

North Norfolk District Council Homelessness Strategy 2014-2019

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Contents

The Homelessness Strategy 2014/2019

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----------------|
| 1. | Introduction | Page. 4 |
| 2. | National Drivers | Page. 5 |
| 3. | Local Policies | Page. 7 |
| 4. | Key findings from review of homelessness services | Page. 9 |
| 5. | Aspirations for taking the service forward | Page. 15 |
| 6. | Monitoring and Review | Page. 18 |

Introduction

1. Introduction

The Homeless Act 2002 requires all Local Authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and publish a Homelessness Strategy based upon the findings of the review every 5 years. North Norfolk District Council has undertaken reviews in 2003 & 2008.

Both the review and the development of the strategy were undertaken in consultation with key partners and stakeholders operating in the district.

The strategy covers homeless and homelessness prevention and seeks to deliver an enhanced housing options service, responds and relates to the Acts of Parliament and statutory guidance that set out the Government's intentions for protecting homeless people and preventing homelessness.

The Strategy must include plans for:

- The prevention of homelessness;
- Ensuring there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or who may become, homeless;
- Ensuring there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become, homeless or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

The Strategy must cover:

- All homeless people, including those who would not be considered to be in priority need for accommodation;
- All people at risk of becoming homeless, whether within 28 days or a longer period;
- People who might have become homeless intentionally;
- Homeless people in the area who might not have a local connection.

As in the previous version of the strategy this strategy will consider homelessness prevention in its widest sense and will continue to deliver an enhanced Housing Options Service in line with the latest guidance issued and will continue to work on its own or in partnership with a range of other agencies including other statutory agencies including Norfolk Children's Services, Adult Social Services, Supporting People, housing providers (including registered providers, support housing providers and private landlords) and voluntary and community sector organisations.

The Strategy identifies a number of issues that are likely to impact on homelessness and the delivery of housing options services being welfare reform, availability of mortgage finance, coastal erosion and flooding.

The recent review of homelessness services in the district identified that there have been a significant number of achievements since the previous Homelessness Strategy was launched. However, continuing demands and challenges, recent changes in the Welfare Reform and Localism Act and re-organisations within our own service has resulted in some actions no longer being relevant or impossible to deliver. As an organisation we want to build on the good work and successes already achieved and look towards building a stronger more customer focused service which will build on the aspirations of the previous strategy and take on the government's ten challenges to deliver a gold standard service.

During the next five years we plan to strengthen our corporate commitment to prevent homelessness, work with our partners and look to deliver the corporate priority that 'everyone in North Norfolk should have the opportunity to buy or rent a decent home at a price they can afford, in a community where they want to live or work.'

National Drivers

2. National Drivers

Since the previous strategy was published there have been a number of fundamental changes to housing policy and the overhaul of the Welfare system.

Below are a number of key policies that have a direct impact on how the local authority delivers its services in the lifetime of this new strategy.

The Homeless Code of Guidance explains how the Act should be implemented. In practice it is a guide that tells the Council how to review the effectiveness of its homelessness provisions and produce a new strategy every five years. It states the requirements that all organisations, within all sectors, whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people in their district, must be involved in the development of the strategy.

Making Every Contact Count 2012 is the government's most recent report on preventing homelessness. It expresses how the government expects all local services to work together to make every contact with a homeless person count and to target funding and resources on early intervention initiatives for groups most at risk of homelessness. The report brings together government commitments to:

- Tackle troubled childhoods and adolescence
- Improve health

- Reduce involvement in crime
- Improve skill; employment; and financial advice
- Pioneer social funding for homelessness

However, it is recognized within the report that these cannot be tackled alone. Therefore government has set ten local challenges that if adopted should lead to local homelessness teams delivering a gold standard service. These challenges are:

- Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy-in across all local authority services
- Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
- Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice to all clients
- Adopt a 'No Second Night Out' model or an effective local alternative
- Have housing pathways agreed or developed with key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
- Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
- Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
- Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed & Breakfast accommodation
- Not place any families in Bed & Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

The Localism Act 2011 includes measures for ensuring that social housing is made available to people with greatest housing need by enabling flexible tenancies for social housing, changes to securing accommodation for homeless people in that local authorities are able to discharge the homelessness duty in the private rented sector in accordance with the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012, Greater freedom for local authorities to set their own policies about who should qualify to go on the waiting list for social housing in their area. It meant that local authorities had to consider increasing mobility within the social housing sector by introducing these new flexibilities within their local context and formulate a Tenancy Strategy as a framework for registered providers of social housing in the area.

