



Cornwall Homelessness Strategy 2010-2015

March 2010

Housing Strategy Team

Contents

	Page
Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	6
Legislative Requirements and National Policy Drivers	7
Local Strategic Context	8
Delivery, Monitoring and Reporting	9
Findings of the Homelessness Review	10
• Key Facts about Cornwall	10
• Population	10
• Employment and the Economy	10
• Credit Crunch and the Recession	10
• Housing Demand Issues	12
• Homelessness Demand	12
• Assessing Need and Service Provision by Client Group	13
• Stakeholder Feedback	16
• Serious Case Reviews	17
• Housing Options	17
• Future Homelessness Levels	18
• Gaps in Provision	18
Strategic Priorities and Objectives	19
Resources to Deliver the Homelessness Strategy	29
Review Date	30
Contact	30

Foreword

Homelessness is about much more than having a roof over your head. Having good quality, affordable housing can improve a person's prospects in almost every other area of life, including employment, health and well being.

On the other hand being homeless or living in inadequate housing can often lead to a whole range of other difficulties, including the risk of developing mental health problems, offending and drug or alcohol dependency.

Housing is a very important issue for people in Cornwall which is why the Council has put the need to tackle homelessness and ensure people are living in good quality accommodation at the top of its priorities. We are already looking at innovative ways of providing more affordable local needs housing and this Strategy will play a vital role in helping us prevent homelessness and support those who have lost their homes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Kaczmarek'.

Councillor Mark Kaczmarek, Cabinet Member for Housing

Executive Summary

Introduction

This is Cornwall's first county-wide Homelessness Strategy, which sets out Cornwall's vision for reducing homelessness over the next five years. The Strategy aims to:

- prevent homelessness;
- ensure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of people who are homeless or who are likely to be homeless;
- ensure satisfactory support services for people who are homeless or those who have been housed and need support to prevent a recurrence of homelessness

The Strategy sets out Cornwall's Priorities and Objectives in order to meet these three aims. It will guide Cornwall's approach to tackling and preventing homelessness until 2015 and will inform future Homelessness Strategies beyond this date. It will be supported by the Strategy Delivery Plan, which will be regularly reviewed and updated.

Homelessness Review

The Strategy is based on a Review of homelessness and housing need across the county, which was conducted between July and September 2009. The Homelessness Review examined a range of factors, including:

- availability of accommodation
- access to support
- need for services across a range of key client groups
- legislative requirements and national policy drivers

The findings of the Review have provided the foundation for the Homelessness Strategy and Delivery Plan.

Working in Partnership

The Homelessness Strategy has been developed with the involvement of all the key partner agencies in Cornwall, and will complement and reinforce the strategic priorities and objectives in the Cornwall Housing Strategy and Cornwall Sustainable Community Strategy.

Delivery of the Homelessness Strategy will be overseen by a multi-agency panel. The group will operate as a sub-group of the Corporate Housing Delivery Group, which oversees the Housing Strategy, reporting through this group to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Homes and Communities Thematic Partnership Board.

Membership of the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Group will largely reflect that of the multi-agency working group monitoring the development of the Homelessness Review and Strategy and will include:

- Housing
- Housing Benefit
- Public Health and Protection
- Supporting People
- Adult Care and Support
- Community Safety
- Health
- Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)
- Registered Social Landlords
- Private Sector Landlords
- Voluntary sector groups
- Service Users
- Children's Services

Strategic Priorities

The Homelessness Review identified a number of areas where current services can be improved, or where new services are needed in order to prevent and reduce homelessness in Cornwall over the next five years.

The following three Strategic Priorities have been identified in order to achieve these aims and deliver high-quality, easily accessible services across all areas of the county:

Strategic Priority 1: Improve Access to Housing

Remove barriers to accessing suitable, long-term private and social rented housing through the provision of financial assistance, development of active landlord partnerships, and the introduction of Choice Based Lettings.

Strategic Priority 2: Support Vulnerable People

Prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness by improving joint working, supporting clients during transitions between services and prevent homelessness and providing practical, flexible and accessible support packages.

Groups with a specific focus under this priority include young people, and people at risk of homelessness due to the current economic climate.

Strategic Priority 3: Minimise Rough Sleeping

Work towards the national target of 0 rough sleepers by 2012 by stemming the flow of new rough sleepers onto the streets and supporting regular and entrenched rough sleepers into suitable accommodation.

Underpinning the successful delivery of these three priorities will be good communication and strong partnerships. Just as no single priority or objective alone will effectively tackle homelessness, so will success depend on good joint working and communication between all partners and service users.

Cornwall Homelessness Strategy 2010-2015

Introduction

Homelessness is about more than just having a roof over one's head. Having good quality, affordable housing can improve an individual's prospects in almost every other area of life, including employment, health and wellbeing. Conversely, being homeless or vulnerably housed can lead to a host of other difficulties, increasing the risk of developing mental health problems, offending, and drug or alcohol dependency.

This Homelessness Strategy sets out Cornwall's vision for reducing homelessness in Cornwall over the next five years, and aims to:

- prevent homelessness;
- ensure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of people who are homeless or who are likely to be homeless;
- ensure satisfactory support services for people who are homeless or those who have been housed and need support to prevent a recurrence of homelessness

This strategy is being launched in a time of significant economic difficulty and rigorous cuts to spending in the public and voluntary sectors. This has resulted in the need to meet an increased demand for services with ever-reducing resources. In order to achieve this, the Homelessness Strategy will focus on making best use of existing resources and ensuring that services are delivering value for money.

