

COPELAND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013-2018: HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION UPDATE

Executive Member: Cllr Geoff Garrity

Lead Officer: Julie Betteridge

Report Author: Jessica Hall

INTRODUCTION

This is an information report for members of the Strategic Housing Panel.

The Council is statutorily required under the Homelessness Act 2002 to have a strategy for preventing homelessness in the Borough. Homelessness prevention means providing people with ways and means to address their housing and other needs to avoid homelessness. This can be done by giving advice and assistance to help them remain in their own home, or by giving advice and assistance to find alternative accommodation before homelessness happens.

COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY (2013-2018)

The Council's Homelessness Strategy was reviewed, updated and agreed in October 2013. A key objective of the Council's homelessness strategy is the prioritisation of homelessness prevention through 6 key actions outlined in the strategy's action plan (Appendix One).

Current Homelessness Prevention Tools

The Council employs a number of homelessness prevention methods which Housing Options Advisors apply in their everyday casework.

Current prevention tools in use are as follows:

- General advice and assistance to those threatened with homelessness (Between 1 April 2014 and 1 September 2014 the Housing Options Team, 180 households have sought advice from the Housing Options Team).
- The Council's Rent Deposit Scheme for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Between 1 April and 1 September 2014, the Rent Deposit Scheme has prevented homelessness for 11 households).
- The Landlord Forum for Private Sector Landlords in Copeland.
- Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Banding under the Cumbria Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
- Mediation and negotiation (family and landlords) by Housing Options Advisors.

- Signposting to Floating Support services.
- The Homelessness Prevention Fund. This has enabled 10 households to remain in their homes since 1 April 2014.
- The Repossession Prevention Fund introduced in June 2014. Since 1 April 2014, 11 households have had possession proceedings commenced against them. These households are contacted by the Housing Options Team. However to date, none have sought further advice from the Council.
- Identifying and resolving housing benefit issues and supporting people with applications.
- Supporting people with Discretionary Housing Payment applications.
- Unfit properties and working with landlords to improve their condition for tenants and taking action where necessary.
- Signposting to debt advice services and agencies.
- Support for the Sanctuary Scheme to enable victims of domestic violence to stay in their homes with professionally installed security measures.

Work Programme for Homelessness Prevention

Recommendations for prioritising the prevention of homelessness are outlined in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.

Members are asked to note the Homelessness Prevention work programme (attached) which has been developed against the action plan. This will be reported to the SHP on a quarterly basis.

1. Review the range of prevention tools used by Copeland Borough Council and introduce additional tools which are available locally – To ascertain and improve levels of prevention in Copeland against the national average and to ensure that prevention tools are for purpose				
Action	How	Milestone/Timescale	Status	Lead Officer
Assess existing methods of prevention by:	Survey service staff	1 September 2014	Complete	Jessica Hall
	Discuss prevention and tools with internal and external partners including support agencies and registered and private housing providers	1 December 2014	In progress – the Senior Housing Options Advisor has started a programme of information and Q&A sessions with various support service providers across the Borough	Jessica Hall
	Benchmark against other Local Authority Housing Options Teams	1 December 2014	In progress	Jessica Hall
	Introduce targets into performance reviews of service staff	May 2015	Pending – the most appropriate way to do this will be considered prior to the 2015-16 service planning and appraisal cycle	Debbie Cochrane/Jessica Hall

	Carry out a survey of service staff on the ease of use of existing methods of recording prevention and amend or introduce new methods as required	31 October 2014	<p>In progress – the current way of recording prevention can be time consuming. This is due to the limited capacity of the current database to record and retrieve data accurately.</p> <p>The team will be introducing Abritas (housing database) at the beginning of October and prevention recording will be updated and streamlined.</p>	Debbie Cochrane/Jessica Hall
2. Following the review of prevention tools, provide training to all local authority officers on homelessness prevention and existing and new tools available. To ensure the Council is compliant with the requirements of legal and statutory guidance and to promote good practice in the team				
Develop a training module for all service staff on methods of prevention	An intensive training programme for all Housing Options Advisors on the legal and statutory guidance including homelessness prevention and relief	29 September 2014 – 3 October 2014	Scheduled annual training programmes	Debbie Cochrane/Jessica Hall
	Monthly focused training/discussion sessions on latest case law/developments and initiatives	Scheduled for week commencing 27 October 2014	Pending – to be scheduled after intensive introductory training programme	Jessica Hall

	Service specific training sessions by external providers (NHAS/Shelter etc)	<p>As required subject to service need.</p> <p>21 August 2014 – NHAS Relationship Breakdown, Domestic Violence and Homelessness (including prevention)</p> <p>23 October 2014 – NHAS/DCLG Youth Homelessness & Prevention</p>	Ongoing - The team take advantage of the free training regularly provided in the County by NHAS/Shelter.	Jessica Hall
3. Keep annual figures for unsuccessful attempts at prevention under review. To ensure that prevention tools are effective and can be altered if levels of unsuccessful prevention in the Borough increase				

Undertake frequent evaluations of the success and effectiveness of prevention in the Borough	Monthly monitoring of prevention and methods of prevention	In place. This is fed into the Council's Risk Management reporting/Top Ten and will also be reported to SHP from December 2014.	Ongoing	Debbie Cochrane/Jessica Hall
	Communications with stakeholders	1 December 2014		
	Post evaluation with service users who have been given prevention assistance (in agreed timescale)	June 2015	System to be in place for follow up	Jessica Hall/Clare Henderson
Keep annual figures for unsuccessful attempts at prevention under review	Monthly monitoring of caseloads and Full Housing Applications.	In place	Currently unsuccessful attempts at prevention are determined by Full Homelessness applications.	Debbie Cochrane/Jessica Hall
	A review of communication to raise awareness of prevention services among potential service users	June 2015		
4.Co-ordinate home visits with partner agencies as appropriate to deliver integrated support. To help people threatened with homelessness maintain their existing accommodation and tackle the main reasons for loss of last settled accommodation.				

Clear criteria for home visits	Criteria for HOAs and customers on what they can expect (standards)	1 October 2014	Home visits with partners (e.g. Housing Associations/Landlords/Support providers) are already part of the offer for those who cannot access the usual service channels. To be developed.	Jessica Hall Jessica Hall/Transformation Programme
	Development of a protocol for good practice in home visiting and set of standards	December 2014		
	WiFi Technology to support the service offer in people’s homes	To be confirmed		
5.Review Annually the use of the prevention fund and make more use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). To help people threatened with homelessness to maintain their existing accommodation.				
Review annually what prevention funding can be used for and increase access to prevention fund money to local authority partners working to prevent homelessness	Create innovative ways of using prevention funding through consultation and partnership working with stakeholders	Annually – by December 2014	In progress – criteria for partners supporting those threatened with homelessness has been produced (April 2014)	
	Working in partnership with DHP through scheduled one to ones	Monthly to be scheduled	Pending	

6. Undertake a review of current floating support services. To ascertain if current services are sufficient and being put to best use so that floating support can be maximised as it is a proven way of enabling people to maintain independent living.				
Assess existing floating support services with stakeholder to consider the effectiveness of existing services and whether additional services could be useful and cost effective.		April 2014 and ongoing	<p>The Housing Options Team have contributed to a recent consultation exercise undertaken by the County Council Supporting People and Prevention Team.</p> <p>The team work closely with the Supporting People Local Area Co-ordinator who is based with the team one day a week and who is also in daily contact to work with clients.</p>	Debbie Cochrane/Jessica Hall with the Copeland Housing Partnership