- Changes to the Local Housing Allowance Arrangements Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates capped and set at the 30th percentile of local rents (April 2011)
- Increased non-dependent deductions (April 2011)
- £15 weekly excess removed where the tenant's rent is less than their Local Housing Allowance (April 2011)
- Increasing the shared accommodation room rate age threshold to 35 from 25 (January 2012)

Welfare Reform Act 2012

Social sector size criteria for working age tenants (April 2013) – those considered to have a 'spare' bedroom will face a reduction in housing benefit

- Benefit cap for working age people (from April 2013) – a cap on the total amount of benefit that working age people receive so it does not exceed the average wage for working families
- Personal Independence Payment (from April 2013) – replacing Disability Living Allowance based on how a person's condition affects them, not the condition they have
- Universal Credit (from October 2013) – bringing together a range of working age benefits into a single payment, including housing support
- Direct Payments in the Social Sector (from October 2013) – housing costs within Universal Credit will be paid directly to individuals in the social sector, rather than the current system of payments direct to landlords
- Localising Council Tax Support (April 2013) – replacing Council Tax Benefit, councils are required to design and adopt a scheme based on a national framework that protects vulnerable pensioners

Local Polices

3. Local Polices

This homelessness strategy supports and works alongside the following North Norfolk District Council strategies and policies:

Housing Strategy

North Norfolk District Council's Housing Strategy 2012-2015, sets out a range of interventions and actions which the Council will undertake to help achieve its ambition that 'everyone in North Norfolk should have the opportunity to buy or rent a decent home at a price they can afford, in a community where they want to live or work'.

The Housing Strategy 2012-15 consists of three documents:

- Housing and Infrastructure identifies what actions the Council will take to provide more housing in North Norfolk across a range of tenure types and ensure the required infrastructure is delivered alongside new homes.
- Making the best use of the existing housing stock - seeking to reduce the number of empty homes, review how affordable housing is allocated and ensure homes in North Norfolk are in good condition.
- Supporting vulnerable people to live independently within the community - ensuring households can access support to enable them to live independently and that there are opportunities to ensure households have support to access learning and employment opportunities and that a range of specialist housing is provided as required.

Tenancy Strategy

The Council would like to achieve the following objectives through its Tenancy Strategy:

- To maintain stable and sustainable communities especially in more rural parts of the district where local community infrastructure such as schools and shops are supported by balanced populations including newly forming households and young families
- To make better use of the existing social housing stock through enabling a reduction in under-occupation
- To ensure that specialist accommodation can be made available to households most in need.

Empty Homes Policy

The Council has set itself an ambition that 'everyone in North Norfolk should have the opportunity to buy or rent a decent home at a price they can afford, in a community where they want to live or work'.

