prevent
homelessness'**
2013-2018

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Foreword

I am proud to introduce this strategy for preventing and addressing homelessness in York. Homelessness is the most extreme form of housing need that can have a devastating impact on people's lives and the wider community.

Homelessness and how we prevent it is something we should all be concerned about. It can affect anyone and has many different causes. It impacts on many areas of life, like putting extra demands on health services, undermining educational achievement and acting as a barrier to those seeking and keeping employment.

These are difficult times, with mounting pressure on households to find and sustain the accommodation they need to support themselves and their families. We must do all we can to ensure these mounting pressures do not translate into more and more homelessness cases.

This strategy was developed with the help of the York Homelessness Forum, a body made up of many statutory and voluntary agencies working to prevent and tackle homelessness in York¹. It is endorsed by City of York Council, which provides strategic leadership on homelessness across the city. I can assure you of the council's ongoing commitment to this agenda.

I look forward to working with as many people as possible over the next five years towards making homelessness in York a thing of the past.



Councillor Tracy Simpson Laing

¹ For a full list of Forum members go to www.york.gov.uk/housing

Signatories to the strategy

The following agencies are committed to delivering the strategy and are members of Homeless Strategy Executive Group:

Tom Brittain (CYC Housing)
 Dave Knowles (Peasholme Charity representing York Resettlement Group)
 George Vickers (Citizens Advice Bureau) representing voluntary sector agencies
 Kate Spencer (York Housing Association representing Registered Social landlords)
 Julia Davies (Department of Work and Pensions)
 Jenny Bullock (CYC Children's Services)
 Judy Kent (Children's Trust)
 Peter Hart (North Yorkshire Probation)
 Carl Wain (CYC Supporting People / Commissioning)
 Dr Paul Edmondson-Jones (CYC Public Health)

Introduction

Many people, as part of everyday life, face experiences or triggers that could lead to homelessness, such as a relationship breakdown or the end of a tenancy. In most cases individuals cope and find suitable accommodation using their own resources.

But for others it is these life events that tip them into homelessness, either because they lack the resources to tackle their immediate challenges – for example enough money for a deposit or because they suffer more underlying problems – such as an addiction or mental health problem – which makes it harder for them to deal with their situation.²

This strategy builds on achievements delivered through the last homelessness strategy. It sets out to build a future where mistakes in life or particular vulnerabilities do not lead to homelessness in the way they often do now. It shows how we will tackle the complex causes of homelessness by focusing on prevention and early intervention and on locally designed integrated services that step in when things go wrong.

Prevention and early intervention

In our last homelessness strategy we showed how the shift from dealing with the effects of homelessness to addressing its causes was helping many more people from being homeless in the first place.

This approach has continued to deliver excellent results and we see no reason to change course. If anything, it

² Department for Communities and Local Government: *Statutory Homelessness in England: the experience of families and 16-17 year olds*, 2008

supports the argument for working even further 'upstream' to better understand and tackle some of the wider experiences of homelessness that make households and individuals susceptible to it.

We know that preventing homelessness is more cost effective³ than dealing with its consequences, and it delivers far better outcomes for those concerned. For these reasons, we will re-double our efforts to make prevention and early intervention the backbone of our approach.

In 2012 the York Fairness Commission highlighted how some residents were not fully sharing in the city's wealth and relative success. It called on the council and other agencies to help close gaps in income, health and wellbeing. The York Child Poverty Strategy and the Financial Inclusion Plan are driving improvements for households struggling with low incomes and little financial resilience and the newly established Health and Wellbeing Board provides new opportunities to develop better integrated services across a wide range of issues.

These strategies and others that seek to improve the life chances and standard of living of local residents make a

³ A report in 2012 found that the average annual cost of homelessness was between £24,000 and £30,000 per person – Evidenced Review of the Cost of Homelessness, DCLG, August 2012.

significant contribution towards preventing homelessness.