Producing the Homelessness Strategy

In July-September 2009, Cornwall Council conducted a Review of Homelessness in the county, the findings from which have provided the foundation for this Homelessness Strategy, effective from April 2010.

The development of the Homelessness Review and Strategy have been led by a series of multi-agency working groups. The work has been undertaken in partnership with all the key agencies working with homeless and vulnerable people in Cornwall. This partnership approach will continue to be a key feature throughout the lifetime of the Strategy and delivery of the Action Plan.

The working groups have monitored the progress of the Review and the development of the Strategy with the following key objectives:

- To assess the needs of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness in Cornwall
- To review the availability of service provision for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- To produce a strategy that focuses on preventing homelessness; ensuring adequate supply of appropriate housing; and ensuring sufficient support for people who are homeless or who may become homeless.

In order to meet these objectives, Cornwall Council and its partner agencies consulted widely with all the key stakeholder and service user groups and evaluated information from a range of sources, including:

- Data from Cornwall Council Housing Department and partner agencies
- Results from surveys to landlords, letting agents, service users and service providers
- Focus groups with stakeholders, providers and service users
- National studies on homelessness and housing need among specific client groups
- Recommendations from Serious Case Reviews and the recent Ofsted report.

Legislative Requirements and National Policy Drivers

Local authorities have statutory duties towards vulnerable clients under the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, including a duty to provide advice and assistance to all people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, which can extend to securing a permanent, settled home.

A significant policy driver has been the Government's concern over the cost and social consequences of homelessness, which has inspired a national policy shift towards early intervention and the prevention of homelessness with financial and practical assistance where appropriate. The Government has acknowledged that the public sector cannot tackle the problem alone or necessarily provide the best housing solution in every case. There is also a greater focus on a wider range of housing solutions and a raised awareness of the contribution that the private sector can make to meeting housing need.

National strategies and legislative requirements that have shaped the Homelessness Strategy include:

- Homelessness Act 2002
 - Requirement for Homelessness Review and Strategy
- Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives (Jan 2005)
 - Homelessness Prevention
 - Reduction in the use of temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010
 - From 2010 B&B no longer suitable for 16/17 year olds
- Sustainable Communities: Homes For All (June 2005)
 - Choice Based Lettings schemes in all local authorities in England by 2010
- No One Left Out: Communities Ending Rough Sleeping (Nov 2008)
 - Reduce the number of rough sleepers to as close to zero as possible by 2012

A fuller examination of these can be found in the Homelessness Review.

Local Strategic Context

The Homelessness Strategy will operate within a wider local network of strategies.

Cornwall Sustainable Community Strategy

The Cornwall Sustainable Community Strategy provides a long term vision for addressing difficult and cross cutting issues which affect the economic, social and environmental well-being of Cornwall

Housing policy is a vital element in achieving this vision and the Homelessness Strategy will link in though the new Cornwall Housing Strategy, which is one of the sub-strategies of the Cornwall Sustainable Community Strategy.

The primary outcome for the Sustainable Community Strategy that will link to tackling homelessness is Outcome 3: Vulnerable adults are able to live safely and independently.

Cornwall Housing Strategy

The Cornwall Housing Strategy has identified the following four strategic priorities:

- The Delivery of Affordable Housing
- Finding Smarter Housing Solutions
- Achieving Decent Homes
- Creating Sustainable Communities

All four of these priorities will have an impact on Cornwall's success at preventing and tackling homelessness. However, the key link to homelessness is through Strategic Priority 2: Finding Smarter Housing Solutions.

The Homelessness Strategy will complement and be consistent with the Cornwall Housing Strategy. It will operate as a stand-alone document, but will link through the Housing Strategy into the Sustainable Community Strategy. Reporting on the Homelessness Strategy will feed through the Housing Strategy to the Cornwall Strategic Partnership, and in particular the Homes and Communities Thematic Partnership Board.

The Cornwall Homelessness Strategy and Cornwall Housing Strategy share a number of key objectives. Where appropriate, responsibility for monitoring the delivery of these objectives will be shared between the Housing and Homelessness Strategy Delivery Groups.

Partner Strategies

The Homelessness Strategy will also aim to ensure good links with the following key partner strategies:

- Supporting People 5 Year Strategy Revision (2008)
- Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) Needs Assessment and Treatment Plan 2009-2010
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Children and Young People's Plan
- Homes and Communities Strategy
- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment
- Community Safety Partnership Plan 2008-2011
- Reducing Reoffending Action Plan

Delivery, Monitoring and Reporting

This Homelessness Strategy sets out Cornwall's Priorities and Objectives in order to meet these three aims. It will guide Cornwall's approach to tackling and preventing homelessness until 2015 and will inform future Homelessness Strategies beyond this date. It will be supported by the Strategy Delivery Plan, which will be regularly reviewed and updated.

Monitoring and implementation of the Homelessness Strategy and Delivery Plan will be overseen by a multi-agency panel, to be established by April 2010. The group will include representatives from Housing; Benefits; Public Health and Protection; Supporting People; Adult Care and Support; Community Safety; Health; Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT); Registered Social Landlords; Private Sector Landlords; the voluntary sector; and service users.

In order to maintain the links and synergies between the Housing and Homelessness Strategies, the delivery group will operate as a sub-group of the Corporate Housing Delivery Group, which oversees the Housing Strategy.

The Corporate Housing Delivery Group will receive regular reports from the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Group and will feed back to Cornwall Council Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Homes and Communities Thematic Partnership Board. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive exception performance reports every quarter on via the Corporate Housing Delivery Group. These reports will monitor the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy against targets and the positive engagement of partner agencies.