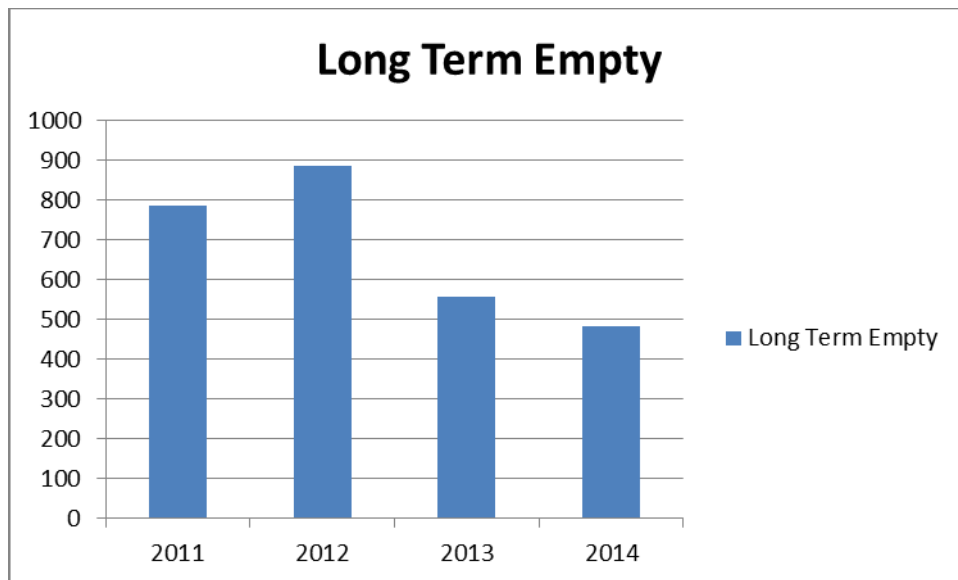
This requires that the existing housing stock in North Norfolk is used efficiently and effectively and that the number of properties which are empty is minimised to increase the supply of housing to meet housing need and housing demand.

Properties become empty for a number of reasons and most are reoccupied within a short period of time. However, across North Norfolk in October 2013 there were 556 properties which had been empty for a period of at least 6 months or more.

The Empty Homes Policy focuses on bringing long term empty properties back into use that otherwise would remain empty.

These empty homes are the focus of the Empty Homes Policy as many will be empty for longer than they need to be or will not be brought back into use without the provision of advice, support or enforcement action. The authority has set a target to reduce the number of empty homes by 200 between April 2012 and March 2015 and this policy sets out the approach the Council's will adopt in order to meet this target

As you will see from the chart below the council are already on target to reduce the number of empty homes by March 2015



Housing Allocation Scheme

The Allocation scheme has been developed in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 Part VI as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The scheme has been developed to utilize the flexibilities afforded by the Localism Act 2011 to achieve the Council's ambition that 'everyone in North Norfolk should have the opportunity to buy or rent a decent home at a price they can afford in a community where they want to live or work'. The scheme has also been developed in line with the Council's Housing Strategy objectives to make best use of the existing housing stock and support vulnerable residents to live independently in the community.

The Scheme consists of three registers being:

- Housing Register – will include those applicants in the very highest levels of housing need, including homeless full duty clients
- Housing Options Register – will include those in lower levels of housing need
- Transfer Register – will include all tenants in social or affordable rented properties within the district of North Norfolk.

Key Findings

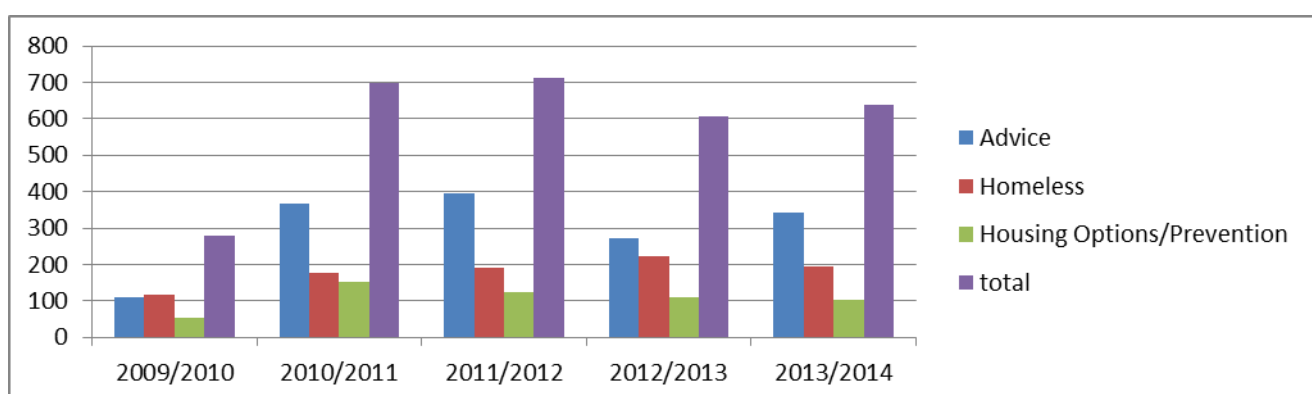
4. Key findings from the review of homelessness services

With continuing demands and challenges and following recent changes to the Welfare Reform and the Localism Act the council has worked extremely hard to

ensure that the customer has been the main focus whilst striving to improve the service and implement the aspirations and aims from the previous strategy.

