

Northamptonshire Homelessness Strategy

Commissioned by the
Northamptonshire County Housing Strategy
Officers Group

Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 This document	3
1.2 Research and consultation	3
2. Strategy implementation	4
Priority 1: Implementation Partnership	4
Priority 2: Service User Forum	5
Priority 3: Resources	5
3. Prevention of homelessness and floating support	7
Priority 4: County Prevention Schemes	7
Priority 5: Sharing Information	8
4. Temporary accommodation, hostels and supported housing	9
Priority 6: County Pathways for Statutory and Non-Statutory Households	9
Priority 7: Investment in Supported Accommodation	9
5. Permanent accommodation	11
Priority 8: Permanent Accommodation Protocol	11
Priority 9: Increasing Move On	11
Priority 10: Access to and Provision of Permanent Housing	12
6. Protocols and partnerships	15
Priority 11: Protocols and Partnerships	15
7. Evidence Base	17
Priority 12: Evidence Base	17

1. Introduction

Each district in Northamptonshire has in place a statutory homelessness strategy outlining how the council and their partners will work to prevent homelessness and ensure accommodation and support for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

In recognition that there are common issues relating to homelessness across Northamptonshire the County Housing Strategy Officers Group has commissioned a countywide review of homelessness and the development of a strategy to guide action on homelessness at the County level. The Northamptonshire Homelessness Strategy will sit alongside the statutory district strategies and link to recently produced East Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy.

The priorities identified in the Northamptonshire Homelessness Strategy are designed to support and enhance work on homelessness being undertaken by district councils, Northamptonshire Supporting People, voluntary sector partners, housing associations and other relevant agencies.

The strategy is informed by:

- National homelessness policy
- District councils' statutory homelessness strategies
- The East Midland's Regional Homelessness Strategy
- The Northamptonshire Homelessness Review
- Information on priorities for action provided by districts' homelessness strategy officers
- Consultation with a wide range of stakeholders from the voluntary sector.

1.1 This document

This document is the Northamptonshire Homelessness Strategy. It should be read in conjunction with its evidence base, the Northamptonshire Homelessness Review, available separately. Under each priority a series of developments are suggested. These will be used to inform the development of an action plan to take forward the work of this strategy.

1.2 Research and consultation

The evidence used to support the development of this Strategy is detailed in the Northamptonshire Homelessness Review. The Review and Strategy were presented for consultation in Northamptonshire during the period 17-31 July 2007, including a presentation to the Northamptonshire TORCH forum. A number of responses were received from statutory and voluntary sources and these comments informed the final version of this Strategy document.

2. Strategy Implementation

PRIORITY 1

Implementation partnership

A County level Homelessness Strategy Partnership with a wide-ranging membership should be set up to implement this strategy and integrate its priorities into Northamptonshire's Local Area Agreement. Such an approach will allow a variety of stakeholder services to help those most affected by or at risk from homelessness, including people with complex and multiple needs. The same partnership should have responsibility for the sub-regional implementation of the East Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy, ensuring that work is not duplicated.

Rationale

A County level Homelessness Strategy Partnership is needed to drive forward the work outlined in this strategy, in particular by developing a detailed action plan to implement the priorities identified and integrate these into Northamptonshire's Local Area Agreement.

Suggested developments

- The East Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy requires an implementation partnership to be set up in each sub-region. As the Southern sub-region shares the same geographical boundaries as Northamptonshire, one partnership should perform both roles
- A key focus should be on integrating the priorities of the homelessness strategy into Northamptonshire's Local Area Agreement
- Dedicated officer time will be required to support the work of the Homelessness Strategy Partnership and consideration should be given to how this may be funded
- There is potential scope for the County Housing Strategy Officers Group to be expanded to perform the functions of this Homelessness Strategy Partnership
- A number of districts have homelessness forums that could be used as a template for the partnership, for example Northampton
- The Homelessness Strategy Partnership should include:
 - Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy leads from each district
 - Housing associations
 - Voluntary sector agencies
 - Supporting People
 - Representation from the private rented sector
 - Housing benefit teams
 - Social services
 - Northamptonshire LAA lead

- Prisons and probation staff
- DAAT and DIP leads
- Service user representatives
- LA Housing management teams

PRIORITY 2

Service user forum

A County level Service User Forum should be set up to promote the views and involvement of homeless people in the work of the Northamptonshire Homelessness Strategy Partnership and the implementation of this strategy. Council officers should comprehensively support this forum and representatives from the forum should attend Partnership meetings. Links should be made to the sub-group of the East Midlands Homelessness Forum for people with experience of homelessness.