Core services

Whilst the prevention approach has worked for many, there are still those whose homelessness we find difficult to prevent, either because they contact us too late or their situation arises as a result of some rapid unforeseen event.

When homelessness is threatened or does occur there is a range of services available. The council has a statutory duty to provide accommodation for families with children and vulnerable individuals in priority need who are homeless through no fault of their own. This can either be in the social rented sector or in suitable private rented accommodation. Sometimes the most appropriate accommodation is not available immediately so households can be placed into temporary accommodation.

Regardless of whether or not the council has a duty to accommodate, it must provide advice and assistance to all those threatened with homelessness. The council provides a comprehensive housing advice and information service (called Housing Options) that is open to a broader range of people than those who would be

statutorily homeless. It also directly supports and works with a wide range of partners to deliver advice services, debt services, hostel and other supported accommodation for vulnerable people.

Homelessness review

In July 2012 the York Homelessness Forum began reviewing homelessness and homelessness services in York. It looked at the housing market and pressures within it that contribute to peoples housing problems. It also looked at patterns of homelessness, including its main causes and the types of households affected.⁴

One message came out loud and clear. We are entering particular choppy waters as far as the wider economy and its impacts on household budgets and the housing market are concerned. Most commentators anticipate increasing demands on housing advice, homelessness and related services as a result.

As you will see below, some of the positive trends in homelessness achieved over the past few years are

⁴ A wide range of evidence was used to understand the nature of homelessness in York and the reasons why people become susceptible to it. The evidence base included the York Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2011, Child Poverty Strategy, Financial Inclusion Strategy, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the York Fairness Commission report, as well as detailed business intelligence gathered as part of ongoing service delivery. Copies of all these documents can be found on the council's website at www.york.gov.uk

starting to decline, consistent with the national picture. There is a strong case for continued investment in services that enable people to avoid a slide into homelessness during this difficult time.

An increasingly challenging housing market

York's housing market is characterised by high levels of housing demand. Strong competition for accommodation from a growing population has fuelled high house prices and private sector rents. **Final addition / amended to be inserted here to note that prices have been higher for many years and that York is a net exporter of people for employment**

Strong competition, coupled with a relatively small supply of affordable rented homes means those least able to compete in the housing market can find their options limited. Young people, young families and vulnerable households are particularly disadvantaged by current housing options.

High demand is set to continue. A Centre for Cities report in 2012 identified York as the third fastest growing city in the country with an increase in population of 23,300 between 2000 and 2010. New housing supply has not kept pace with demand and problems in the wider economy have slowed development even further.

There are around 4,500 households on the Housing Register, waiting for the offer of an affordable rented home. The number of people joining the register each week is growing yet with turnover of around 550 vacant properties per year many on the list face never being offered accommodation.

Households face growing challenges to access and even sustain accommodation as pressure builds on household budgets. The government's welfare reform package is set to add further pressure to those with the least financial resources such as those on benefits, including a growing number of in-work claimant households.

We expect these pressures to generate rising demand for housing advice, support and homelessness services in the years to come.

More households approaching the council for help

During 2011/12 the council saw a 76 per cent increase in demand for housing advice and information from people worried about their accommodation. We successfully prevented 993 households from being homeless or from presenting as homeless, up from 631 in the previous year.

Homelessness prevention tools

There are a wide range of tools to help prevent homelessness. The most effective ones during 2011/12 included:

- Debt advice
- Crisis intervention
- Negotiation / Legal advocacy
- Resolving benefits issues
- Conciliation

Preventing homelessness is cost-effective⁵:

- The cost of mediation - for example, resolving family disputes to avoid someone becoming homeless - is nine times less expensive than finding someone new accommodation
- Advice on housing options, such as how to solve benefit problems or helping people to manage their finances, is estimated at around nine times less expensive than finding someone new accommodation
- The costs of a rent deposit scheme are estimated to be eight less than providing accommodation under the main homelessness duty

Bucking the trend in households accepted as homeless

⁵ Communities and Local Government advice demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of preventing homelessness, published in 2010

Of the 215 households that presented as homeless and for which a homeless decision was taken in 2011/12, 151 were accepted as being homeless and in priority need, down from 183 in the previous year. This is against a national increase in homelessness acceptances over the same period.