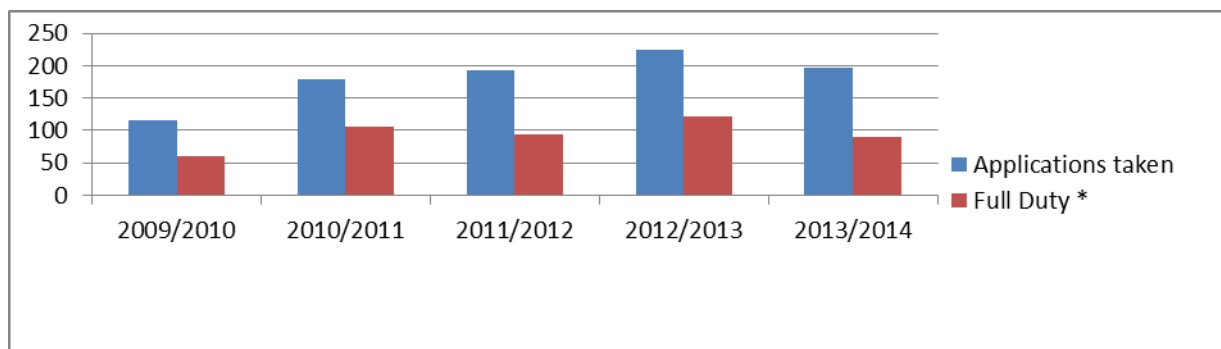
Homelessness within North Norfolk is now relatively low with 90 households being accepted in 2013/14, 72 households being accepted to date in 2014/2015 compared to 201 in 2003/2004. Evidence shows the reason for this number decreasing is due to the amount of work the council are putting into the prevention of homelessness and early advice being offered to individuals that approach the service. You will see from the charts below that the number of households approaching the service is steadily increasing.

Households Approaching the Service for Advice



Homeless Applications

Number of homeless applications taken compared with decision reached and full duty accepted

