

Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013

Copeland Borough Council

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1. A note from Cllr George Clements, Deputy Leader, Promoting Prosperity

One of the Council's key objectives is to tackle homelessness as robustly as possible so that its effect on individuals and the community as a whole is minimised.

It is not an easy task and cannot be undertaken by any one organisation alone. As the first Homelessness strategy draws to a close it is with this in mind that thanks and appreciation is given to Staff, Elected Members and Partner Organisations for their input and hard work throughout.

During the early part of 2008 we conducted a detailed and thorough review of homelessness in the District. We have undertaken this through consultation with service users, staff and partner agencies as well as having regard to statistics and relevant reports.

Thanks and appreciation are also given to the service users who voluntarily offered their personal views and experiences of the services provided. These have helped us take forward ideas for improvements and many of the actions in the Delivery Plan stem from this consultation.

Cllr George Clements.

2. Foreword

In 2002 the Council responded positively to the Communities and Local Government Department's (CLG) changing agenda with regard to homelessness, in particular the shift towards prevention and partnership working. Since the production of the first Homelessness Strategy in July 2003 some progress in reducing homelessness and improving homelessness services has been made. However with new emerging agendas the Council is keen to see progress improved so that the needs of individuals and the community as a whole are strengthened.

However there are a number of key challenges for the future:

- To continue and improve the progress and performance made to date in reducing homelessness in the borough.
- To identify how those affected by homelessness can be helped into employment and/ or training schemes
- To further reduce, the number of households living in temporary accommodation by 2010.
- To further strengthen partnership working so that the Council fully meets its strategic objectives
- To make sure all vulnerable adults and young people receive an appropriate package of support to live in a settled home

This Strategy 2008 - 2013 will build on the very positive work undertaken to date, ensuring that a long term vision is taken and that the homelessness service is robust and responsive to changing needs. The Council is determined to continue working with all relevant partner organisations and build further on the links already made.

The Council will not be complacent and it recognises that there are a number of areas where more work is needed.

These will be addressed through the Homelessness Delivery Plan which will steer the 2008-2013 Homelessness Strategy to success.

3. Introduction

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 there is a legal requirement for all Councils to develop a Homelessness Strategy.

The Strategy must set out the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are or will be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming homeless. This can be provided directly or indirectly as long as its provision is effective and appropriate.

It is incumbent upon each Council to make sure that the Strategy is consistent with other local plans, policies and strategies that relate to and/or have some impact on homelessness both to the individual and the wider community.

The Homelessness Strategy is a key component of the Housing Strategy which is produced in response to national Housing policy and the desire of the Council to best meet local needs. The Government's strategy for tackling homelessness is outlined

in Sustainable Communities: Homes for All and Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives, published in 2005

The homelessness review 2008 – available separately at www.copeland.gov.uk - has helped determine the direction and content of this second strategy so that it builds on previous success particularly in relation to homelessness prevention.

In order to drive forward the Strategy, a Delivery Plan will be used to monitor continued improvement to services whether provided by the council or partner agencies. It provides a mechanism to make sure actions are addressed correctly and on time. The Delivery Plan was developed in partnership with agencies who make up the Copeland Homelessness Forum. The Delivery Plan is included as an appendix to this strategy.

Key areas that the homelessness review has looked at are;

- The principle causes of homelessness and how it can be prevented.
- Current levels of homelessness
- The provision of various housing options and choice given to households facing homelessness (preventative work)
- The use of and length of stay in temporary accommodation
- How the Council and its partners are performing compared with national and regional performance comparisons.
- What services are provided across the district and by whom
- Customer views and expectations of the service provided

4. Vision and Aims

The Council recognises that homelessness hinders individual and community growth. Its effect on individuals are not limited to housing but to health, training, education and overall self esteem. We recognise that solving one problem in isolation is not a satisfactory remedy and that people must be given choices and options. The Councils vision is to have the correct partnerships in place to maximise the potential for people to have a settled and secure home and enjoy the consequent benefits for themselves and society as a whole.

