

These minutes are draft, subject to approval at the next meeting of the sub-committee

Housing Sub-Committee

24 July 2017

Present: Councillor S Cox (Chair)
Councillors K Bolger, L Darke, John Hunter, N
Huscroft, M Madden, P Mason, A Newman,
Pat Oliver, M Thirlaway and J Walker

HO07/07/17 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Arkle.

HO08/07/17 Substitute Members

No substitute Members were reported.

HO09/07/17 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.

HO10/07/17 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The sub-committee received a report and presentation in relation to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The Act sought to introduce new homelessness legislation and duties to prevent and tackle homelessness in England. The legislation was expected to be enacted in April 2018 and established a number of new duties to ensure that local authorities adopt a more preventative approach to homelessness and provide all households at risk of homelessness with the advice and support they require.

The new duties in the legislation included an extension of the period during which the authority should treat someone as threatened homeless from 28 to 56 days; a new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants and a new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they thought may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It was noted that ahead of the enactment date, government would publish an amended Code of Guidance in October 2017. The Code would provide local authorities with detail on how they should exercise their homelessness functions and apply the various statutory criteria in practice.

A project team had been created to ensure that North Tyneside Council fully understand and prepare for the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The group would deliver and develop an Implementation Plan to ensure that the Authority continued to meet its existing homelessness duties as well as the new duties. In order to raise awareness of the legislation and implications, consultation would be undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders, including Lead Members, Housing Sub-committee, Members, service users and partner organisations. A governance structure for the project was appended to the report.

The sub-committee was informed of current levels of homelessness in North Tyneside. It was noted that, during 2016/17, a total of 2312 presentations were made to the housing service. These people received a high level of support to assess needs and 796 full

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assessments were made. From these assessments, 167 were accepted as priority homeless. Members had requested an update on rough sleeping in the borough, as anecdotal evidence suggested that this was on the increase, particularly in the Whitley Bay area. The sub-committee was informed that, from data collected on a Friday evening when checks were made, there were no rough sleepers in North Tyneside. It was highlighted that there had been recent problems with people begging on the streets in certain areas of the borough. These people were not homeless and the police had issued dispersal orders to move these individuals on. Members suggested that there were areas in North Shields where these people were still begging and it was suggested that this be passed onto the relevant officers to look at with the police.

The sub-committee was informed of the proposed duties that would fall on local authorities once the new legislation came into force. The prevention duty would require reasonable steps to help the applicant secure their accommodation so that it did not cease to be available. This would apply to all eligible applicants who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days. Eligible applicants who remained or became homeless would then move onto the relief duty. The relief duty would be to take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure suitable accommodation. If after 56 days the applicant remained homeless, they may move onto the main duty. This would be to secure accommodation is available for the applicant. This would apply to priority need applicants only but they would be excluded from the full duty if they deliberately and unreasonably refused to cooperate or they refused a final offer of suitable accommodation at relief stage. All applicants would have a personal housing plan that would set out circumstances and actions to be taken.

It was highlighted that one of the key changes to emerge from the legislation was that dealing with homeless applicants would be priority blind. This meant that people from all over the country could apply to North Tyneside for support and the local authority would have to administer the relevant duties. Members were informed that, in delivering these changes, North Tyneside Council would aim to enable people to help themselves, work in partnership to improve outcomes, use intelligence to target resources and reduce long term costs.

Officers outlined the challenges that the new legislation would bring for the authority. These included a projected increase in service demand at a time of increased budgetary pressure; enabling and facilitating a cultural shift; developing and enhancing partnerships to raise awareness of the legislation and their duties; utilising the private rented sector and supporting non-priority homeless applicants. It was noted that £61m in government funding would be provided to enable the service transition (across all authorities). However, this would be limited and the full financial impact would not be known until the end of year 1.

Members were informed that the next steps to preparing for the implementation of the new legislation would be to understand the resource requirements, particularly preparing for the shift from a specialist homelessness resource to prevention focussed approach. The governance structure also needed to be established and the project team to deliver the agreed implementation plan. It was reiterated that comprehensive consultation would take place in lead up to and during the transition phase. Update reports would therefore be provided to Housing Sub-committee in the future, to detail progress of delivery of the implementation plan.

It was **agreed** to note the report and receive further updates at future meetings.