Over 40 per cent of these households had dependent children and 51 per cent were young people under 25, well above the national rate of 35 per cent. However, the trend in young people accepted as homeless has been downwards since 2008/09 and the picture so far in 2012/13 is consistent with this.

Female lone parents represent the largest single group of households accepted as homeless at 37 per cent of all households.

The pressures on young people looks set to continue. A study by Homeless Link found welfare cuts were increasing the chances of young people becoming homeless. It said changes in eligibility and benefit rates had made it harder for young people to find private accommodation, leading to 50 per cent more young people seeking support.

The main causes of homelessness remain unchanged

In percentage terms, the main causes of homelessness have remained fairly consistent over the years. Last year the main cause was eviction by family or friends, followed by relationship breakdown and end of an assured short hold tenancy.

Homelessness arising as a result of eviction by family or friends predominantly involves young people or young families. The level of exclusion by parents in York has dropped significantly from 38 per cent in 2010/11 to 24 per cent but is still well above the national rate.

The rate of homelessness as a result of relationship breakdown in York is almost double the national rate at 32 per cent.

Too many households in temporary accommodation:

Given the shortage of affordable homes, many of those accepted as homeless and in priority needs are placed into temporary accommodation.⁶

There were 93 households in temporary accommodation at the end of 2011/12. This has risen further over the first half of 2012/13 but is significantly down on the 227 households just 5 five years ago. However, the number remains unacceptably high given the reduction in

⁶ This includes purpose built hostels and accommodation schemes. Very little use is now made of bed and breakfast accommodation.

homeless acceptances and the opening of Howe Hill hostel for young people.

Rising levels of rough sleeping:

The number of people sleeping rough has remained low throughout the last few years at around two people (based on CLG assessment criteria). However, recent figures show a marked increase as pressures in the local housing market and the wider economy build up.

Those that remain street homeless are encouraged to work with early intervention and prevention services to resolve their situation.

Aims and priorities

The homelessness review found that our existing strategic aims had delivered effective results in the face of increasing demands on services.

We have adopted the same strategic aims for this new strategy plus an additional one to reflect an even stronger focus on early intervention and prevention. We also identified a number of emerging pressures and gaps in services that we must begin to address.

1. Enable people to avoid housing crisis through integrated early intervention and prevention approaches

- We will continue to identify the underlying causes of homelessness as part of housing needs assessments and ensure that everyone gets advice at the earliest possible stage to prevent them from experiencing a housing crisis.
- We will give particular focus to the main causes of homelessness in York and the higher rates of young people and young families approaching the council for help. This will involve much earlier work with families⁷ to reduce the rate of family exclusions and, in certain target wards, do more to raise young people's awareness of housing options.
- We will continue to implement a positive youth accommodation pathway for those that cannot stay within the family network or are leaving care. This will be supported by wider work such as that aiming to raise educational attainment, tackle youth unemployment, reduce teenage pregnancy and improve health and wellbeing. We will continue offering support to schools to identify young people (or whole families) that may be at risk of

⁷ Including those families that meet the government's 'Troubled Families' criteria

homelessness and provide early support for housing and other needs.

- Similarly, we will work with health professionals to identify those at risk, making ‘every contact count’ to reduce health inequalities and prevent homelessness. The new Public Health Outcomes Framework aims to ensure the mental health needs of homeless people and those at risk are properly taken into account by local services. We will work closely with the new Health and Well-being Board to deliver this outcome.
- Early engagement with drug and alcohol treatment agencies and interaction with the criminal justice system will remain critical points for identifying and helping those at risk of homelessness.
- We will continue to develop clear housing pathways for each specific client group such as those leaving prison, hospital or social care that includes appropriate accommodation and support. We will continue to develop our approach for those with more complex needs, such as the recently established Mental Health Tracking Panel.
- Finally, as the national economic slowdown and rising prices place growing pressures on household budgets we will continue to support access to

financial advice, skills and employment services. We will build upon our work with voluntary sector partners to deliver free and independent debt advice and refer or signpost those at risk of homelessness. Within this, will be a particularly strong focus on those affected by welfare reform. Improving the energy efficiency of properties will be a key measure to reduce the incidence of fuel poverty within the city.