The aim of the strategy is to prevent homelessness wherever possible through the provision of appropriate advice and support to those at risk. Early intervention and strong partnership working is essential if homelessness is to be reduced during the coming years. Increasing customer options and capturing

information early so that resources can be deployed effectively are also integral themes to the Strategy.

However the strategy also takes into account that housing and combating homelessness is not just about handing over keys. It endorses the need to address the relationship between homelessness and access to a range of other services and options. It recognises the link to life chances as a whole and the need for people to be able to make choices and be able to improve their lives through work and education in line with the “Services for all” agenda.

With this in mind the following key objectives have been established and form the backbone of the 2008-2013 Homelessness strategy and Delivery Plan.

- 1. Prevent homelessness**
- 2. Improve performance Monitoring**
- 3. Increase access to Housing**
- 4. Tackle the wider causes of homelessness**

All of the above are consistent with the council’s overarching aims and objectives as well as those at the sub regional level.

5. Strategic Links

This Strategy cannot be successful in isolation. It has been developed with reference to a range of other regional corporate strategies and plans. In particular it takes account of the North West Regional Homelessness Strategy and two sub regional Cumbria-wide Strategies in Housing and Homelessness. It also links to the Local Area Agreements which focus on how services will be improved in Cumbria as a whole.

It takes account of the CLG’s own strategy for tackling homelessness “Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives (March 2005)” which focuses on: Preventing homelessness, providing support for vulnerable people tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness, helping more people move away from rough sleeping and providing more settled homes.

Copelands Homelessness Strategy sits within the framework of the Governments national policies on homelessness and that of the Housing Corporation which issued its own homelessness strategy ‘Tackling homelessness’ in November 2006 (this strategy sets out what the Corporation expects Housing Associations to do in contributing to the prevention and tackling of homelessness).

Key related Strategies are indicated below;

Related Strategy	Nature of links
Cumbria Local Area Agreement under the Cumbria Strategic Partnership, formed in 2001	There are five themes, one of which is housing; affordable housing, homelessness and supporting people are identified.
North West Regional Homelessness Strategy 2008	<p>There are three Priorities identified;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent homelessness • Increase access to a choice of settled homes, • Develop plans and activity based on a robust understanding of homelessness and housing need
Regional Housing Strategy 2006-2011	<p>It has four main priorities, supported by the Housing Policy Themes of the Cumbria Housing Strategy. These are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regeneration • Affordable housing • Creating decent homes • Homes with support or additional facilities
Private Sector Housing Strategy (currently under review)	This will assist in developing relationships with Private landlords and increasing the number of affordable, settled homes in the area which is consistent with the aims of the Homelessness Strategy
Supporting People 5-Year Strategy for	The Key aim is to support the well-being

Cumbria 2005-2010	<p>of Cumbria's people and communities by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting people to be Independent • Supporting people to be part of their community • Supporting people to have a real choice about the services they need <p>There are clear links with the objectives within the Homelessness Strategy</p>
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6. Homelessness in Copeland: The Review

In early 2008 a thorough review of the 2003-08 Strategy was undertaken. The aim of the review was to;

- provide a comprehensive evaluation of the extent, causes and demography of homelessness in the Borough
- establish the effectiveness and relevance of existing services in meeting the varied needs and demands of those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- identify gaps in service provision affecting those that are threatened with or become homeless
- establish the Council's priorities for the coming years to prevent homelessness wherever possible

In undertaking the review the Council has consulted widely and analysed data from a range of sources. Performance comparisons have been made against national and regional data. This approach has resulted in a holistic understanding of the key challenges facing the Council in delivering services to homeless people.

6.1.Key findings in review

The review has shown that there were early indications of improvement in terms of reductions in homelessness acceptances and time spent in temporary accommodation, but that this has not been maintained.

