‘Making every contact count’

Preventing homelessness

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‘Making every contact count’

Purpose

This briefing paper gives an overview of the government’s homelessness prevention strategy “Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness”\(^1\) which was published on 16 August 2012.

It will be useful for strategic housing authorities. They will want to consider how they take advantage of the opportunity to review and reinvigorate their approach to homelessness prevention and how use the report as a lever to achieve buy-in and action from other local services.

The briefing will also be useful for housing providers. They will want to understand the context for further emphasis on homelessness prevention and to reassess how they can contribute to plans developed by local partnerships.

The key points

- The government has been explicit in widening responsibility for homelessness prevention to all local services
- The vision within the report requires an integrated approach at local level and a commitment to making every contact with a vulnerable person count
- Additional funding and resources are being made available – they are targeted on early intervention initiatives for groups most at risk of homelessness and cross cutting themes
- The government has evaluated what is already working well and has used this to set ten local challenges to local authorities which will lead them to deliver a ‘gold standard service’.

Introduction

In July 2011 the government’s Ministerial Working Group on preventing and tackling homelessness published its first report: *Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out* nationwide.\(^2\)

The second report *Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness* was published on 16 August 2012. In this report attention is turned upstream to think about how services can be managed in a way that prevents all households, regardless of whether they are families, couples, or single people, from reaching a crisis point where they are faced with homelessness.

The publication of *Making Every Contact Count* coincided with the publication of:

\(^1\) [http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/makingeverycontactcount](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/makingeverycontactcount)


\(^2\) – Making every contact count – preventing homelessness
An evidence review of the costs of homelessness\(^3\) which highlighted the direct costs of homelessness to local authorities and also estimated costs to the NHS and the Ministry of Justice.

Official Statistics for England 2011/12 in relation to homelessness prevention and relief\(^4\) which show the number of households which were helped last year to stay in their homes or found a new place to live.

This is an opportune time for strategic housing authorities to review their approach to homelessness prevention and to consider how they can use the publications of these reports to harness further partnership working with other local services.

This briefing includes:

- The vision set out in Making Every Contact Count
- A summary of the key findings of the Ministerial Working Party
- A summary of the government commitments set out in the report
- The government's expectations, including their ten local challenges for local authorities.

It suggests some general ‘next steps’ primarily for strategic housing authorities, but also for housing providers.

\(^3\) \url{http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/visionendroughsleeping}

\(^4\) \url{http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/visionendroughsleeping}
The vision and key findings set out in *Making Every Contact Count*

**Vision**

In the foreword to the report Grant Shapps sets out the vision:

“...the vision of this report is simple, but bold. There is no place for homelessness in the 21st century. The key to delivering that vision is prevention – agencies working together to support those at risk of homelessness”.

**Key findings**

The report presents evidence and emphasises:

- The complexity of preventing homelessness
- There are a number of triggers for homelessness
- There are particular groups who are at higher risk such as young people, ex-offenders, and people with drugs, alcohol and mental health needs
- The links between homelessness and poor health, crime, and financial and social exclusion
- There is evidence that the most successful approaches include early intervention, person-centred planning, co-ordination between services
- The significant costs associated with homelessness.

The government’s strategy - the core of the report - reflects these conclusions. It places particular emphasis on an integrated approach at a local level in keeping with the fundamental premise that homelessness prevention is everyone’s responsibility.

The report announces resources which focus on groups at greatest risk and align with the cross-cutting themes referred to above. A number of voluntary sector agencies are named as recipients of funding and the lead agency for delivering initiatives within the strategy. The report also introduces the concept of payment by results.

**Government commitments set out in the report**

The report summarises initiatives already being delivered or planned, ie:

- Roll out of ‘No Second Night Out’ (rough sleeping initiatives)
- £20m Homelessness Transition Fund to be administered through voluntary sector providers
- £10.8m fund administered by Crisis to support the voluntary sector to deliver access to the private rented sector
- £18.5m to groups of local authorities to develop prevention services for single homeless people
- £5m Social Impact Bond for services for rough sleepers in London

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4 – Making every contact count – preventing homelessness
£20m for local housing authorities for preventing repossessions

Development of a national rough sleeper reporting line

Funded a report on how hospital admission and discharge can be improved for homeless people

Funded a pilot for improving outcomes for homeless people with co-existing mental health and substance misuse needs.

The report also:

Reiterates the government’s intention that that local authorities use elements of the Localism Act to strengthen their approach to homelessness prevention

Refers to the £19.5b Affordable Homes Programme.

**Commitments based on cross cutting**

Further commitments focus on five priority areas:

1. **Tackling troubled childhoods and adolescence**
   - Working with schools, local service commissioners and other local delivery partners to produce a evidence-based document which sets out effective local approaches to preventing youth homelessness
   - Funding the promotion of the youth accommodation pathway and developing innovative approaches to youth homelessness via St Basil’s youth homelessness charity
   - Investing £448m in a family intervention programme
   - Supporting 300 schools to take part in a three-year trial to assist excluded pupils.

2. **Improving health**
   - Working with the Inclusion Health Board to improve the evidence base on the health of homeless people and the recording of homeless patients in the health system
   - Funding Homeless Link to improve outcomes for homeless people with dual drugs/alcohol and mental health needs through a pilot in five local authority areas
   - Working with the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Recovery Partnership and local drugs and alcohol treatment teams to develop sector-led guidance to improve understanding of how the two sectors can work together to support people to achieve full recovery
   - Working with Homeless Link to ensure medical professionals discharging patients who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless know who to approach for help with meeting housing needs.

