

Appendix 3

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 Homelessness 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 2021-2022 Action plan has been developed following a review of the progress made to date on our existing 2020-21 Action plan.

Progress to date

The review of the 2020/21 Action Plan demonstrates the positive progress made against our targets for the year. At this stage in the delivery of our strategy, many projects that have been established now form part of our ongoing work. Whilst we can confirm that good progress has been made on the actions for the year certain elements of our action plan have been hampered by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and our delivery of services has needed to flex to support both new ways of working and emerging trends and issues relating to the impact of the virus.

Review of 2020/21 Action Plan

Understanding the True Cost of Homelessness

- In the year 2020/21 373 Households were prevented from becoming homeless in South Hams and 244 in West Devon.
- Our Money Advice Contract assisted 203 households across South Hams and West Devon in the financial year 2020/21. The contract was expanded in April 2020 to provide additional support hours for those impacted upon by Covid. The combined contracts achieved in excess of £ £216,598 in previously unclaimed benefits and other entitlements.

- We have achieved a reduction in the number of 650 nights (30%) in nightly paid temporary accommodation for South Hams and a 1081 (46%) decrease in West Devon.
- Zero rent arrears across the portfolio of properties managed by SeaMoor lettings.
- Interactive self-service webpages established detailing all support services available across the area in addition to national support groups. Training delivered to CST to enable access for those calling in requiring information.
- Ongoing data collection and cross referencing with previous years to support recovery planning and identify trends.
- True impact of Covid 19 on worklessness and accommodation sustainment yet to be seen. Adaptations made to the case management system to enable capture of Covid related homelessness to enable identification of targeted support opportunities.
- Dedicated landlord support web pages still under construction to be completed by the end of 2022.
- Quarterly rough sleeper counts and rapid response project is enabling an accurate picture of current need.
- Robust review of methodology and support provision available to ensure equitable access to Devon Home Choice for BAME households.

Access to Services

- Increased early identification of those at risk of homelessness through improved joint working with the 3rd sector. Over 200 referrals made into the homelessness service by organisations not under a duty to refer.
- Appointment of a Vulnerable Persons Officer – improving communication opportunities internally and externally to improve identification of those requiring Local Authority services and those approaching the Local Authority requiring holistic support.
- Communication with landlords improved across commercial letting agent sector through frequent contact and evidenced positive outcomes following joint working.
- Rapid response to temporary changes made to eviction legislation through contact with all park homes and most commercial letting agencies to ensure new guidance was understood and implemented.

Access to Housing

- Established Perpetrator accommodation and support offer Pilot for those perpetrators engaged with Integrated Offender

Management support services. Accommodation provision enables focussed work on pattern changing and long term recovery and improvement in family dynamics. Creates an opportunity for better outcomes for victims and families who may otherwise have had to flee their homes.

- Review of leasehold arrangement for the 6 Bed HMO leased in response to Covid has revealed that the management model is successful and an option for future investment. Lease costs required by the property provider rendered continuation of the lease to be unworkable and alternate properties are currently being sought.
- Pressures of Covid 19 on property management and turnover has resulted in no properties being made available for the housing first programme through Livewest. 18 properties have been secured either for Housing First or for more settled accommodation with landlords in the private sector and 17 secure via Devon Home Choice.
- Rough sleeper count sustained at 1 South Hams and reduced from 1 to zero in West Devon.
- The total number of rough sleepers supported into long term housing was 25 in South Hams and 12 in West Devon.

Health and Wellbeing

- The tailored Multi Agency Hub brings together relevant professionals such as the Mental Health Team, Drug and Alcohol support services and Probation to enable us to deliver targeted support and streamlined referrals to get better outcomes for rough sleepers.
- Feasibilities studies commenced into the provision of specialist housing for those with learning difficulties in partnership with Devon County Council.
- Through the Disabled Adapted need panel and Health and Wellbeing we have been using the data from Devon Home Choice to identify households in high and medium housing need that have specific housing requirements. This information is shared with the Affordable Housing team who are looking to integrate these properties into new development plans. The panel has now been extended to include Occupational Therapists to ensure that all possible solutions are being considered for these households. In 20-21 the number of households assisted by the panel to resolve their complex housing problems was 9.

Actions to be rolled over as incomplete:

- Homelessness forum – booked for mid March 2020 but cancelled due to pandemic. Options for future forum formats to be considered.
- Landlord Bulletin – 1st edition created early this year. Dissemination paused due to conflicting guidance released relating to renters in response to the Covid 19 Pandemic. Instead officers and specialists delivered bespoke advice around changes made as a result of Covid 19. All 'park home' establishments contacted to ensure compliance and to reduce the risk of homelessness. Additionally, registered landlord, private landlords and agencies contacted to ensure Covid regulations around eviction were understood and adhered to.