



Report of the Landlord Services Manager

Poverty Reduction Policy Development and Delivery Committee -
28 March 2018

Development of Swansea's Homelessness Strategy

Purpose:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To inform the Committee of the progress made so far to develop the Homelessness Strategy.• To provide the Committee with the opportunity to comment and influence the development of the draft aim, key principles, objectives and actions.
Policy Framework:	Local Housing Strategy 2015-2020.
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) Members consider the draft aims, key principles and objectives for the strategy and provide their comments.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a responsibility on all local authorities to produce a homelessness strategy by the end of 2018 to set out how the Council plans to tackle homelessness in its area over a four year period. The strategy must have a detailed action plan to address gaps in service provision and must include plans for:
- The prevention of homelessness
 - Securing accommodation for people who are homeless or are threatened with homelessness
 - Provision of support for people who are homeless or are threatened with homelessness

- 1.2 The Homelessness Strategy has a clear link with the Council's poverty agenda and Swansea's Wellbeing Strategy as it has a significant role in contributing to the achieve of the objectives to ensure that children have the best start in life and building stronger communities through the early intervention and prevention of homelessness.
- 1.3 It also supports the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, as the Act requires public bodies to carry out their functions in a sustainable way which improves the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. Homelessness Prevention is a Well-being of Future Generations national indicator therefore is a key contributor to the Welsh Government's national goals. The five ways of working set out in the Act will be incorporated into the key principles of the Homelessness Strategy (see paragraph 5.3) these are:
- Preventing problems from occurring or from getting worse
 - Addressing long-term challenges
 - Working in partnership with others
 - Avoiding conflicts between public body objectives
 - Involving people

2. Homelessness Review

- 2.1 The strategy must be developed as a result of a review of homelessness in the area, which requires analysis of:
- a) The levels and likely future levels of homelessness
 - b) The activities carried out to:
 - Prevent homelessness
 - Ensure suitable accommodation is available
 - Ensure that satisfactory support is available
 - c) The resources available to carry out the above
- 2.2 Headline figures are provided in paragraph 4 of this report in order to give an overview of the current picture of homelessness in Swansea. The Homelessness Review will cover this in significant detail and will have in-depth information on the following: levels of homelessness; advice and prevention; rough sleeping; temporary accommodation; housing support; permanent accommodation; strategic and partnership working; and service user consultation. The review will be published along with the strategy.
- 2.3 The Homelessness Review is nearing completion and has identified the following key challenges that will impact on future levels of homelessness:
- Future funding levels
 - Welfare Reform
 - Increasing levels of rough sleeping
 - Increasing numbers of complex cases
 - High demand for housing
 - Population changes
 - Future legislative changes

2.4 The emerging findings from the review include:

2.5 *Provision of temporary accommodation*

Swansea is well served with an extensive range of temporary accommodation which meets the needs of the vast majority of people. It is important therefore that we look at and expand on existing good practice, wherever possible in order to maintain and improve provision. There are however a number of issues in relation to accessing temporary accommodation that need to be addressed:

- Address inappropriate use of B&B for people with complex needs (including mental health issues)
- Additional temporary accommodation needed for young people with high/complex support needs
- The process for recording evictions from temporary and supported accommodation needs to be improved.
- Improve the single point of access for supported accommodation
- Simplify the referral process to access to domestic abuse refuges.
- Address barriers to employment for people in temporary or supported accommodation

2.6 *Support*

There are effective services in place to provide people with housing related support through Supporting People funded projects and the Council's Tenancy Support Unit. In addition to specific tenancy support there are a number of third sector organisations who provide a range of advice and support on housing and homelessness issues.

Supporting People grant for Swansea is currently £13.8million and this funds a wide variety of support across a range of client groups. There is a close and effective working relationship between the Homelessness Service and the Supporting People team and the commissioning process for housing related support works well, with prevention of homelessness the key priority in the Supporting People Commissioning Plan.

However the Homelessness Review has identified some areas for improvement/enhancement of support service to be addressed in the Homelessness Strategy including:

- Provide a single access point for supported accommodation.
- Increasing levels of need for support for people with mental health/complex needs.
- Need to review support and accommodation provision for people with substance misuse issues.
- Ensure staff are trained in a range of psychologically informed approaches, including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE).
- Provide a more flexible and responsive support service to ensure that people receive the right level of support at the right time.