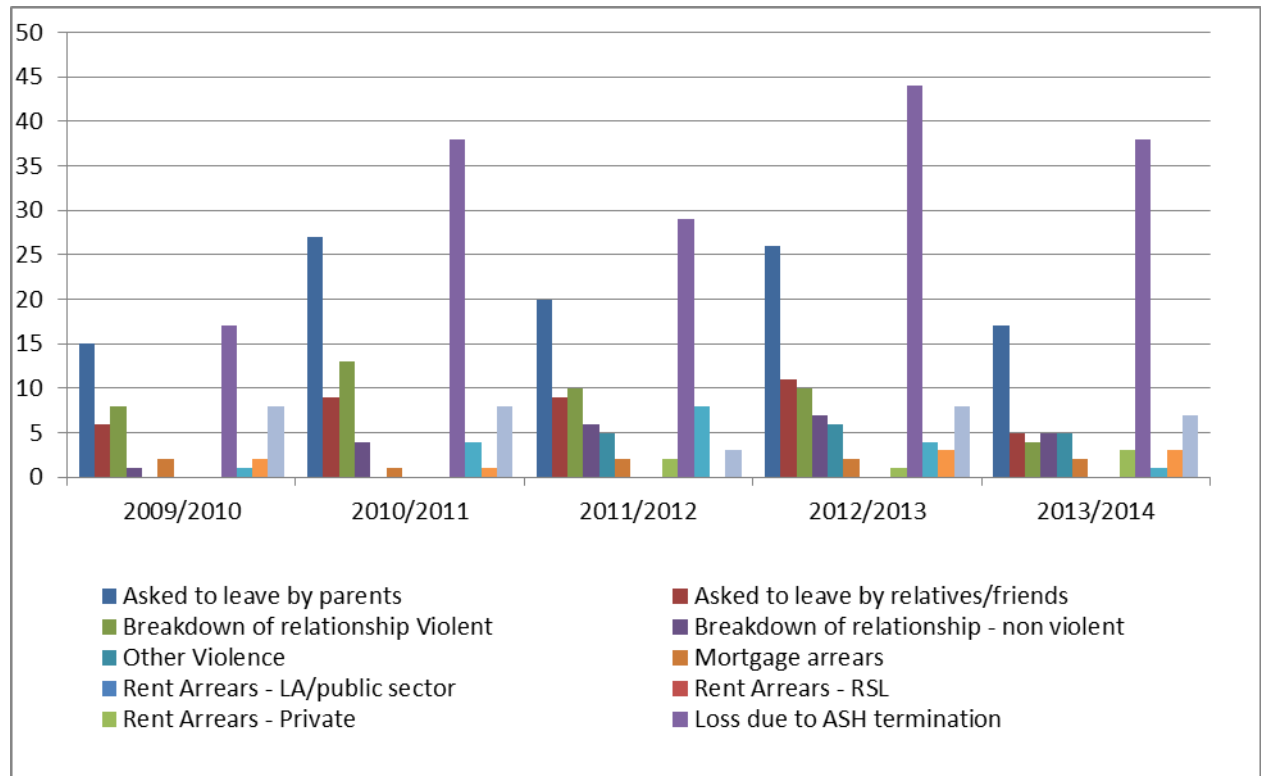


* Full Duty – means where the authority has accepted a duty to rehouse under Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act (as amended)

The main reason for homelessness has remained consistent with the loss of private rented accommodation being the main reason for homelessness followed by family/friends being unable to accommodate. This supports the recent news article in June 2014 which reported 'The number of people made homeless when a private tenancy ends has trebled in the past five years. It is now the single biggest cause of homelessness in England and most have been thrown out by private landlords. According to government figures, the end of a tenancy has been the most common cause of homelessness every quarter for the last two years. In the final quarter of

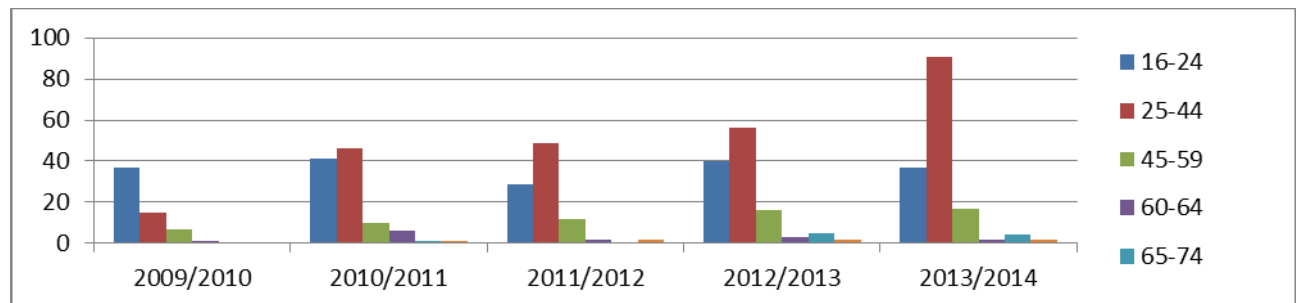
2009, 1,060 households in England became homeless after their private tenancies were ended, while the latest figure for the first quarter of 2014 is 3,330'.

Main Reason for Approach



Most clients being accepted as homeless are in the 25-44 age group with the 60 plus age group being negligible. This could be considered as unusual given the high proportion of elderly people in the district. However, the majority of such households are owner occupiers with no mortgage commitment which is reflective of the local census carried out in 2011.