3. **Reducing involvement in crime**
   - Commissioning Crisis to develop guidance for prison and probation practitioners on improving offender access to private rented sector accommodation
Highlighting homeless prevention to new police and crime commissioners (following their election in November 2012) to facilitate more cross-cutting service commissioning across local criminal justice system partners

Using the published Integrated Offender Management key principles to set out the advantages of a wide partnership involvement

Helping prevent prisoners from becoming homeless upon release from custody by maintaining payment the housing element of the new Universal Credit from October 2013 to those serving sentences of six months or less.

4 Improving skills; employment; and financial advice

Testing the support required to help claimants budget and manage their rent payments effectively through a series of Housing Demonstration Projects

Providing £33.6m over two years to support the not-for-profit advice sector to adapt to changes in the way that it is funded

Piloting a range of Community Learning Trust models

Analysing the issues faced by homeless people in accessing skills training

Exploring options for supporting individuals facing multiple disadvantages that are some distance from the labour market (such as homeless rough sleepers) on a ‘payment by results’ basis

Via Homeless Link, supporting a pilot initiative bringing local voluntary homelessness sector and the local authority together with Jobcentre Plus, Work Programme and Work Choice Providers.

5 Pioneering innovative social funding mechanisms for homelessness – including

Providing £5m to launch the world’s first homelessness Social Impact Bond in London, designed to attract social investment

Providing ‘light touch’ support to help other local commissioners develop Social Impact Bond propositions

The report makes further commitments in respect of:

Preventing migrants from becoming homeless and dealing with the associated rise of illegal ‘beds in sheds’

Preventing and supporting members of the armed forces who are at risk of homelessness.
Government expectations

Given that strategic housing authorities have been developing and embedding a prevention approach to homelessness since 2002, it is not surprising that the report has analysed and built upon what is already working well.

The report concludes that “some common themes emerge from the good practice that we’ve seen and should form part of the local strategic response across the country”.

The five common themes are:

- Agencies working together to target those at risk of homelessness
- Identifying and tackling the underlying causes of homelessness as part of housing needs assessments by referral to appropriate support
- Local authorities co-ordinating access to services for vulnerable people; multi agency action, case work, agencies responding flexibly
- Increasing access to the private sector; supporting people to remain in private sector tenancies
- A focus on youth homelessness.

The ten local challenges that the government have set local authorities

The government has drawn on the common themes set out above to develop ten local challenges for local authorities – the ‘gold standard’ to which they should aspire to reach:

1. To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which achieves ‘buy in’ across all local authority services
2. To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients, including written advice
4. To adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
5. To have housing pathways agreed, or in development, with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support
6. To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
7. To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. To have a homelessness strategy in place with a proactive approach to preventing homelessness, reviewed annually to test that it is responsive to emerging needs
9. Not to place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. Not to place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than six weeks.

“If adopted these could lead to all local homelessness services meeting the standards of the best”.
Next steps for strategic housing authorities and housing providers

Strategic housing authorities will welcome the principles of this report and the additional commitments to preventing homelessness. Delivering the vision presents considerable challenges.

The report comes at a time when strategic housing authorities are already making significant changes and plans for their services associated with the Localism Act and Welfare Reform. A priority is to anticipate and address any impact which might lead to an increase in homelessness/undermine prevention strategies. It comes at a time of change for other local services; regrouping of many partnerships and evolving commissioning arrangements. Finally it is set against a general background of reduced resources.

Actions for strategic housing authorities specifically

Use the report (and statistical information published in linked reports) as a platform to:

- Educate senior managers and members about the causes, impact of homelessness and the cross cutting themes; showcase what you are already doing well and highlight the need for corporate commitment to take homelessness prevention to the next level
- Emphasise expectations to partner agencies and use it as a lever to connect with those who are currently least engaged
- Develop a plan to influence joint commissioning arrangements in your area including new health and well-being boards and consider who will champion the homelessness agenda
- Review the effectiveness of your current homelessness prevention partnerships and the lead agencies for delivering local initiatives in relation to young people, ex-offenders and people with drug, alcohol mental health needs. At a time of change within many local services, these partnerships need to reassess pathways for people who are at risk of homelessness. This is likely to require further education of practitioners
- Keep abreast of the funding that becomes available and be proactive in making bids.

As they emerge, consider the outcomes of the pilots and new initiatives outlined in the report and their relevance to your local setting.

You will be having a range of discussions with housing associations in your area as a result of Localism Act and welfare reform – use this forum to highlight the expectations in the report and link those discussions with your strategy to tackle homelessness.

If you have not already done so, you should specifically consider:

- Whether pre-eviction protocols are working
- The implications of the housing association’s tenancy policy and associated procedures to manage ending of fixed term tenancies
- Their under-occupation plans
- Whether there is merit in reviewing aspects of tenancy management, eg, allowing and promoting applications from single sharers in areas where there is a lack of single person accommodation.
Building on work associated with the Localism Act and Welfare reform, be proactive in providing relevant information on trends and anticipated changes in housing need to your enabling teams.

Focus on the ten challenges and consider what you will have to do to reach the ‘gold standard’. The government has funded an extensive local authority self diagnostic toolkit. The toolkit allows local authorities to benchmark, assess their front-line and back office services and customer experience, and evaluate the cost effectiveness of prevention and statutory homeless activity. The toolkit is available via the National Homelessness Advice Service – they are currently offering training to all local authorities. As part of an ongoing approach to strengthening the local integrated approach, strategic housing authorities should consider involving partners in the process of self-assessment developing and delivering an outcome-focused improvement plan.
Jenny Mayne is an independent consultant with 30 years of housing experience. She has worked for both urban and rural local authorities - in London, Bristol and Norfolk as well as a number of housing associations.

Jenny's significant and diverse experience covers homelessness, strategic housing, housing management and regeneration from front line to senior management level. She has a track record of facilitating positive partnership working and supporting teams and individuals to drive forward positive change in front line services.