2.7 *Access to Permanent accommodation*

Access to permanent accommodation needs to be improved. There is high demand for social housing so the options available in the private rented sector need to be increased. There is a clear need for the Council to work with RSL partners to set out and agree how the housing sector will work together to alleviate homelessness. It is also essential that the Homelessness Strategy feeds into the Social Housing Grant Programme in order to influence any new housing developments.

2.8 *Early intervention and prevention*

The Homelessness Service provides effective prevention and advice with homelessness prevented for over 73% of households who are threatened with homelessness. But more work could be done to design services to ensure early contact with service users and to improve the information and knowledge of services that are available including:

- Raising public awareness of services – including developing an education programme for young people; reviewing information available on-line and in written format
- Improving mediation services
- Reducing evictions from supported and permanent housing
- Working with Housing Benefit and Poverty and Prevention to identify households at risk of future homelessness due to impact of welfare reform and address increased need for welfare benefits advice, income maximisation and debt advice
- Ensure housing and support providers are well-trained and equipped to provide appropriate advice according to the needs of individuals.

2.9 *Rough sleeping*

There are a wide range of services available for people who are sleeping rough however numbers continue to increase therefore a re-think of the solutions available needs to take place. It is proposed that there is a specific objective to address rough sleeping and the strategy will set out a range of actions, also incorporating actions taken from the Welsh Government Rough Sleeping Action Plan, including

- Ensuring that rough sleepers receive advice and support within 48 hours of being identified.
- Developing a Housing First Approach – Housing First uses ordinary housing, such as private rented or social rented flats and is designed to house those who have had long term homeless issues (such as entrenched rough sleepers with high needs) in their own, settled homes as quickly as possible and to provide the support they will need to sustain an exit from homelessness.
- Developing a suitable monitoring system.
- Improving facilities for those who are vulnerably housed or sleeping rough.

2.10 *Service user involvement*

This has been identified as a key area for improvement for the strategy therefore a specific objective has been proposed. In particular to develop

opportunities to ensure that the principles of co-production are incorporated into the design and delivery of services.

3. Consultation

3.1 Consultation with service users and providers of homelessness, support and housing services has been a key element of the Homelessness Review and their views have directly influenced the aims, objectives and the actions. The following consultation has taken place:

- **Service users** – via a survey distributed by service providers, which was also available on-line (131 responses received).
- **Four service user focus groups** – Service users from a range of Wallich Services; Service users from Crisis; Young People engaged with homelessness and support services; and women currently receiving support from Women’s Aid and BASWO.
- **Service Providers** – via a survey and prioritisation exercise with the Supporting People and Homelessness Forum.
- **The general public** – via an on-line survey (116 responses received).

3.2 The full details of the findings from the consultation form part of the Homelessness Review. A summary of the key issues raised is attached (**Appendix A**).

3.3 There will be a full and extensive internal and external consultation process once the strategy has been completed. This is anticipated to take place over the summer. Further opportunities will be provided for service user involvement in this process.

4. Profile of homelessness in Swansea

4.1 Levels of homelessness have remained fairly constant in Swansea over time. However due to recent changes in statutory homelessness legislation brought about by the introduction of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, direct data comparisons are no longer possible with previous years. Therefore the data collected for the Homelessness Review will set a baseline to enable the Council to closely monitor changes in levels of homelessness going forward.

4.2 In 2016/17:

- 2557 applications for assistance were dealt with by Housing Options.
- 1143 were threatened with homelessness within 56 days
- Homelessness was prevented for 73% of households (compared to 62% in Wales)
- 395 were actually homeless and provided with further advice and assistance.