Key investment requirements:

- Ongoing focus on supporting families
- Reducing health inequalities with a particular focus on those with mental health needs and drug and alcohol dependency and teenage pregnancy
- Identifying and supporting those leaving prison, hospital or care to develop clear housing pathways to independent living
- Reducing the impact of financial exclusion

2. Ensure trusted, timely and accessible housing information and advice is available so people can make informed housing decisions and plan ahead

- We will provide timely and accessible housing advice and information to ensure planned housing moves and

continue to apply our key prevention tools when people approach us for help.

- We will continue to develop the Housing Options service so it appeals to a wider range of customers, not just those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We will build on our work developing advice and information for specific customer groups, such as older people, those with learning disabilities and private sector landlords. The move into new council accommodation during 2013 will greatly improve the customer experience and enable co-location of services providing a 'one-stop-shop' approach.
- We will work in a collaborative way with a wide range of partners across the city so that housing advice and information is consistent and linked up. We will refer vulnerable clients into relevant support services at the earliest opportunity.

Key investment requirements:

- Maintaining capacity within advice and information services to meet increasing customer demand for housing, debt, employment and related services.
- Supporting outreach advice services to help mitigate the impact of welfare reform

3. Ensure the supply of and fair access to accommodation sufficient to meet housing needs

- The York Housing Strategy sets out our aims for ensuring more homes, including affordable homes, are built to meet identified housing need. We continue to work closely with registered providers and private developers on new supply and regularly review our housing and planning policies to facilitate new development. The 'Get York Building' programme launched in 2012 aims to unlock stalled development. City of York Council will further develop its affordable housing asset plan to outline opportunities for new council homes.
- It also shows what we are doing to make better use of the existing housing stock, such as tackling long term empty properties, converting and adapting homes to changing needs and addressing the high levels of under occupation. In early 2013 we will be offering additional incentives and support for households within council properties to downsize.
- We will implement the York Tenancy Strategy and expect social housing providers in the city to adhere to its guidelines when developing their tenancy policies. The strategy roots the allocation of social and affordable rent homes to housing need whilst

strengthening local connection criteria for access to the housing register.

- The tenancy strategy aims to remove the historic disadvantage experienced by armed forces and ex armed forces personnel in relation to local connection criteria to help ease the transition into civilian life and avoid housing crisis.
- Increasing access to the private rented sector is essential to manage housing demand. Unfortunately, vulnerable households and those with the least financial resources can find it hard to compete in this market. We will continue to support a suitable private rented offer by working closely with landlords, providing advice on fulfilling their legal responsibilities and assisting them to find tenants through our innovative social lettings agency (YorHome). Rent bonds/deposits will continue to open up accommodation options. This remains a very challenging area due to the unregulated nature of the tenure and the predominance of 'amateur landlords'.
- We will continue to work closely with private registered providers (principally housing associations) to ensure that nomination agreements are maximised and that providers play a growing role in meeting the housing needs of vulnerable households in the future.
- Building on the success of YorHome, we will look to develop landlord and tenant accreditation partnerships. When necessary we will use enforcement action where standards fall below acceptable levels.
- Reducing the use of temporary accommodation will be an ongoing priority. We will make more use of suitable private rented sector accommodation to discharge homelessness duty using provisions set out in the Localism Act 2011.
- We will review our housing allocations policy to ensure it assists those affected by welfare reform and armed services personnel who have been placed at a disadvantage in relation to local connection criteria. Our programme of welfare reform mitigation involves ensuring landlords are aware of the changes and how these affect vulnerable households.
- We will continue to keep the use of bed and breakfast accommodation at the lowest levels possible, though we recognise that mounting pressure on homeless services will make this a challenging goal. Within this we will not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in such accommodation nor place any families in Bed and Breakfast except in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks

- We will implement an ongoing programme of improvements to hostel accommodation and seek to maximise funding opportunities to support this. A particular focus will be better provision of accommodation for people with mental illness and complex needs.
- The reduction in the most obvious form of homelessness, rough sleeping, will remain a high priority and will support national initiatives designed to tackle it. City of York Council has recently signed up to the five principles underpinning the No Second Night Out initiative.

Key investment requirements:

- Develop new affordable homes
- Providing downsizing incentives for under occupying social housing tenants
- Maintaining standards within the private rented sector
- Provision of specialist mental health/complex needs temporary accommodation
- Ongoing development of young people's temporary accommodation

4. Ensure people with housing support needs have these needs fully assessed and have access to the services to help sustain independent living

- We will continue to provide vulnerable customers that require a multi-agency approach with a joint assessment and care plan so they can live successfully within the community. We will provide ongoing monitoring of needs to ensure timely and fully integrated support when required.
- We will support people to remain in their home through practical help to maintain tenancies, such as budgeting advice, furnishing assistance, signposting and advocacy for other services. We particularly want to address the high number of failed tenancies amongst young people.
- We will enable those with mental health problems and complex needs to achieve independent living through the provision of more specialist support.
- We will learn from research into the housing and support needs of homeless women and consider options for more specific support where required.

Key investment requirements:

- Joint assessments for all vulnerable customers

- Ongoing support for tenancy sustainment particularly for young people and those with complex needs

5. Ensure the effective co-ordination of service providers whose activities help prevent homelessness or meet people's accommodation and support needs

- The York Homelessness Forum will continue to meet to deliver and review this strategy, under the strategic leadership of City of York Council. This approach has served the city well, ensuring effective partnership working across a diverse range of services with good links into relevant client groups.
- Whilst effective partnership has been the bedrock of our success to date, there is always room for improvement and we look forward to working more closely with health service colleagues under the auspices of the Health and Wellbeing Board. A particular focus will be to gain a better shared understanding of how early homelessness prevention results in much better outcomes for people and significant financial savings for health and other budgets further down the line.
- We plan to continually monitor the local impacts of welfare reform to inform the development and review

of policy at the national and local level. We aim to share such information as widely as possible.

Key investment requirements:

- Joint awareness raising between those working within housing and health on the benefits of early intervention and homelessness prevention

Action plan

The commitments outlined above are set out more fully in the strategy action plan. This is available for download from the council's website at www.york.gov.uk/housing or you can request a copy using the contact details below.

Making sure we deliver

The homelessness strategy steering group will meet at least annually to review progress against the action plan to ensure it remains responsive to emerging needs. We will publish a short annual report that will be published on the council's website in summer each year.

Being the best – A 'Gold Standard' approach

In August 2012 government set out ten challenges for local authorities and their partners to consider. If adopted these could lead to all local homelessness services meeting the standards of the best.

- City of York Council, as strategic lead on homelessness in York, to adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
- Partners across the statutory and voluntary sectors working effectively together to prevent and address homelessness including education, employment and training needs
- To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice
- To adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
- To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support
- To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
- To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme

- To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a pro-active approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs
- To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks

In York we strive to be the very best homelessness service possible and indeed one that leads from the front through local innovation and embracing good practice. We will regularly benchmark our approach against the Gold Standard and take action where gaps are identified to ensure we remain amongst the best.

Your comments and further information

We would like to know what you think about this strategy or homelessness in general. You can leave comment or feed back any time at:

yourservice.yoursay@york.gov.uk

We will use your comments to our review meetings.

If you would like more information about any aspect of this document please contact us on (019014) 554379

Further copies of this strategy are available to download from the council's website www.york.gov.uk/housing or on request using the telephone number above.