Whilst there have been some successes in performance, overall the service has suffered from a lack of a coherent prevention strategy. It appears that the transition to more prevention and partnership working has not been made in any sufficient depth and that a toolkit of options tailored to the needs of customers is required.

Prevention activity therefore needs to be increased, be integral to the homelessness strategy and carried out early. Home visits, mediation, useful working relationships with private landlords and effective intervention through floating support services are all needed to achieve better results. This is particularly important given the source of homelessness applications as in 2006/07 the two main causes were;

- Parents, other relatives and friends no longer willing to accommodate (35%)
- Loss of Assured Shorthold tenancy (22%)

These two sets of reasons make up some 57% of homelessness during 2006/07. As such there is strong reason to believe that significant inroads could be made to reduce homelessness if further energy and resources were targeted at these two groups.

Households accepted as homeless generally include children or an expectant mother which follows the national trend. There are, however, still a significant number of accepted households which are made up of vulnerable individuals.

Improved and strengthened partnership working is needed to allow resources to be maximised and targeted. Data and information from other agencies could be used to inform ongoing needs and it was unclear in the review if such data is captured at the present time. Increased use of joint working protocols is required and a directory of contacts should be developed to enable every agency to see who else is working in the borough, and how they can be contacted.

The use of the private rented sector needs to be maximised so that fewer tenancies result in homelessness and access to this sector can be increased. Copeland is receiving considerably more approaches as a result of private sector tenancies coming to an end when compared to the North West region and England as a whole.

Publicity needs to be improved so that agencies and clients know what information and services are available.

The Rent Deposit Scheme (DIGS) scheme is well thought of by clients but it appeared it wasn't systematically discussed as a housing option with all those who approached for assistance. The scheme needs to be expanded.

Nomination and monitoring arrangements were not in place with Housing Associations/RSLs so that best use is made of available stock. If in place these would also help assist with discharging the councils obligations

Improved performance monitoring and benchmarking is needed so that staff can tailor and adapt services accordingly.

Housing market data suggests that affordability is not a major concern at the present time and that mortgage repossession is not a particular issue. However it is recognised that this could change over the life of the strategy and therefore needs to be monitored.

6.2.Key Statistics

As part of the homelessness review, a full range of data was analysed to understand the borough and its relationship with housing need and homelessness. These are set out in detail in the review document, and summarised here.

- Unemployment is lower than average standing at 2.5% in March 2007. Sellafield nuclear site which is currently being decommissioned will have a direct result on unemployment levels
- There is limited employment opportunity in the area compounded by the fact that only 17.1 per cent of the population are qualified to National Vocational Qualification level four or above, compared to 27.4 per cent UK as a whole.
- According to the 2001 Census, Copeland has a resident population of 69,200 and a mid 2006/07 estimate of 70,300. The population is predicted to increase to 78,060 (by 12.8%) by 2026
- The 5 year Migration Projections below taken from figures provided by Cumbria County Council show that between 2001 and 2026 there is a projected increase in the number of households from 29533 in 2001 to 41839 in 2026. This represents an increase of 41.7%, which is very substantial.

- The housing stock for the Borough totals 32,396 units of accommodation. In terms of private rented accommodation the district has 6.6% compared to Cumbria which has 11.7%.
- A target to build 80 units of social housing between now and 2011 is currently in place
- At the current time there are 1100 households registered for social housing, on the Council's housing register .
- Parents, relatives and friends wishing to evict and private landlords evicting make up 57% of homelessness acceptances in 2006/07
- In 2006/07 69% of all acceptances involved households with children or where a household member was pregnant
- Between 2006 and 2007 the period October to December showed an increase of 167% in acceptances in Copeland. This compares to a fall of 12% and 24% for the North West region and England
- During 2007 91 households were accepted as homeless compared to 63 in 2006. This represents a 44 % increase and is a major departure from Regional and National trends.
- Within the meaning of central government BVPI 213 no cases of homelessness have been reported as being prevented by direct casework intervention despite a target of 40 cases. Some of this is due to the inability to effectively capture data on preventions.