Rationale

- Service user involvement should be key to the delivery of the priorities in this strategy and to the services provided in the County for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness

Suggested developments

- Develop a Service User Forum as outlined in Priority 2
- Ensure that appropriate levels of support are provided to the forum by council staff
- Develop links, as outlined in Priority 2, with the equivalent body at regional level and the County Homelessness Strategy Partnership.

PRIORITY 3

Resources

Homelessness services (statutory and voluntary) should commit to working jointly with other agencies where beneficial shared outcomes can be determined and as part of the Local Area Agreement where appropriate. This will ensure effective use of a range of resources including core local authority funds and those not traditionally focused on homelessness.

Rationale

- There are no new resources available for the implementation of this strategy, hence more effective use of current funds is required

- Joint work and pooled budgets can lead to beneficial shared outcomes, for example ensuring the provision of appropriate accommodation for people engaging in drug treatment (with the DAAT) or the provision of suitable supported temporary accommodation for statutory clients (with voluntary sector hostels).
- Outcomes and funding for homelessness are likely to be more closely tied to the Local Area Agreement in the future
- Local authority core funding for homelessness provides a much larger budget than specific prevention or innovation funds and should be used innovatively to tackle and prevent homelessness.

Suggested developments

- The priorities of this Homelessness Strategy should be incorporated into the Local Area Agreement (see Priority 1) to promote the financial involvement of a range of agencies and services in meeting shared outcomes relating to homelessness
- Priority 11 of this strategy makes suggestions for further development of partnership working. Consideration should be given in the action plan to developing financial commitments in these partnerships as well as protocols for joint working.
- Northamptonshire districts should ensure that their core spend on homelessness promotes at every opportunity effective working to prevent and tackle homelessness for all people.

3. Prevention of homelessness and floating support

PRIORITY 4

County prevention schemes

A central resource should be determined (from existing district staffing/budgets) to develop prevention schemes that are accessible by all County residents. This would create economies of scale and equality of provision across the County. Schemes should be actively publicised by housing advice staff in local authorities and voluntary agencies to all individuals requiring these interventions. Floating support (long and short-term) also has a preventative role and such services should be available across district boundaries.

Note: There should be a separate and specific focus on schemes that help people access the private rented sector. This is covered under Priority 10.

Rationale

- Homelessness applications have fallen across the County and in the majority of districts (2004-2006). However, the 21 percent decrease in the County compares to a 40 percent decrease across England. A focus must therefore be kept on the prevention agenda
- Many prevention schemes in Northamptonshire currently have local connection or statutory homelessness criteria, or are linked to social housing tenure, thus preventing mobility and access
- Economies of scale would allow provision of a wider range of schemes, allowing schemes to be more specific in their provision if necessary
- Some floating support services are subject to local connection criteria and no service has coverage of all seven districts.

Suggested developments

- The focus of County prevention schemes should be on the main reasons for loss of last settled home, although other issues should not be denied coverage. In Northamptonshire the main reasons are parents/friends/relatives no longer willing to accommodate (39%), end of assured shorthold tenancy (17%) and domestic violence (14%). The work under Priority 10 will be important for people made homeless by the end of an assured shorthold tenancy
- Local authority and voluntary sector housing advice staff should actively publicise prevention schemes, investment in other forms of publicity should be encouraged and all non-housing related staff (i.e. teachers, social workers, support providers) should be able to signpost appropriately to these services
- Supporting People funded floating support schemes (long and short-term) should operate across all district boundaries and all forms of tenure.

PRIORITY 5

Sharing information

County level risk assessment and information sharing protocols should be created to ensure that correct levels of support are provided at the time of tenancy commencement and that any support issues (including rent arrears) are swiftly communicated to the relevant agencies so that support can be provided and eviction avoided.

Rationale

- The Housing Corporation's *Tackling Homelessness*, which outlines the role that Housing Associations are expected to take in preventing and responding to homelessness, provides a key opportunity to engage housing associations in prevention through better co-ordination and communication.
- A large number of individuals have contact with people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This information should be shared to ensure effective prevention activity across the County.

Suggested developments

- Housing and homelessness departments, voluntary providers, local authority housing management teams, housing benefit staff, housing associations and private landlords should be involved in the protocol as well as other professionals in contact with people at risk of homelessness (support staff, social workers etc)
- The protocol between the Housing Corporation's East Midlands Office, housing associations and Derby City Council should be examined to see if it can provide a basis on which to develop a protocol for Northamptonshire.
- A protocol on information sharing could also include agreements on nominations and allocations (see Priority 10)
- The involvement of housing associations and other agencies in the Homelessness Strategy Partnership will be key to the development of the protocol.