Findings of the Homelessness Review

This chapter provides a brief summary of the findings of the Homelessness Review. For more in-depth information on each of the following areas, please refer to the Homelessness Review document. Page references for the appropriate section in the Homelessness Review can be found in brackets, or click on the section title to link to the relevant page in the Homelessness Review.

Key Facts about Cornwall

Population (p11-15)

- Cornwall's population has been steadily increasing since the 1960s, but the rate of increase has reduced since 2007.
- The population increase can be attributed to a combination of natural growth, in-migration and a reduction in out-migration.
- Experimental statistics from ONS (2007) suggest that population growth is not consistent across Cornwall. Some areas have experienced significant population decline whilst neighbouring areas have encountered very rapid growth, linked to house-building.
- Experimental statistics from ONS (2007) show some relatively dramatic increases in particular ethnic groups, including a 58% increase in Cornwall's Other White population, which is largely attributable to net migration from the new European Union states. Cornwall's mixed heritage ethnic population has nearly doubled since 2001, driven mainly by natural growth.

Employment and the Economy (p15-17)

- Cornwall is a diverse rural county with a patchwork of areas with relative affluence and pockets of marked overall deprivation, notably in West Cornwall.
- In spite of recent improvements, Cornwall still lags behind the South West and the rest of the UK in terms of earnings, with average annual earnings 16.4% lower in Cornwall than the rest of the UK.
- The low-wage economy in Cornwall, seasonal nature of many dominant employment sectors, and low savings levels among average-low income households, place many people at increased risk of homelessness due to financial difficulty.

Credit Crunch and the Recession (p16-18)

- The current recession is clearly having an impact on the housing market and is placing increasing numbers of people at risk of homelessness, including people who previously would not have been considered vulnerable.

- A report by the South West Regional Economic Task Group It's Your Home – Let's Keep It That Way (November 2009) found that the number of mortgage possession orders (not necessarily resulting in repossession) increased dramatically in the South West in 2008. It found that repossessions were more likely to be located in lower value properties, with unemployment and reduction in income being the main causes of mortgage arrears. Unemployment was often followed by relationship breakdown. It also noted that the number of people seeking to register as homeless has not increased across the region, suggesting that repossessed households are not turning to the local authority for help
- The report identified a number of common features in households facing repossession:
 - Higher than average interest rates
 - Short time between the mortgage being taken out and the borrower getting into difficulty (under 4 years in most cases), suggesting households are overstretched from the outset
 - Loan values are very close to lower quartile house prices suggesting householders took a high loan to value or are now in negative equity or both
 - Only around half of all householders facing repossession proceedings attend court, but those who do attend get much more favourable outcomes.
- The report also contained a series of actions that the local authorities should take, with support from the Government Office for the South West:
 - Develop effective protocols to enable local authorities to take appropriate action when they receive notification of possession proceedings from lenders
 - Maximise the provision and accessibility of local prevention services provided to households facing repossession action
 - Stress the value of attending court
- At the time of writing, national analyses generally support the view that the global economy is on the road to recovery (Source: Cornwall Economic Monthly Update September 2009). However, predictions indicate that the recovery will be gradual and it is likely that increased numbers of people will continue to be vulnerable to homelessness over the next year or two.
- It will also be important for the Homelessness Strategy to prepare for future economic shocks over the lifetime of the Strategy, including the possibility of spending cuts which may impact upon the availability of service provision.

Housing Demand Issues (p19-25)

- The geographical remoteness, increasing and ageing population and low wage economy in Cornwall combined with the current problems facing the national economy have led to an increase in demand for affordable accommodation, particularly in the social rented sector.
- The cost of buying or renting property in the private sector has remained consistently high across Cornwall over the last few years, with affordability rates across the county in excess of 10:1.
- Social housing forms only 12% of the housing stock in Cornwall, compared to 16% regionally and 23% nationally. The number of applicants on the Housing Register has increased since 2005, from 15349 households on the waiting list, to 18,931 households on the Housing Register in March 2009. Re-registration for the new Cornwall Homechoice scheme is currently taking place, with approximately 6000 people registered on the new scheme at Jan 2010.
- Cornwall has very low typical annual turnover rates of around 5-7% in general needs social housing, and around 10% including temporary and sheltered housing.
- The local shortage of social rented housing is in line with national trends, although the situation is particularly acute in Cornwall due to the comparatively low levels of social housing compared with higher than average levels of need. The Government is encouraging local authorities to maximise use of the private rented sector to help ease the pressure on social housing.
- The Strategic Housing Market Assessments indicate that the private rented sector accounts for around 12% of housing across Cornwall.
- Cornwall Homechoice, Cornwall's new Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme is due to be fully operational by the end of March 2010. CBL aims to improve choice by opening up the allocation of social housing by giving applicants the opportunity to view details of all properties available for letting and then submit a bid for the property of their choice.

Homelessness Demand (p26-31)

- The shift towards proactive prevention work has resulted in a consistent reduction in the number of homeless acceptances between 2003 and 2009, as set out in Table 1 below:

	03 04	04 05	05 06	06 07	07 08	08 09	09 10 (to date)
Total Acceptances	1076	721	733	546	497	371	77
Total Decisions	3336	1349	1321	1012	1072	706	131
%Acceptance of Decisions	32%	53%	55%	54%	46%	53%	59%
% change acceptances from previous year		-33%	1.60%	-25.50%	8.97%	25.32%	