6.3.Consultation

To fully understand, establish the priorities and map service provision now and in the future a range of consultation was undertaken with stakeholders, including staff, service users and partner agencies as outlined below. This ensured all stakeholders had an opportunity to feed into the review and get their particular issues raised and it enabled them to contribute to the formulation of this Strategy.

During April 2008 a Customer Satisfaction Survey was carried out. JenkinsDuval housing consultants were commissioned to carry out this work so that service users could talk openly and honestly about their experiences of being homeless in Copeland. The results of this are available in a separate report.

During April 2008 a short survey was sent out to partner agencies asking for their views on homelessness issues in Copeland. The response rate to this was low, with

just two agencies replying. This may be an indication of poor links with the Council or a low level understanding of the importance of tackling homelessness within the wider context. Either way it strongly suggests that work is needed to improve this in the future.

Once a draft strategy had been drawn up, our partner agencies were invited to contribute to the development of the final version of the strategy. This was done by circulating a draft version of the strategy and by inviting stakeholders to a Stakeholder Conference held in July.

A detailed mapping exercise was completed to understand what services were being provided and what gaps may exist. Partner agencies contributed to the production of this.

6.4.Key strategic Priorities

The following have been identified as the main strategic priorities for the 2008 - 2013 Strategy taking into consideration the Homelessness review and the National and Regional Priorities;

1. Prevent homelessness

Although the Council made a good start on developing the homelessness prevention, this success has not been maintained. One of the key aims of this Strategy is to develop more prevention tools for staff to use in order to effectively tackle homelessness. This means developing practical initiatives such as a sanctuary scheme, early warning protocols with agencies, increased use of the rent deposit scheme, offering mediation to young people, accessing Discretionary Housing Payments, and providing a full range of take-away advice and information leaflets. Crucial to making these initiatives work, is effective joint working with agencies and effective referral routes into services. Developing a comprehensive directory of services will be the first step in enabling this.

2. Improve performance Monitoring

Understanding how Copeland performs, especially in comparison to others, is important so that we can, where necessary, learn from others and introduce ideas from best practice to improve. Over the life of this Strategy the Council will look to develop a suite of performance information, which can track performance and flag any issues around performance early. Performance

information must be cascaded to staff who are doing the front line job both in the form of targets and feedback. In delivering this Strategy with partner agencies, it is anticipated that arrangements with partners will be formalised through protocols and service level agreements. The Council will look to the multi-agency Homelessness Forum to monitor and manage performance on prevention and tackling homelessness.

3. Increase access to Housing

The Council aims to assist all those that approach it as threatened with homelessness with a realistic opportunity to access housing. This includes assisting those in greatest need through the housing register, managed by Copeland Homes, and making better use of the private rented sector in Copeland. The Council will therefore review its own allocations policy to ensure appropriate priority is given to those who are homeless and those who fall within one of the five statutory reasonable preference groups. In addition, the Council recognises the role that the private rented sector has to play and will be engaging with private landlords to explore opportunities for closer working in coming years /months.

The Council is also very keen to work closely with partner RSLs in tackling homelessness.

4. Tackle the wider causes of homelessness

The Council is keen to tackle some of the wider issues relating to homelessness, and a range of actions are programmed into the Delivery Plan to reflect this. This includes close working with partner agencies to address issues around the provision of support for homeless households and wider issues such as training and employment.

7. Predicting Future levels of Homelessness

Since the first homelessness strategies were published in the summer of 2003, there have been significant changes, nationally and locally, as to how homelessness is addressed. Prevention is a key driver in reducing homelessness and is expected to compliment other wider aims such as improving opportunities for work or training. Proactive work helps reduce reactive and crisis driven responses.