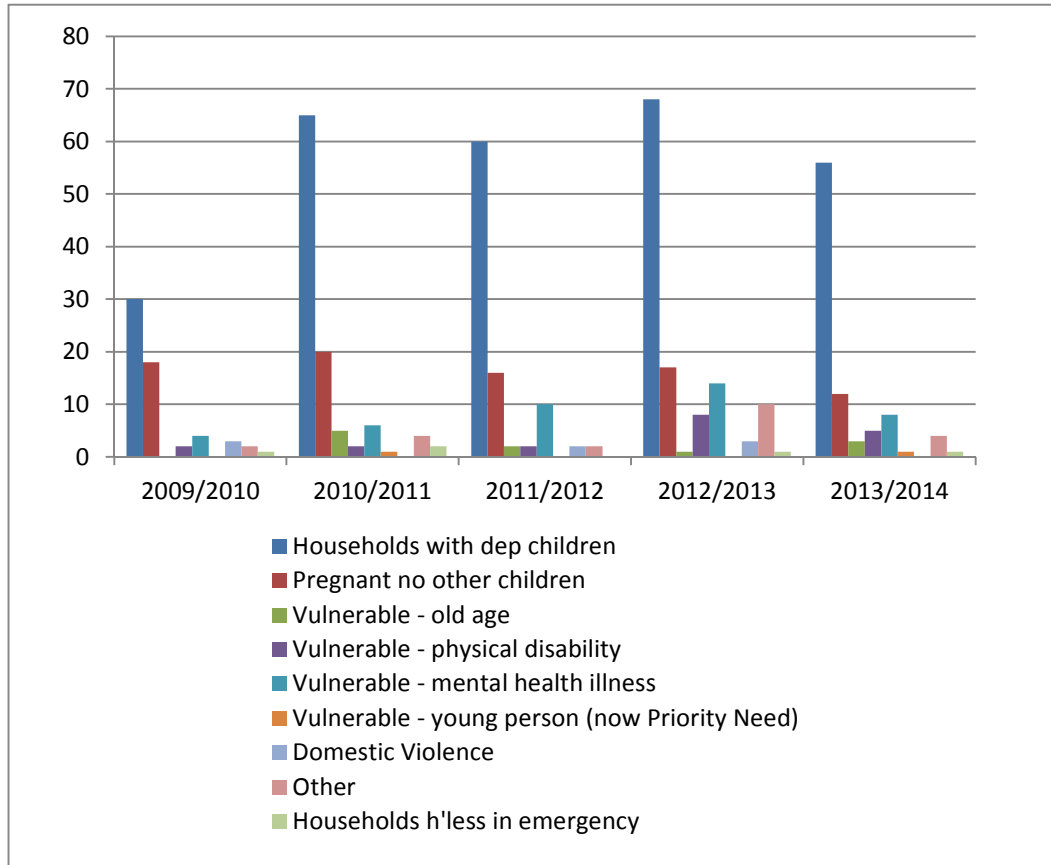
Age Profile



Priority need for homelessness has remained consistent in that households with dependent children or are pregnant followed by those that have a mental health

issue are the main reason for the authority accepting a duty to rehouse a household.

Priority Need for Homelessness



When the previous strategy was adopted coastal erosion and flooding were not seen as something that was a major issue for consideration. However, in December 2013 North Norfolk was impacted by a tidal surge which affected a number of locations across the North Norfolk coast, in particular Walcott and Bacton – in total over 100+ households were impacted in some way. The service worked very closely with residents and other agencies to ensure that accommodation was provided to those in need and they were supported until such time as insurance companies took over. The council was also instrumental in the delivery of the Norfolk and Lowestoft Flood Recovery Fund.

Successes

'Aim 1 – To deliver customer focused service to standards influenced by the customer'

The aim was to deliver an excellent customer focused service, to achieve this aspiration as a service the following has been achieved:

2009 – Integrated ICT system which housed 'Your Choice Your Home' choice based lettings and Housing Options data base

2009 – Changes were made to the Housing Reception, moved away from counter style barriers to more relaxed and welcoming open desk environment.

2009 – Launch of 'What and Where' interactive map showing customers stock profile and lets within parishes to enable customers to make informed choices when bidding

2013 – Targeted Housing Options launched, providing customers with focused support and options when logging into Your Choice Your Home.

2013 – Main council reception was updated and the changes made to the housing reception were duplicated across the whole reception area.