- The three main reasons for homelessness acceptances in Cornwall reflect regional and national trends:
 - Losing a private sector tenancy
 - Friends and family no longer able to accommodate
 - Relationship breakdown
- There are a number of key challenges that make it difficult for people to access the private rented sector and for people to move within the sector, including:
 - Tenant being unable to afford rent in advance, deposit, letting agent credit checks and other fees
 - Lack of landlords willing to accept tenants on Housing Benefit or Local Housing Allowance (LHA)
 - Removal of option to have LHA paid directly to landlords. However, new guidance from the DWP issued in January 2010 has relaxed the restrictions on this issue to enable more people to have their benefit paid to the landlord.
 - Relatively low numbers of properties for rent in some areas having a disproportionate effect on the LHA market rental rates, leading to discrepancies between LHA rates and rental asking prices
 - Increasing numbers of landlords asking for guarantors with a minimum level of income
 - Under 18s unable to hold own tenancies
 - Single room rent restriction for under-25s.
- A closer examination of the breakdown of homelessness acceptances due to friends and family no longer able to accommodate suggests that the vast majority of these cases involve young people who have been evicted by their parents.
- The majority of acceptances due to relationship breakdown involve a violent relationship breakdown.
- Cornwall Council has responded strongly and positively to The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2003, which requires local authorities to avoid the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families, except in an emergency and even then for a maximum of six weeks. Across the county, this target was met ahead of schedule, with the only exceptions where it has not been possible to meet the target in limited cases in agreement with a client who has very specific accommodation needs. This will continue to be the Council's response over the next three years.

Assessing Need and Service Provision by Client Group (p32-82)

The Homelessness Review assessed the level of need across 25 key client groups. In general, the level of need and services available for client group were considered separately, while also taking into account the fact that any individual may require support for a range of different needs, and that an individual's needs may change over time.

Key client groups:

A detailed examination of each client group can be found in the Homelessness Review. Please click on client group to view the relevant section in the Homelessness Review.

Single People (p32-33)
Rough Sleepers (p33-36)
Mental Health Issues (p37-40)
Drug and Alcohol Support Needs (p41-46)
Dual Diagnosis (p46-47)
Offenders and Ex-offenders (p48-51)
Ex-Service Personnel (p51-55)
16 and 17 year olds (p55-57)
16 to 24 year olds (p57-59)
Care Leavers (p59-61)
Young Offenders (p61-62)
Teenage Parents (p62-64)
Families (p64-65)
Domestic Abuse (p65-66)
Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (p67-68)
Gypsies and Travellers (p68-69)
Refugees and Asylum Seekers (p70)
Migrant Workers (p70-72)
LGBT (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Trans Groups) (p72-74)
Physical Disabilities (p74-76)
Learning Disabilities (p76-77)
Older People (p77-80)
Repeat Homelessness (p81-82)

There is scope to improve services to prevent and minimise homelessness among every client group. However, the Review also identified a number of key client groups where current homelessness needs are not being met, or where homelessness may be at risk of increasing over the next five years.

Single People with Multiple or Complex Support Needs (Encompassing Rough Sleepers, Drug and Alcohol Support Needs, Mental Health Needs, Offenders and Ex-offenders, Dual Diagnosis)

- There are significant overlaps in the support needs and services used between rough sleepers, ex offenders, drug and alcohol users, mental health service users and dual diagnosis clients.
- There is a likely hidden need for services for these client groups in North and East Cornwall.
- Significant numbers of rough sleepers in urban and rural areas across Cornwall, with current outreach services patchy across the county and only one 10-bed direct access night shelter.
- Difficulties accessing mental health services for homeless people, and in particular rough sleepers
- DAAT has identified the highest levels of unmet accommodation need among complex and chaotic drug and alcohol misusers, suggesting

that the same is true for homeless people with multiple and/or complex support needs.

- Homelessness is a both a consequence of and a factor in mental health problems, offending behaviour, and drug and alcohol misuse. Awareness of and access to housing advice and support services is critical in overcoming other problems.
- Flexible accommodation options are needed to support clients who require different levels of independence at different stages of their journey.

Single People With No Significant Support Needs

- Loss of assured shorthold tenancy is the single most common reason for homeless acceptance.
- Recent increases in the number of single homeless people with no additional support needs approaching agencies such as Shelter for advice.
- Of all the groups threatened with homelessness as a result of the current economic climate, single homeless with no significant support needs are those least likely to qualify for assistance from the local authority, credit unions or the voluntary sector.

Young People (Encompassing 16 and 17 year olds; 16-24 year olds, Young Offenders, Teenage Parents, Young LGBT people)

- Cornwall is working towards eliminating the use of B&B for 16 and 17 year olds, and alternative emergency accommodation is needed in order to meet this target.
- The single room rent restriction for under 25s is a significant challenge in supporting young people to move to independent living
- Cornwall has higher numbers of care leavers making homeless applications than nationally
- At least 90 people currently in care will be going through the leaving care process over the lifetime of the Homelessness Strategy
- National research shows that teenage parents and their children are at increased risk of living in poor housing
- In August 2009, Connexions estimates that there were 243 teenage parents in Cornwall.

Ex-service Personnel

- Time spent in Armed Forces accommodation can now count towards establishing a local connection in an area, which may impact on veterans' entitlement to assistance from Cornwall Council
- Estimates suggest that 10% of rough sleepers have spent time in the Armed Forces, although wider levels of homelessness among veterans in Cornwall are difficult to measure
- Links between homelessness among veterans and the occurrence of major conflicts indicate a possible increase in homelessness among this client group around 2015.

Women

- Approximately 20% of rough sleepers are women, but there are no specialist services for female rough sleepers.

- Recent drug related death highlighted lack of provision for women with drug and alcohol needs who are fleeing domestic abuse
- Cornwall has 25 Refuge spaces for women fleeing domestic abuse.
- A host of difficulties can arise when someone flees one home due to violence, lives temporarily in a Refuge and is then re-housed in more stable accommodation.

