

## **HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY – REVIEW 2016**

### **Homelessness update:**

Last year (2015/16) there was a 16% increase in homeless applications over the previous year (2014/15). Homelessness has continued to rise nationally and we have already had more homeless applications this financial year than in the whole of last year. Based on the year so far we are expecting an increase of more than 60% compared to last year. These are worrying figures as the number of social/affordable housing properties becoming available is on the decrease with an expected drop of 15% this year compared to last year. It is also becoming more and more difficult to access the private sector due to the widening gap between rent levels and the help available to low income families from Housing Benefit.

The main reasons for homelessness have remained the same for several years.. Relationship breakdowns of various kinds – parental and other family evictions, couples splitting up, and domestic abuse – account for around 60% of our homelessness cases, and loss of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) is the next major reason. Although cases resulting from loss of AST have increased as a reason, here in Stroud we get far fewer homeless applications for this reason than is the national trend. We put this down to having more notice for these cases than relationship breakdowns so more opportunity to prevent the homelessness.

Against all of this doom and gloom, the good news is that we are still increasing the number of preventions with an estimated 15% increase this year over last year.

### **Temporary accommodation:**

Despite the increase in homeless applications, the number of households in temporary accommodation this financial year is expected to be similar to 2015/16. The government has a target that families with dependent children should not be placed in bed and breakfast for more than six weeks. So far this financial year, two families have spent more than six weeks in bed and breakfast. One family went over the target by one day as they were waiting to move into their council tenancy, the other family was found to be intentionally homeless. This family was assisted into a private rented property to avoid then becoming homeless.

### **Funding:**

Although the government has confirmed its funding for homeless prevention up to the end of this parliament, the funding is not ringfenced and we have had a significant cut in our homeless prevention budget. The government has said that the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Bill currently going through parliament will result in extra funding to Local Housing Authorities to cover the costs of the further duties imposed by the Bill.

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**Training:**

Our training sessions, for both internal and external partners, have continued to receive positive feedback and we are trying to expand it to other organisations. The training sessions cover homeless prevention, homelessness and Homeseeker*plus*. The sessions give our partner agencies a better idea of how and why we do what we do, and also give them information to help identify trigger factors from their clients which may lead to the threat of homelessness. The earlier we can get to people threatened with homelessness, the more likely it is that we can prevent that homelessness. We are particularly looking to strengthen links with health and social care as these often get the first indications of problems arising.

**Homelessness Prevention Strategy:**

The five year strategy was developed through the Homelessness Forum and an action plan has been in use to monitor progress. At the recent forum views were sought through a questionnaire session of the original set of six outcomes identified in the strategy to decide if they are still relevant, to review the achievements so far and to review ongoing priorities. Results from the feedback session, which included refocusing on early intervention with young people, and developing stronger links with health and wellbeing partners, will be incorporated in the annual review of the strategy.

**Upcoming Challenges:**

The recent reduction of the benefit cap, the effects of the Housing and Planning Bill when fully enacted, the government focus on low cost home ownership for new build rather than affordable rented, and the upcoming Homelessness Reduction Bill are all likely to have an effect on homelessness and so on the work of the Housing Advice Team. These changes will all need to be considered when reviewing the strategy next year.

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