'Aim 2 – To increase the accessibility of the Housing Service ensuring equity of access for all'

North Norfolk is a rural authority and there is a lack of public transport between main towns and villages, with the increasing cost of fuel the Housing Team have had to ensure that the service is still accessible by all; the decision was made to focus its resources by offering a personal service via the telephone. Each household that joins 'Your Choice Your Home' receives a personal phone call, officers are at this initial stage able to offer the household individual housing options advice and are able to identify potential homeless clients and start to work with them at an earlier to stage with the main focus being on prevention of homelessness.

Within the Allocation Scheme Launched Oct 2013 the Council has ensured that members and former members of the Armed Forces and their families are not penalised by any requirement to have a local connection, the Council will therefore give any such applicant who does not have a local connection an automatic local connection. The Government also requires that such applicants are given additional preference for consideration for an allocation of affordable housing; the Council considers that backdating the relevant date for applicants who meet this criteria by 3 months will meet this requirement

'Aim 3 – To increase the range of housing options available and to provide a service that enables customers to make informed choices about their housing options and empowers customers to pursue their chosen housing option'

The previous strategy identified the challenges that households would face in finding affordable housing within the district.

Working with five housing associations; Victory Housing Trust, Broadland Housing Association, Orbit East, Hastoe and Saffron Housing Trust, NNDC provided 152 new affordable homes across the district during 2013/2014. This is the highest ever number of affordable dwellings delivered in the district in a single year and the first time that the number of new affordable homes completed by housing associations has exceeded 150 homes. The completion of 152 affordable homes places North Norfolk at the top of the table for affordable home completions in Norfolk for 2013/14.

2009 – Launch of ‘What and Where’ interactive map showing customers the stock profile and lets within parishes to enable customers to make informed choices when bidding.

A recent news article has highlighted the current need for more affordable housing schemes across Norfolk. The highest average district house price in Norfolk is North Norfolk at £204,267 followed by South Norfolk at £204,096. While North Norfolk is the highest, the average house price in the rest of rural Norfolk is between 9.85 and 11.4 times the average annual income.

‘Aim 4 – To reduce the incidence of homelessness through effective homelessness prevention services’

As detailed in ‘Aim 2’ the Council works hard to provide an excellent and informative service to the customer. Key to this delivery is providing the customer with effective housing options and paramount to this is the prevention of homelessness. To assist the council with this delivery we have key tools available. These consist of a prevention fund, mainly used to secure rent in advance and deposits with private landlords. We are also able to use these monies in other ways. For example we could use the money to clear small rent arrears the main focus being to prevent a household becoming homeless. The team will also work with landlords where a more vulnerable client has been identified to ensure that the best outcome is reached for both the household and the landlord.

As a service we also work with key agencies being; registered providers, Adult & Children’s services, and support agencies being Stonham Homestay, Together, CAB, Shelter and in house services.

We offer ‘move-on’ interviews and housing surgeries at supported housing schemes. These surgeries/interviews explain to residents how ‘Your Choice Your Home’ works how it is important to work with the support providers, the types of properties to be looking for and the chances of securing housing both with a registered provider or private rented landlord. These are delivered with the local supported housing hostels within the area being Leeway, Benjamin Foundation, Flagship Housing, Genesis and Argyle House

The service works closely with the housing benefits team. The two teams make joint decisions with regard to applications made to the discretionary housing benefit fund, by housing being involved in the decision the team are able to ensure that a focus on preventing someone from becoming homeless is considered. The monies can also be used to secure damage deposits for housing benefit claimants on low incomes to secure private rented accommodation when facing homelessness.

‘Aim 5 – to reduce the use of temporary accommodation for households accepted as homeless and where temporary accommodation has to be used to ensure that it is a reasonable standard and in a location which enables the household to maintain stability’

The government set a target for all local authorities to reduce its temporary accommodation portfolio and over the last 6 years we have successfully achieved this by reducing the council’s portfolio of temporary accommodation from 44 in 2008/2009 to 5 units in 2013/2014. North Norfolk District Council still has clients in temporary accommodation and because of the nature of the service this will always be the case. However, we work more closely with landlords and families to persuade the household to remain in the home they are being evicted from as this is more cost effective for the landlord and the household.