Older People

- Cornwall has seen population increases in every age group over 55 since 2001, and this trend is set to continue.
- A need for 5000 Extra Care places has been identified between now and 2028.
- The number of older people with additional support needs such as mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, vulnerability due to sexuality or ethnicity etc. is likely to increase over the next 5-10 years.

Gypsies and Travellers

- There is a shortage of pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in Cornwall, and a need has been identified to provide 159 new residential pitches, 40 transit pitches and 6 sites for travelling show people by 2011.

Repeat Homelessness

- Lack of evidence on the extent of repeat homelessness in Cornwall
- Insufficient support during transitions between accommodation and lack of support once a client has moved to independent living can contribute to repeat homelessness
- Capacity on support services means that clients may not always be able to access support for as long as they need it

Stakeholder Feedback (p83–84)

The Homelessness Review sought to engage stakeholders at every stage of the process, and the views of stakeholders were gathered through a series of events, including:

- Multi-agency working groups
- Informal discussions with staff teams
- Seminar for agencies working with children and young people.

In addition to highlighting areas of concern, the consultation was used as an opportunity to highlight areas of good practice, including common paperwork; joint working and protocols; and common proactive prevention and early intervention work.

Priority areas for improvement were broadly similar across all sectors and provider groups and included:

- Availability and accessibility of accommodation, particularly for more complex clients, non-statutory homeless, and those trying to access the private rented sector
- Transitions between services, with a built in handover period from one support service to another
- Genuine multi-agency working, “not just going through the motions”
- Identifying new funding sources

- Improved awareness of services for providers and service users
- Ensuring Cornwall Council delivers consistent Housing services across the county
- Ensuring providers have the skills and knowledge to deliver specialist services (in providing support, needs assessments, referrals and in ensuring service is 'approachable' for a range of client groups)

Serious Case Reviews (p86)

The purpose of a Serious Case Review is to identify any lessons to be learned from the case about the way in which local professionals and agencies work together, and establish how these lessons can be acted on and what is expected to change as a result.

The conclusions from Serious Care Reviews in which Housing has been involved, include a series of recommendations for improvement:

- There is a need for better communication between agencies and the sharing of low-level information.
- Communication needs to be improved both verbally and in writing, and particularly the need for feedback from Children's Social Care.
- Improved training for staff is needed, particularly in dealing with 16 and 17 year olds and vulnerable adults.
- Housing officers require updated training on homelessness legislation particularly in relation to young persons and vulnerable adults, and in relation to domestic abuse
- Improved training for front-line staff to improve their awareness of the protocols and practices that can be employed in the safeguarding of children and young people.
- There is a continuing need for managers to remind staff to raise concerns and for this information to be collected centrally for senior managers to review them to assess weaknesses and good practice.

Housing Options (p83–84)

Housing Advice and Options is still undergoing a period of transition since the move to Cornwall Council in April 2009. The amalgamation of six different councils, each with their own staffing structures, policies and procedures, and operating systems has been a considerable challenge for staff and customers alike.

Consultation with Housing Advice and Options Officers for the Homelessness Review provided an opportunity to identify areas of good practice within the former districts that could be enhanced and extended with the new Housing service, as well as identifying aspects of the new service that are not working as well.

Consultation with Housing Options officers identified two key areas of the service that are most important in preventing homelessness:

- Tenancy Sustainment Officers to support clients in the early stages of their tenancy and prevent those in difficulty from losing their tenancy.
- Bond scheme for single homeless.

Future Homelessness Levels (p96–97)

- Issues around affordability of housing and the disparity between supply and demand for housing, particularly for lower-income groups, are likely to persist for the foreseeable future.
- Although analyses indicate that the economic climate is improving, recovery is predicted to be slow and it is likely that more households will become vulnerable to homelessness through mortgage and/or rent arrears if unemployment continues at current levels.
- It will also be important to remain mindful to possible increases in homelessness and housing need among ex-service personnel, care leavers and older people
- A further challenge created by the current economic climate is that new plans to tackle homelessness will have to be developed within limited resources, which are unlikely to increase for the foreseeable future.

Gaps in Provision (p97)

A number of more general gaps in provision have been identified that cut across client groups:

- Need for more detailed information on prevalence of homelessness among some client groups
- Considerable scope to improve partnership working at a strategic and operational level
- Current services struggle to meet the needs of the most chaotic and complex service users
- North and East Cornwall have considerably fewer services than the Mid and West of the county, particularly for rough sleepers.
- Limited availability of supported or social housing and high costs of accessing private rented sector have created a gap in services for many client groups, particularly those who do not fall into homeless priority need categories.
- Capacity pressures on services, including Housing Options, mean that all a client's support needs are not necessarily identified and supported.
- Certain groups feel that generic services do not know how to communicate with them or respond to their specific needs

Meeting the Challenges – Our Priorities

The Homelessness Review identified a number of areas where current services can be improved, or where new services are needed in order to prevent and reduce homelessness in Cornwall over the next five years.

The following three Strategic Priorities have been identified in order to achieve these aims and deliver high-quality, easily accessible services across all areas of the county:

1. **Improve Access to Housing:** Remove barriers to accessing suitable, long-term private and social rented housing through the provision of financial assistance, development of active landlord partnerships, and the introduction of Choice Based Lettings.
2. **Support Vulnerable People:** Prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness by improving joint working, supporting clients during transitions between services and providing practical, flexible and accessible support packages.
3. **Minimise Rough Sleeping:** Work towards the national target of 0 rough sleepers by 2012 by stemming the flow of new rough sleepers onto the streets and supporting regular and entrenched rough sleepers into suitable accommodation.