Mirroring experiences in other parts of the country, there have also been notable changes in the profiles and types of households who seek advice and assistance from homelessness services. For example there have been increases in the number of people with complex needs who tend to take up disproportionate amounts of frontline service time and resource.

It is difficult to predict future needs, but the current socio-economic and demographic context suggests that there will be further difficulties for many households trying to access good quality affordable housing, especially in light of the current “Credit Crunch”.

However, notwithstanding this, what the review has told us is that locally Copeland is likely to see further increases in homelessness unless it develops a more coherent strategy to prevent homelessness and reduce the need for temporary accommodation.

It is essential that within the strategy effective performance monitoring and benchmarking of data and trends is in place to capture issues early and take the necessary action early. In this respect improvements in partnership working and how all agencies can help to see warning signs or predict changes is vital to help steer the Delivery plan.

There are a number of possible sources that can impact on future levels of homelessness. These are;

- The potential increase in the numbers of young people who will approach the service, because they cannot afford to access their own housing unassisted
- The potential increases due to unemployment as the decommissioning of Sellafield continues
- The possible increase in homelessness due to family and friends evicting because access to the owner occupied sector is made harder by Mortgage Companies and the lack of private rented accommodation
- The increasing numbers who will approach because of the rising costs of home ownership and the risk of mortgage repossession- this may be small but may increase as general cost of living increases
- The impact of Local Housing Allowance on the private rented sector

- Specific vulnerable clients who need a package of support when leaving institutions and to then sustain tenancies.

Nationally we know from the trends in homelessness applications and acceptances and levels of clients in temporary accommodation that homelessness is more manageable now than it was 5 years ago and that reductions can be sustained

However, given the results of the review and the issues above, the Council is keen to tackle the root causes of homelessness and use our Delivery Plan as a way to make significant improvements

The next 5 years may see some changes in homelessness but if we work strategically and in partnership we can establish downwards trends in applications and acceptances as well as improve performance on homelessness prevention

8. Accommodation for Homeless households

As can be seen from the homelessness review there will be a continuing need for temporary accommodation..

The baseline level for households in temporary accommodation recorded at the end of December 2004 was 12. The target to achieve for 2010 is 6. As at the end of 2007 there were 10 households in temporary accommodation. Numbers are small but any increase in homelessness presentations will undoubtedly make it harder to reach the target.

The length of stay in Bed and Breakfast accommodation rose from an average one week in 2005/06 to seven weeks by 06/07 and therefore action needs to be taken to address this. There is also a need to look at what alternatives can be provided in the north of the Borough and households here were sometimes placed outside of the boundary causing disruption to family life and alienation from support networks.

Improved working with the Private rented sector to provide more good quality accommodation is required so that availability of housing for those facing homelessness can be increased.

9. Preventing homelessness

In June 2007 CLG published homelessness policy briefing number 19, "Local Authority Survey of Homelessness Prevention". The briefing summarised the most successful types of prevention tools and included information barriers and solutions for success. The briefing made clear that the need for Councils to provide for temporary accommodation can be reduced by preventing households from becoming homeless.

It is clear that effective prevention work can reduce homelessness, which in turn helps minimise disruption to individuals' lives and impacts on wider services. It is understood that 71% of local authorities reported to CLG that they have more officer time preventing homelessness than they do assessing homelessness applications. Copeland BC is keen to structure its resources so it is best placed to meet these needs over the coming years.

The Council is aware, both from this survey and from the work carried out during the homelessness review, that officers within the Homelessness Service do not have an effective toolkit at their disposal to help them in preventing homelessness. Central to this strategy is the need to develop more housing options for customers of the service. The Council is keen to learn from others in this respect and as such the Delivery plan includes a section relation to performance monitoring and benchmarking so that there is the availability to contact other Authorities to understand what works well and what makes a difference. In addition a number of tasks have been identified under the heading "Tackle the wider causes of homelessness" so that partnership working can be strengthened to target resources more effectively

During 2007 91 households were accepted as homeless compared to 63 in 2006. This represented a 44 % increase and a major departure from Regional and National trends.

