

Appendix 2

Background

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to review homelessness, and the influencing factors that cause homelessness, and to develop a strategy which addresses the findings of the review.

Our 2017-2022 Homelessness Strategy for South Hams and West Devon has been designed to address changes in national policy, reductions in government spending, changes in demography in the area and the impact of the 2013 Welfare reform Bill, 2012 localism Bill and 2017 Homeless Reduction Act.

The Key Priorities for the Homelessness Strategy

The review of homelessness in South Hams and West Devon identified four key priorities to reduce and prevent homelessness. These are:

- Understanding the True Cost of Homelessness
- Access to Housing
- Access to Services
- Health and Wellbeing

These four key priorities form the basis of the strategy and the annual Action Plan. Our 2019-20 Action plan has been developed following a review of the progress made to date on our existing 2018-19 Action plan.

Progress to date

Following the review of the 2018/19 Action Plan we are pleased to be able to confirm that good progress has been made on the actions for the year.

Review of 18/19 Action Plan

Understanding the True Cost of Homelessness

- In the year 2018-19 520 Households were prevented from becoming homeless in South Hams and 410 in West Devon.
- Our Money Advice Contract assisted 78 households across South Hams and West Devon in the financial year 2018/19 and brought in excess of £89,000 in previously unclaimed benefits and other entitlements.
- Our tenancy support service has worked with 115 South Hams households and 60 West Devon households. 30 Households were supported to maintain their existing accommodation as a result of this support.

Access to Services

- The introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 included a Legal Duty for certain partner agencies to refer those threatened with homelessness into the service. Training delivered to multiple partner agencies to ensure these new duties are understood and that the duty to refer process is embedded in partner agency service delivery.
- Training delivered to partner agencies in using an online referral service as part of the referral process. 259 online referrals received by partner agencies using this option.
- Housing specialist co-location in Children's services enabled effective training delivery to staff in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and facilitated improved joint working.
- Online self-referral and communication portal established to enable customers to access housing related support online.
 - Portal established in September 2018 with regular referrals now being received in this manner. A reporting process is being developed by the software provider to ensure the numbers of online self-referrals can be being captured.
- All localities staff trained to support customers with claims for Housing Benefit and Devon Home Choice applications.
- Supported Children's Services in the design of a new role; Housing Specialist Early Help Officer and supported the effective recruitment of four new members of staff to further facilitate effective joint working between housing and Early Help services.
- 15 cases co worked with Early Help
- Co location opportunities with support service providers currently being explored.

Access to Housing

- Seamoor lettings scheme launched in West Devon
- 2 properties taken on in 2018/19 to the scheme in WD and 3 in SH's
- Working under the Vulnerable Customer Charter ethos we have created a shared accommodation property for young people threatened with homelessness in partnership with Young Devon.
- Research undertaken on best practice options for Landlord engagement which may be more effective than the traditional landlord forum approach. A biannual landlord information bulletin is due for launch in 2019.
- Rough sleeper count remained static in South Hams and West Devon
- 12 rough sleepers supported into long term housing.

Health and Wellbeing

- Homelessness prevention sessions successfully delivered in Dartmouth, Kingsbridge and Okehampton colleges. Ongoing efforts are being made to book dates in for the next academic year with other schools across the area.
- South Hams & West Devon established a partner agency working group alongside Teignbridge District Council which successfully applied for and recently received funding to enable to development of a bespoke multi agency hub and recruitment of specialist staff to address the needs of rough sleepers across all three districts.
- Online safeguarding reporting process designed and accessed through our intranet. Process launched council wide and training provided to all staff.
- 38 grants issued in West Devon and 20 in South Hams to meet the cost of home energy efficiently improvements through the EcoFlex scheme; resulting in homes which are warmer and healthier.
- Vulnerable customer charter written and embedded in our internal working practices. Successful projects in progress and further opportunities to identify multi agency projects to address local needs are being discussed.

Actions to be rolled over as incomplete: None