Underpinning the successful delivery of these three priorities will be good communication and strong partnerships. Just as no single priority or objective alone will effectively tackle homelessness, so will success depend on good joint working and communication between all partners and service users.

Note: reference numbers under each objective refer to the corresponding action in the Delivery Plan and do not necessarily reflect the priority order of the actions.

Strategic Priority 1: Improve Access to Housing

The Homelessness Review identified barriers in accessing Housing across all client groups. One barrier is the limited supply of certain types of housing, for example access to social rented housing. Other barriers centre around the high costs associated with accessing housing, for example letting agents fees, credit checks, rent in advance and deposits.

Particular difficulties are faced by single homeless people who may be on a low income, but who are not necessarily owed a statutory duty under housing legislation. For this group, the private rented sector presents the most realistic housing option, but the costs of starting a new tenancy can be prohibitively high for those on a low income.

Delivery of Affordable Housing is a key priority for the Cornwall Housing Strategy, and should go some way to improving access to housing for some. However, it will also be important to maximise the use of the private rented sector through proactive landlord liaison and incentives and financial assistance for homeless households.

Access to housing for clients with complex support needs is also a key area to be addressed. The majority of supported housing projects are suitable for clients with low-medium support needs, meaning that clients with high support needs or chaotic lifestyles may be prevented from

accessing housing because existing projects are unable to accommodate their needs. Improvements in this area can be made by working in partnership with Supporting People and accommodation providers to remodel services to enable them to accommodate a wider range of needs.

Objectives

1. Improve access to private rented sector through active landlord partnerships and financial assistance

- 1.1.1 Promote the use of mediation services to reconcile differences between landlords and tenants and prevent legal action leading to homelessness
- 1.1.2 Develop active partnerships with private sector landlords to ensure access to accommodation for homeless households
- 1.1.3 Provide financial assistance for rent in advance or deposit bonds required to access private tenancies, including for non-statutory homeless
- 1.1.4 Work with credit unions to increase access to affordable loans for rent in advance and/or deposit.
- 1.1.5 Develop a tenant accreditation programme to assist people to access new tenancies in the private rented sector
- 1.1.6 Develop a landlord accreditation scheme
- 1.1.7 Extend and actively participate in landlord forums
- 1.1.8 Work with Housing Benefit to reduce delays in benefit payments and make best use of Discretionary Housing Payment and Interim Payments
- 1.1.9 Continue to standardise and improve Housing Advice and Options across the county
- 1.1.10 Work with Probation and Cornwall Residential Landlords Association to improve and extend access to private rented accommodation for ex-offenders.
- 1.1.11 Improve the condition of privately rented stock through the provision of interest free loans to landlords in exchange for nomination rights for households on the choice based letting register

2. Improve access to social and/or supported housing

- 1.2.1 Improve access to housing through Choice Based Lettings

- 1.2.2 Minimise time spent in B&B and other temporary accommodation and support people to access stable, long-term housing as soon as possible
- 1.2.3 Ensure supported housing meets the needs of complex and/or chaotic service users
- 1.2.4 Revise the Allocations Policy to ensure local connection of people leaving the armed forces is taken into account
- 1.2.5 Provide 159 new authorised residential pitches and 40 transit pitches for Gypsies and Travellers, and 6 sites for travelling show people by 2011.
- 1.2.6 Work with DAAT and Domestic Abuse services to identify solutions to accommodate women with high support needs fleeing domestic abuse
- 1.2.7 Work with Public Health and Protection and other partners to address issues of overcrowding and under-occupation in private and social rented housing
- 1.2.8 Work with Registered Social Landlords to improve access to social housing for homeless households

Strategic Priority 2

Supporting Vulnerable People

Homelessness is rarely, if ever, solely down to a lack of housing. Whether a person is homeless or at risk due to temporary unemployment in the recession, or a more enduring support need such as age, addiction, disability, or health needs, it is important that services are accessible and flexible, and that staff work together to provide a co-ordinated multi-agency response.

It is essential to ensure that easily accessible and understandable information about services is available to everyone in the community at an early stage, before problems develop and homelessness becomes a possibility.

The recession and its resulting increase in unemployment has placed more people at risk of homelessness, who otherwise would not have been considered vulnerable. It is important that these people are supported to maintain their existing home, whether they own or rent, and that Housing, training and employment services work together to support clients to return to the workplace and thus minimise the risk of becoming homeless.

The Homelessness Review identified a range of vulnerable groups who found it difficult to successfully secure and maintain a tenancy. Particular difficulties arose for those in the 'single homeless with complex needs

group', who often move through the supported housing system into private sector accommodation, and for whom the transition period between services often presents a particular threat to their successful move-on.

Other groups, particularly older people, those with mental health needs, and LGBT groups, reported difficulties navigating through advice and support services. It is important that services are accessible to all groups, and that staff in each agency have appropriate training in working with clients from a range of backgrounds.

The Review also highlighted some groups where current housing and homelessness needs are not being met, or where homelessness may be at risk of increasing over the next five years. The needs of the largest of these groups, Older People, are being addressed through the Older Person's Supported Housing Strategy, which has been jointly developed by Housing and Adult Care and Support. The Homelessness Strategy will link to this work through the Housing Strategy and support the delivery of its objectives where appropriate. Similar work is being jointly undertaken by Housing and Adult Care and Support on the Learning Disability Housing Strategy, and again, the Homelessness Strategy will link to and support this work where appropriate.