Aspirations

5. Aspirations for taking the service forward

Through carrying out the review of homelessness within the district we have identified that there have been a significant number of achievements. However, to ensure the service continues to provide an excellent level of service we need to ensure that the council continues to challenge service delivery. Taking this on board there are some key areas of work that have been identified to improve service delivery but also to continue with the strong working relationship we have with both statutory and voluntary agencies.

Aim 1 – Work with registered providers

Work with registered providers to deliver targeted welfare advice to residents on a low income. With the welfare reform housing benefit payments will be rolled into a single Universal Credit (UC) payment for recipients to manage. It is anticipated that UC may start to affect residents of North Norfolk from the autumn of 2015. (DWP have now confirmed the roll-out date is September 2015). We need to ensure that as a service we are able to support registered providers with this transition in a planned and managed process, but also support tenants that are affected and ensure that they understand the key message on how to manage their money and pay their rent, as failure to do so could result in eviction.

Aim 2 – Improve Housing Advice/Option/Solutions

As a service we are aware that service delivery doesn’t stand still. We need to ensure that our customers are at the forefront of our service delivery. To do this we need to understand what the customer needs and ensure that we have the expertise to deliver this by way of front line staff and technology.

- Review technologies with current IT provider – move to text alerts and mobile apps
- Review current letters
- Review landlords guide
- Review Rent in Advance and Damage Deposit Scheme
- Work with the Housing (Health and Wellbeing) Lead to develop processes to assist those that are disabled or living in difficult housing

Aim 3 – Not to place any families in Bed & Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks and provide suitable temporary accommodation.

The combination of early effective homelessness prevention services and provision of good quality suitable accommodation is key to the delivery of our services. As a council we try to avoid the use of bed & breakfast unless in an emergency. We are now in a position where we have reduced our portfolio of accommodation. However, with an increase of applications we now need to ensure that as a service we are looking ahead and will need to reconsider our options and look to identify other suitable solutions for families other than bed and breakfast. As a council we accept that living in bed and breakfast is not a good option for families with children, young people or those with a mental and physical disability.

Aim 4 – Aspiration to deliver the challenge set to deliver ‘A Gold Standard Service’

The challenges set by government are as follows:

| | Current Position | Priority |
|--|---|----------|
| Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy-in across all local authority services | not in place | medium |
| Actively work in partnership with the voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs | not in place | low |
| Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice to all clients | not in place identified within strategy | high |
| Adopt a <i>No Second Night Out model</i> or an effective local alternative | not in place | medium |
| Have housing pathways agreed or developed with key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support | Work in progress | high |
| Develop suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, | not in place | low |

| | | |
|---|---|------|
| including advice and support to both clients and landlords | | |
| Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme | not in place | low |
| Have a Homelessness Strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs | not in place | high |
| Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed & Breakfast accommodation | not in place identified within strategy | high |
| Not place any families in Bed & Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks | not in place identified within strategy | high |

Aim 5 – Deliver Customer Focused Service Standards

The Council has an aspiration to deliver an excellent customer focused service. The best way to achieve this is to consult and work with the customer. One of the key aims of the authorities Business Transformation programme is to improve the overall customer experience.

- Work with the Customer Service Manager to implement changes and improvements through the Business Transformation programme.
- Work with the Customer Service Manager to develop service standards
- Encourage feedback from customers through the corporate complaints and compliments process
- Design quarterly questionnaires using targeted Housing Options with Your Choice Your Home to applicants and report feedback to Partnership Board for Your Choice Your Home

How will we deliver our aims?

The above aims will be delivered over the life time of the strategy. We will continue to work on our own or in partnership with a range of agencies to ensure delivery of the aims identified and incorporated in the annual Action Plan and Service Plan delivery process.

Monitoring

6. Monitoring

This strategy will be monitored and reviewed yearly to ensure that the aims are still relevant, actions are being met and to incorporate any changes in legislation as necessary.

All identified actions will be monitored through the Council's Performance Management Framework, and will include feedback from customers and partners.

Policy Statement

The master copy of this document, a record of review and decision making processes will be held by Housing Options Team. All documentation will be available for audit as necessary.

This policy will be available to all staff and Members on the corporate document register on the intranet.

Document Information and Version Control

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