Of the households threatened with homelessness:

- 39% were single males
- 26% were single parent families

- 21% were single females
- 7% were couples with children

Of these

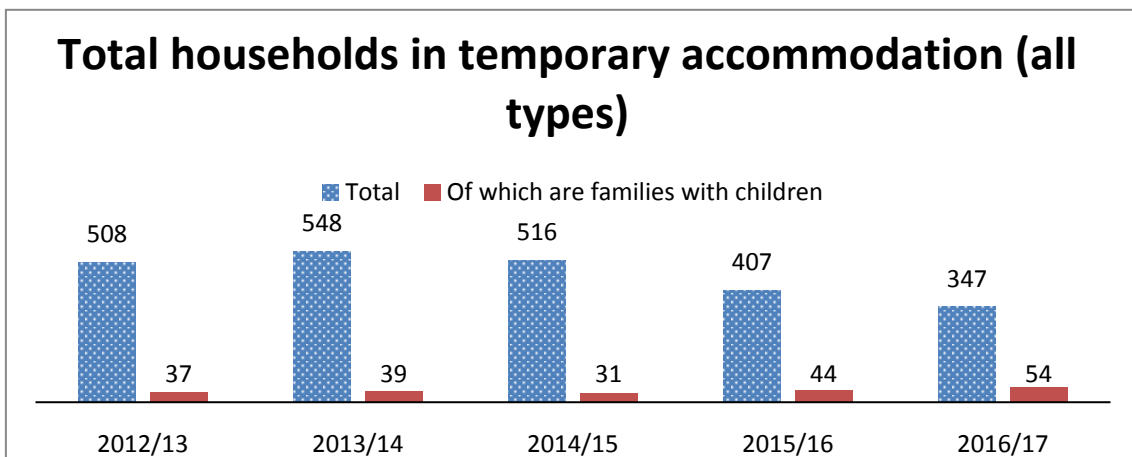
- 1% were 16-17 years olds
- 27% were aged 18-24
- 71% were aged 25 and over
- 15% of households were from an ethnic minority background

The main causes of homelessness are:

- Loss of private rented accommodation
- Parental relationship breakdown
- In Institution or care (Asylum seekers granted refugee status, hospital, residential home, army etc.)
- Domestic violence
- Relationship breakdown
- Leaving prison

4.3 *Temporary accommodation*

Overall use of temporary accommodation has reduced between 2015/16 and 2017/18:

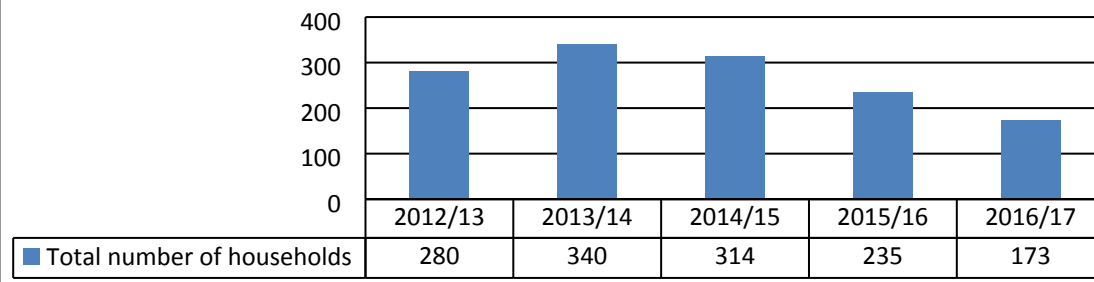


However, whilst overall use of temporary accommodation has reduced the number of families in temporary accommodation increased in 2015/16 and 2016/17. Further analysis is being undertaken to establish the reasons for this.