Feedback from clients and data from partner agencies for the Homelessness Review indicates that for a significant number of homeless adults, their housing issues started before the age of 25. A strong focus on preventing homelessness and creating sustainable housing solutions for young people will help to reduce the likelihood of young people becoming trapped in the revolving door of repeat homelessness in later life.

Housing-related support for homeless and vulnerably housed people is funded in large part by the Supporting People programme. The Council and its partners face a major challenge when the ring fence is removed from Supporting People funding from 1st April 2009, as part of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). These services have a very important role and a key challenge for the Council will be to mainstream and safeguard these functions in light of reducing resources.

A new post of Supported Housing Strategy Manager has been created within the Housing Services, to work closely in partnership with the Supporting People Team and other statutory and voluntary sector agencies with an interest in developing and managing supported housing projects.

Objectives

1. Safeguard vulnerable people

2.1.1 Prioritise attendance at safeguarding meetings in Housing Options

teams

- 2.1.2 Train staff in adult and child safeguarding
- 2.1.3 Revise and extend multi-agency information-sharing protocol to promote information-sharing between agencies
- 2.1.4 Create a Housing Providers Safeguarding Forum to share safeguarding good practice between accommodation providers
- 2.1.5 Continue to develop role of Safeguarding Champions and ensure all staff know how to contact them
- 2.1.6 Work with DAAT to learn lessons from drug related deaths and achieve reduction in number of drug related deaths of people in supported housing and 'NFA'.

2. Support people during transitions between accommodation providers

- 2.2.1 Develop flexible floating support packages to support clients during and after move-on
- 2.2..2 Work with Ministry of Defence and Royal British Legion to ensure members of the armed forces are appropriately prepared to address their housing needs after discharge
- 2.2.3 Develop Gateway model to minimise evictions and facilitate planned moves between accommodation
- 2.2.4 Develop tenant accreditation scheme to ensure clients have the necessary skills to manage their own independent tenancy
- 2.2.5 Build in formal handover periods to ease transitions between support services

3. Improve mechanisms for joint working and communication between agencies and Cornwall Council Departments.

- 2.3.1 Continue provision of Shelter CMAAP service to facilitate multi-agency support for clients receiving services from a number of providers
- 2.3.2 Involve landlords in support plans where secure and appropriate
- 2.3.3 Revise and extend multi-agency information-sharing protocol
- 2.3.4 Revise and update hospital discharge protocol for homeless and vulnerably housed people

- 2.3.5 Develop a prison and custody discharge protocol to reduce the number of people released from prison or custody with no suitable accommodation
- 2.3.6 Continue formalisation of local Homeless Action Group (HAG) structure to facilitate effective localised multi-agency working
- 2.3.7 Develop a countywide Homelessness Forum to facilitate networking and good practice sharing opportunities
- 2.3.8 Increase access to staff training and establish a multi-agency training forum
- 2.3.9 Address priority training needs of safeguarding, mental health, domestic abuse, drug and alcohol awareness, diversity and equality awareness, housing legislation, and 16 and 17 year olds.
- 2.3.10 Establish joint strategic visions/mission statements between agencies where appropriate
- 2.3.11 Continue to standardise monitoring and reporting systems across Cornwall and ensure all systems are kept up-to-date

4. Maximise funding sources

- 2.4.1 Maximise opportunities for joint commissioning
- 2.4.2 Make better use of social enterprise and income-generation models
- 2.4.3 Contribute to SP sector reviews to ensure that SP-funded services deliver value for money
- 2.4.4 Develop fundraising skills and knowledge in voluntary sector to increase access to alternative funding streams

5. Ensure services are well publicised and easily accessible to all vulnerable groups

- 2.5.1 Ensure services are publicised through effective channels that reach vulnerable and isolated groups
- 2.5.2 Conduct equality audit of services and improve monitoring of vulnerability across all strands of diversity
- 2.5.3 Improve accessibility of services by ensuring that the time, venue and method of access is client-friendly
- 2.5.4 Improve service monitoring tools to capture trends and highlight

gaps

- 2.5.5 Ensure clients with literacy/ESOL needs are supported to access services
- 2.5.6 Develop and maintain service directory of housing and support services for all vulnerable groups in Cornwall
- 2.5.7 Undertake proactive education work around what happens when clients approach services to allay fears and clarify expectations around what services can and cannot do

6. Support people at risk of homelessness due to current economic climate

- 2.6.1 Ensure that agencies working with people at risk of mortgage repossession signpost effectively to advice services and stress the value of attending court
- 2.6.2 Develop effective protocol to enable the local authority to take appropriate action on receiving notification of possession proceedings from lenders
- 2.6.3 Ensure Housing Options effectively signposts clients to training and employment services to enable people to return to work as quickly as possible
- 2.6.4 Provide a crisis grant or loan to help reduce short term mortgage or rent arrears and prevent evictions
- 2.6.5 Continue support for CAB court desk housing advice service for clients facing repossession
- 2.6.6 Proactively advertise services to all sectors of the community to ensure people know about services before they might need them

7. Support people at risk of homelessness to maintain their existing home

- 2.7.1 Extend tenancy support across all areas of Cornwall
- 2.7.2 Develop flexible support packages that enable clients moving on from a period of homelessness to access support as often and for as long as they need it
- 2.7.3 Ensure swift access to floating support and tenancy sustainment support for vulnerable people across all tenures and those living in temporary accommodation

- 2.7.4 Continue to work with Housing Benefit to monitor and ensure that Safeguarding Policy is operating effectively
- 2.7.5 Promote use of mediation services to reduce youth homelessness through reconciliation between family members
- 2.7.6 Continue operation of a sanctuary scheme, which provides security measures for people threatened with domestic violence and allows them to remain in their homes
- 2.7.7 Ensure the Allocations Policy discourages evictions by family and friends.
- 2.7.8 Ensure advice and support services identify and support issues that may impact on housing and homelessness and support other agencies to identify housing/homelessness issues and signpost to appropriate services

