

Feedback on homelessness prevention strategy. Responses in grey.

Parish and town councils – the consultation period has been extended and a link to the strategy has been sent to all parish and town council clerks.

It is clear that a lot of work and consideration had gone into this document which will set the guiding principles for the next 5 years so it needs to be as clear and accessible as possible. As an external reader, who has some knowledge of this area, I would like to make the following points.

It is really good that Stroud performs well against other areas in prevention. However, it has dropped from the ‘top spot’ in 17/18. Is there a reason for this and can we learn from other high achieving authorities.

The graph referred to with Stroud in the “top spot” was for the same year. However, it only had the number of cases of relief. The graph in the strategy covers both prevention and relief and is per 1000 households so was felt to be a more accurate comparator.

The use of percentages is misleading in some cases as the high rates are linked to small numbers. In some cases actual numbers are used also. It would be helpful if figures could be consistent and used in a way that makes them more proportionate e.g ratios rather than percentages with small numbers.

The actual figures are shown with the percentages in brackets so there should not be any confusion.

It would be really useful to have some more local detail so that it is clear that the services that are provided are the right ones, in the right place at the right time. The shifting numbers and demographic changes obviously mean that the strategy will need to be different this time from the last one. The list of prevention and relief is helpful but how do we know that these are the right responses without data to show effectiveness.

Our list of prevention activities are those that are available. Some are more effective than others and records are regularly monitored. Costs are linked to the number of uses e.g. counseling is not used frequently but we only pay for actual sessions.

We get feedback from all of our partner agencies that we help fund. Some activities are easier to measure success than others e.g. preventions through financial advice from Citizen’s Advice are easily measurable, but those from Stroud Foodbank are not.

It would seem vital to include data about

Demographics of those at risk of homelessness

- **Age - do we really have such a problem with potential homelessness among older people that it needs to be a priority? Are we unusual in this - why is this?**

The strategy is developed along with partner agencies involved in homelessness e.g. health, tenancy support, police, addiction agencies. Priorities are those determined by the Working Group as a whole, not just the council. As the population ages, it becomes more important to ensure that the appropriate accommodation to meet their needs is taken into account to prevent actual homelessness or living in unsuitable accommodation.

- **Status - single/family - employed/unemployed/student**

- **Reason for homelessness**

Table to be added to the strategy showing the main reasons for homelessness over the last few years.

- **Location - nationally rural homelessness is an issue, is that for us too or are people more at risk in the major towns - is there a pattern?**

Homelessness can occur in any location, but towns, due to population density will have higher figures. Larger towns and cities tend to attract homeless people as there are more services available to them.

- **Some narrative about trends e.g why has the number of intentionally homeless halved last year. Do we have comparative data from other areas about how many intentionally homeless there are in comparator authorities?**

Sentence to be added to strategy to explain these trends. Homelessness data is available on the MHCLG website under "live homelessness tables" to show comparative data. The introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act has changed things so much that it is difficult to compare stats with years previous to its enactment. This will improve as time goes on so that we are comparing like with like.

Prevention and relief

This is an extensive and probably expensive list but this isn't costed or previous outcomes shown. Do we have data to show that these initiatives made an impact and they are the right priorities for the new strategy? Do they need to be adjusted in terms of demand e.g support for families in bed and breakfast for too long. These are the interventions that should be helping to reduce the number of homeless. As an external reader, I find it difficult to see the 'adding up' about how these services are commissioned and evaluated as effective.

Please see response to paragraph 4. The number of families spending any time in B&B is reducing as we source more self-contained units for them. Families are referred for support from P3 or Green Square where appropriate.

Using other relevant data.

I really don't understand the comments about Care Leavers. These young people are the responsibility of Children's Services, as the Corporate Parent, not the youth service. Additionally, full council debate about given them exception from Council Tax stated that there were few living in the Stroud District. This really needs clarifying for accuracy.

While in care, children are the responsibility of Children's Services. However, as soon as they leave care and become care leavers at the age of 18, their housing becomes the responsibility of the council and they have an automatic priority need under homeless legislation. The Homeless Reduction Act means that a care leaver has a connection to all housing authorities within the county. As much of the countywide youth provision is in Stroud, the care leavers may decide to stay in Stroud rather than return to the part of the county that they were originally from.

Priority outcomes

The setting of these is difficult to understand as the data isn't provided to support why these should be priorities and the key areas for the council.

I am more than surprised that avoiding homeless families is not a key priority. Our performance with regard to this group has not been good, with too many staying too long in

bed and breakfast. The recent article in the Stroud News and Journal to corroborate this. The Children's Commissioners's report on homeless (published on 22 August 2019) is a stark reminder of this on a national scale.

The priorities are decided along with our partner agencies at the Working Group so they are not decided exclusively by the council.

The single case mentioned in the article was an exceptional case and, without going into detail due to data protection, was at the families request and in a situation where the council exercised its discretion rather than a duty, to provide the accommodation. Stroud has an excellent record compared to other housing authorities in avoiding B&B type accommodation for families for more than six weeks.

It is recognized that, for various reasons, more families are requiring temporary accommodation and some families have to stay in temporary accommodation for lengthier periods. We are taking steps to secure more and higher quality temporary accommodation for families.

I am a little confused about why health and well-being are priorities. Surely these are part of the tools used to address homelessness in areas - the domestic abuse area clearly fits with reducing homeless in couples and families. Substance Misuse both with couples and families and rough sleepers. I would guess this would also be included in this, but it would not be a stand alone priority.

Health and wellbeing are closely linked to homelessness, particularly mental health, and the government supports close working between health services and housing authorities.

We have considered the strategy and would like to recommend a proposal that further safe house properties should be included.

Addition made to strategy to confirm working towards increase in places of safety to meet demand.

We have reviewed this document and are in full support of the strategy.