4.4 *Bed and Breakfast accommodation*

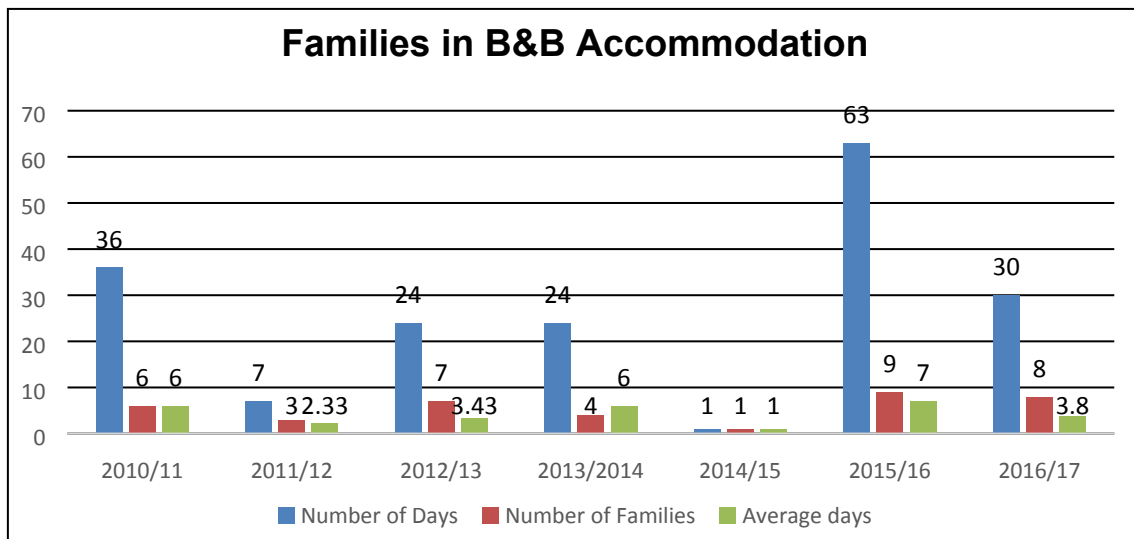
There has been a steady reduction in the use of B&B accommodation since 2014/15, and especially since the introduction of the new legislation and provision of Welsh Government funding to help fund alternative approaches to prevention. This indicates that the early prevention work that is being carried out is directly reducing the number of households requiring temporary accommodation at a later stage.

Total use of B&B accommodation for households in Swansea



4.5 Families in bed and breakfast accommodation

The average number of days homeless families spend in bed and breakfast accommodation is one of the Council's corporate performance indicators and the chart below shows the data from 2010/11-16/17. The target is 6 days. The chart shows that overall the Council performs well in this area and regularly meets this target. However, it is important to note that the use of B&B accommodation for families does fluctuate, as shown in the 2015/16 figure. The spike in use in 2015/16 is attributed to the fact that the Council's own temporary accommodation for families was undergoing renovation to develop disabled facilities therefore four units were not in use for a portion of the year, which led to an increase in the number of families who were placed in B&B. However, B&B remains the option of last resort and families are moved on to more suitable accommodation as soon as possible.



4.6 Rough sleeping

Between 2015 and 2017 there has been a 37% increase in the estimated number of rough sleepers in Swansea. This corresponds with what is happening in Wales as a whole, where the estimated number of rough sleepers has increased by 44% over the same period.

The causes of rough sleeping are complex however some key changes over recent years have been identified as having an impact including: changes brought

about by Welfare Reform and cuts to benefits which have increased financial insecurity and levels of poverty; rising rents in the private rented sector and reductions in permitted housing benefit payments which have contributed to reducing access to housing; changes in legislation have also led to an increasing number of Eastern European migrants who are not eligible for housing benefit support, therefore are unable to access assistance if they are not working.

Finally, improvements in methods of data collection on numbers of rough sleepers also mean that current information is more likely to be an accurate reflection of the situation.

	Swansea			Wales		
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
Actual count (1 night count)	5	16	21	82	141	188
Estimated rough sleepers (2 week period)	19	23	26	240	313	345

5. Draft strategic aim, key principles and objectives

5.1 A draft strategic aim, key principles and objectives have been developed for the basis of consultation. Key actions are also being identified to achieve the objectives as a result of the emerging findings from the Homelessness Review, and some examples of the type of actions being considered are included with the objectives.

5.2 *Draft strategic aim*

The aim of Swansea's Homelessness Strategy is to ensure every person has access to good quality advice, accommodation and support at the earliest possible opportunity in order to prevent homelessness.

5.3 *Key principles*

In order to successfully deliver this Strategy we will:

- Safeguard people from harm.
- Ensure equality of access to services and promote social inclusion and community cohesion.
- Maximise the resources available to deal with homelessness.
- Continue to encourage and promote local partnership and regional working, where appropriate, in order to make the best use of resources.
- Work in line with the five ways of working set out in the Future Generations Wellbeing Act:
 - *Prevention – preventing problems occurring or getting worse*
 - *Long term – balancing short-term needs with addressing long term needs*
 - *Integration – avoiding conflict between public body objectives*
 - *Collaboration – working in partnership with others*

- *Involvement – involving people*

5.4 *Draft Objectives*

The following draft objectives have been developed:

Objective 1: Ensuring service users are at the centre of service delivery.