8. Minimise Youth Homelessness

- 2.8.1 Develop dedicated Youth Homelessness Strategy in partnership with Children's Services
- 2.8.2 Extend hub and spoke model of accommodation for young people countywide
- 2.8.3 Undertake proactive education with young people on the realities of leaving home
- 2.8.4 End the use of B&B for 16 and 17 year olds except for less than six weeks in an emergency by 2010
- 2.8.5 Continue to monitor and improve joint Housing and Children's Services protocol for 16 and 17 year olds

Strategic Priority 3 Minimise Rough Sleeping

The government has set a national target to reduce the numbers of rough sleepers to as close to zero as possible by 2012. Cornwall has significant numbers of rough sleepers, and a robust response will be needed if the county is to achieve its target by 2012.

The new countywide outreach service, commissioned by Supporting People will provide an invaluable tool in helping to achieve this aim, by making contact with rough sleepers on the streets and supporting them to access services. However, it will also be important to improve pathways off the streets, enabling providers to accommodate all rough sleepers,

including couples, people with dogs, and active drug and alcohol users with chaotic lifestyles.

Stemming the flow of people on to the streets must also be addressed. Developing eviction and re-engagement protocols for those who have previously been banned from services, and closer working with prisons, will help to reduce the number of clients returning to the streets after being supported into accommodation, and reduce the numbers of new people coming on to the streets.

Objectives:

1. Work towards the national rough sleeping target of 0 rough sleepers by 2012

- 3.1.1 Establish realistic baseline figure of number of rough sleepers in Cornwall
- 3.1.2 Conduct regular assessments and street counts of the number of people sleeping rough
- 3.1.3 Reduce the number of rough sleepers to half of baseline figure by 2011 and to 0 by 2012.
- 3.1.4 Explore options to meet needs of rough sleepers in North and East Cornwall
- 3.1.5 Provide proactive street outreach linked to support services
- 3.1.6 Explore options to increase direct access provision for rough sleepers across Cornwall

2. Reduce the number of new rough sleepers arriving on the streets

- 3.2.1 Develop a prison and custody release protocol to increase the number of people with suitable housing on release from prison
- 3.2.2 Develop a hospital discharge protocol to minimise the number of people leaving hospital with no suitable accommodation
- 3.2.3 Develop eviction protocol with housing providers across all tenures to ensure that no-one is evicted to sleep rough in Cornwall
- 3.2.4 Work with health services and the Royal British Legion to prevent rough sleeping among ex-servicemen suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder
- 3.2.5 Work with Leaving Care Team and Outreach services to reduce

the number of rough sleepers with a history of being in care and ensure that future care leavers do not have to sleep rough

3. Ensure new rough sleepers are supported to move off the streets quickly

- 3.3.1 Develop a reconnection policy to assist rough sleepers who want to return to another local authority area
- 3.3.2 Work with Supporting People to develop an Accommodation Gateway and create a clear pathway from street to home
- 3.3.3 Improve links with regional and national Outreach and Health for Homeless teams to identify rough sleepers coming to Cornwall from other areas

4. Work with regular and entrenched rough sleepers to support them off the streets

- 3.4.1 Remodel services to ensure that female rough sleepers, couples and people with dogs are able to access a full range of services
- 3.4.2 Develop a re-engagement protocol to enable clients previously evicted or banned from services to access these
- 3.4.3 Develop a 'case management' approach to rough sleepers with complex needs to support people to manage transitions between services
- 3.4.5 Improve Cold Weather Provision protocol to maximise opportunities to engage and move on rough sleepers
- 3.4.6 Work with mental health and safeguarding services to prevent vulnerable adults from sleeping rough
- 3.4.7 Make the most of the opportunity to engage rough sleepers and link them in to other services through informal opportunities at soup kitchens and breakfast clubs
- 3.4.8 Explore options to increase access to 'wet' accommodation for rough sleepers

Resources to Deliver the Homelessness Strategy

The Draft Delivery Plan has been set within the Council's budget, but it is recognised that there is a need to maximise new sources of funding. It should be noted that the Delivery Plan will be continually monitored and revised on a regular basis. Partners identified within the Draft Delivery

Plan will also share responsibility in being able to achieve the identified actions.

There are a number of sources of finance linked to the Housing Strategy, many of which will indirectly contribute to tackling and preventing homelessness, including, for example, funding for the provision of new Affordable Housing, the Eco-Town Initiative, and Growth Points Initiatives.

Finance for tackling and preventing homelessness derives primarily from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Supporting People. In 2008-09, Cornwall received £515,000 in DCLG funding, which will increase to £706,000 for 2009-10.

In 2007-08, the Cornwall Supporting People budget, which provides housing related support critical for sustaining tenancies for vulnerable people, was £14,204,036. Over the next three years this will not be increased even for inflation. To address this situation, Supporting People commissioning priorities will focus on achieving best value for money from existing services, to make provision for any new developments which have been identified and prioritised.

The work of other public sector organisations, housing associations and the voluntary and community sector also make a significant contribution to preventing and tackling homelessness in Cornwall.

To achieve its aims in full during a difficult economic climate, the Council will need to look beyond the conventional methods of investment and adopt a proactive approach to bidding for external resources. Cornwall has a good track record in this area and there are successes and opportunities through current Government housing investment initiatives.

Review Date

Strategy: April 2011

Delivery Plan: October 2010

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Housing Strategy

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