In addition, within the meaning of central government BVPI 213 no cases of homelessness were reported as being prevented by direct casework intervention despite a target of 40 cases.

These issues and others are addressed within the Delivery plan.

10. Supporting the homeless and those threatened with homelessness

Since 2003, the Council has been in a position to be able to access support services for homeless people, thanks to provision made by Supporting People funding. This work is on-going but there is a need to strengthen access.

The review has identified areas where improvements can be made in service provision. Gaps identified through the Housing market assessments and consultation indicate that there is a need for more floating support for most client groups, a need for some form of direct access accommodation, a need for move on accommodation for ex offenders and more assistance for those suffering Domestic Violence.

The mapping exercise and survey of agencies also suggests a need to make improvements in the understanding of what help is available and the need for joined up working.

Making sure there is a smooth transition from institutional care settings and that tenancies are sustained is important to avoid an increase in repeat homelessness and demand on other associated services. Reviewing the way support is provided may help to target more effectively and this has been built into the Delivery plan.

The Government wants to encourage all local authorities to offer services to drive down youth homelessness such as peer mentoring and supported lodgings. The need to help give younger people a fighting chance is seen as very important and we are keen to participate in this agenda.

11. Housing services and Employment

We know that unemployment and poverty are factors associated with homelessness and many of the householders who present as homeless in Copeland are unemployed and in receipt of benefits. This makes it very important that joint working is effective. We need to connect homeless people not only to available opportunities for work and training but also education to help give them the right skills to meet employers' needs. In order to improve the prospects of those affected by homelessness the Council will strive to;

- find ways to assess the impact of homelessness on employment opportunities and access to training across the district.
- seek to ensure that those affected by homelessness are not disadvantaged in accessing employment and training opportunities.

- successfully connect homeless people to existing Employment and Training Programmes
- ensure that relevant organisations consider people who are homeless within their strategies and plans

In doing so this would be consistent with the aim of generating mixed and thriving communities as stated in “Ends and Means: The future roles of social housing in England” published by John Hills, February 2007

12. Resources

The Council has a number of resources to us to tackle homelessness, and recognises that to successfully implement the Delivery Plan, it will need to consider what other resources we can access. The resources available now are:

- General Funding from Council
- CLG funding through Homelessness Grant and any other funding available in light of the current economic climate
- Supporting people funding to provide support to prevent homelessness
- Partnerships with other agencies allowing us to tap into and benefit from the resources of others not only within the Borough but also further afield in Cumbria. This is enhanced through our strong sense of joint working
- Service savings through a spend to save policy

13. Monitoring delivery

In order to take forward the Strategy for 2008-2013 clear tasks have been identified and are located within the 5 year Delivery plan. It is recognised that new and

emerging tasks may become apparent in the lifetime of the Strategy and these will be addressed appropriately. The Delivery plan identifies the key strategic priorities and is consistent with National and Regional agendas.

The officer with responsibility for driving forward this strategy and monitoring progress against the Delivery Plan is the Housing Strategy Manager. In the early days the Strategic Housing Panel will be involved in monitoring delivery against targets and overall progress. Council Members will receive 6 monthly progress reports. It is the role of the Copeland Homelessness Forward to monitor progress against targets, to assess the impact that the strategy is having overall in Copeland and to identify other actions for the Delivery Plan throughout the life of the strategy.

Regular monitoring and updating will take place with clear checkpoints to make sure the strategy is successful and that any amendments are made early. Benchmarking coupled with giving staff the opportunity to be innovative in preventing homelessness will help drive the Strategy forward although overall the Homelessness Forum will take responsibility for delivering the Strategy to success.

14. The Delivery Plan

The Delivery Plan is attached as Appendix 1. It defines the key strategic objectives and the tasks that are needed to bring success. It establishes what outcomes are anticipated and how these would be achieved.