In order to achieve this we will.....

Some examples of the type of actions we are considering are:

- Ensure that the principles of co-production are incorporated into the design and delivery of services to ensure that people with experience of homelessness have a voice and involvement in planning services aimed at helping them. This will initially include:
 - Development of a Homelessness Charter
 - Development of service standards for the Council's Homelessness Service

Objective 2: Prioritising early intervention and prevention of homelessness.

In order to achieve this we will.....

Some examples of the type of actions we are considering are:

- Raise general public awareness of homelessness, advice and support services in order to ensure a more widespread understanding of where people can go if faced with a housing issue.
- Strengthen pathways between services across the local authority, voluntary agencies, health and housing sectors, to ensure that staff have sufficient awareness and training to appropriately signpost and enable individuals to access the help that they need at the earliest opportunity.

Objective 3: Ensuring suitable accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless.

In order to achieve this we will.....

Some examples of the type of actions we are considering are:

- Work with Supporting People and providers to ensure that future funding levels for temporary supported accommodation meet local needs.
- Improve engagement with private sector landlords in order to increase the supply of good quality, affordable properties.

Objective 4: Ensuring appropriate support is available for people who are or may become homeless.

In order to achieve this we will.....

Some examples of the type of actions we are considering are:

- Deliver a responsive, flexible tenancy support service to ensure that people receive the right level of support at the right time.
- Ensure housing and support providers are well-trained and equipped to provide appropriate advice according to the needs of individuals, including: for example, Domestic Abuse; mental health training; Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Psychologically-informed environments (PIE).

Objective 5: Providing robust responses to support rough sleepers and end the need for individuals to sleep rough.

In order to achieve this we will.....

Some examples of the type of actions we are considering are:

- Promote the prevention of rough sleeping through emergency housing arrangements and maximising the effectiveness of homelessness prevention, and, where rough sleeping cannot be prevented, ensure support and advice is provided within 48 hours.
- Develop a Housing First approach to address the housing and support needs of homeless people and rough sleepers with the most complex needs.

5.5 Action plan

A detailed series of actions to achieve the objectives are currently being developed. A comprehensive action plan will form part of the strategy and will also be subject to the rigorous consultation process.

5.6 The actions are being developed with reference to the following key pieces of evidence:

- Emerging findings from the Homelessness Review
- Consultation with providers of homelessness, support and housing services
- Consultation with service users
- Welsh Government Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales
- Welsh Government Rough Sleeping Action Plan 2018-20
- Wales Audit Office report “How Local Government manages demand – Homelessness”

6. Next steps

6.1 Consultation is currently taking place with providers of support, housing and homelessness services on the draft strategic aim, key principles and objectives. Providers have been asked to give their views on these and identify key actions that they believe will prevent and alleviate homelessness in Swansea. A similar exercise is taking place with the Council’s Heads of Service to ensure that they have the opportunity to influence the development of the draft strategy.

6.2 The Review of Homelessness is being finalised and is due for completion by end of April 2018.

6.3 The draft Strategy will be produced by early summer and a full public consultation exercise, including service users, will take place between July and September, with the aim of the final strategy being considered by Council in October 2018.

7. Equality and Engagement Implications

7.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening form has been completed (**Appendix B**) and it has identified that a full EIA is required. This process has commenced and will be completed once the final strategy is ready for consultation.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report. However there will be cost and resource implications for the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy, which will be clearly identified in the final strategy and action plan, with reference to the appropriate budgets.

9. Legal Implications

9.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a responsibility on all local authorities to produce a homelessness strategy by the end of 2018 (i.e. 31st December) to set out how the Council plans to tackle homelessness in its area over a four year period.

9.2 The Act replaces Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, the Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001, the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2006.

9.2 The legislation has changed the law on homelessness in Wales and provides a different framework for homelessness in the rest of the United Kingdom. For example, whilst local authorities in England and Northern Ireland are encouraged to focus on preventing homelessness where possible, their duties in respect of homelessness are not framed around prevention as the primary driver.

Background Papers: None.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Summary of consultation findings

Appendix B - Equality Impact Assessment Screening Form