4. Temporary accommodation, hostels and supported housing

PRIORITY 6

County pathways for statutory and non-statutory households

A series of pathways should be developed to govern access to, and moves through, temporary and supported accommodation. Pathways should:

- Contribute to the reduction in the use of B&B and meeting the Government's 2010 temporary accommodation target
- Place statutory as well as non-statutory homeless households in supported accommodation wherever there is an identified need
- Utilise temporary and supported accommodation across the County regardless of a household's local connection to a particular district
- Be specific to certain client groups
- Allow entry, move on and steps backwards at multiple points along the pathway
- Link to accommodation in other regions of the East Midlands, where appropriate.

Note: Move on to permanent accommodation is covered in Priority 8.

PRIORITY 7

Investment in supported accommodation

To support the pathways model the County should:

- Continue to invest in forms of specialist supported accommodation so that, as a County, there is suitable and sufficient provision for all client groups, including those with multiple needs. The Supporting People strategy provides a basis for this investment. Further gap-analysis to inform investment decisions should be undertaken given the changes in access criteria initiated by the pathways model
- Invest in direct access homelessness provision and ensure that sufficient access to emergency accommodation is available
- Continue to ensure that all supported accommodation meets the 'places of change' agenda, linking services, activity and support to the provision of quality accommodation.

Rationale:

- Numbers in temporary accommodation have fallen by 6 percent across England between 2004 and 2006, while they remain level across Northamptonshire

- Sixteen percent of households in temporary accommodation in the County are living in bed and breakfast¹
- The size and rural nature of some areas means that it is not cost-effective to provide specialist accommodation provision for each client group in each district
- Supporting People data suggests that access to accommodation services for all client groups is highly dependent on local connection or agency referral (also likely to be affected by local connection)
- There is a significant shortage of direct access and emergency provision across the County
- Shortages of accommodation are reported for young people (including nightstops); teenage mothers; those fleeing domestic violence; complex/multiple needs (outside Northampton); drug and alcohol projects separate from mainstream homelessness services (including services for those abstaining/reducing); mental health and learning disabilities.

Suggested developments:

- A series of pathways (specific to client groups i.e. substance misusers, domestic violence) should be researched and developed, as described in Priority 6
- Investment in supported housing provision, as described in Priority 7, should support the pathways model. The ability to access provision across the County should help address some of the gaps identified above. Further gap-analysis to inform investment decisions should be undertaken given the changes in access criteria initiated by the pathways model and providers should share information on any planned capital or service developments
- Accommodation providers should be supported to meet the 'places of change' agenda
- There should be easier and faster access to detox and rehab services.
- The Homelessness Strategy Partnership should work closely with housing associations, districts, the County Council, the Regional Housing Board, Supporting People, the Housing Corporation and all other relevant sources of funding (i.e. Learning and Skills Council) to ensure that suitable supported housing schemes are developed and revenue funded.

¹ Q4 2006

5. Permanent accommodation²

PRIORITY 8

Permanent accommodation protocol

As part of the pathways model (Priority 6) introduce a ‘permanent accommodation protocol’ that covers the final stage of move on and allows clients to be housed in the district where they had a local connection (the ‘sending authority’) or in an area of their choice under a reciprocal arrangement between the Northamptonshire districts.

Rationale:

- As the pathways model will facilitate people being housed in short-term supported accommodation across the County there must be arrangements for the return to permanent (independent or long-term supported) once short-term services are no longer required or appropriate
- The option to choose permanent housing in a district other than the ‘sending authority’ may be beneficial for people fleeing violence or those wishing to make a fresh start.

Suggested developments:

- Research and implement a permanent accommodation protocol as part of the pathways model outlined under Priority 6. Reciprocal arrangements between authorities should form a central part of this agreement and permanent accommodation must include long-term supported as well as independent living options.

PRIORITY 9

Increasing move on

Increase move on between pathway providers and to permanent accommodation. Involve all pathway and permanent accommodation providers in understanding move on need and creating access to suitable options.

Rationale:

- The pathways model will only be effective if providers in the system can ensure move on between services and access suitable permanent accommodation when required

² Please note that this section is not about housing supply. Estimates of need are contained within the East Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy and are not covered in this document.

- Less delays and more appropriate move on from temporary and supported accommodation will help to meet the Government’s 2010 temporary accommodation target and ensure that bedspaces in Supporting People funded schemes are available for those that need them the most.

Suggested developments:

- Understand the likely need for various forms of accommodation, the potential supply of these options and any barriers to effective move on in the area.
- Use this data to inform commissioning of short and long-term supported schemes and develop actions to address access to and supply of a range of temporary and permanent options.

PRIORITY 10

Access to and provision of permanent housing

As part of Priority 9, address access to and supply of permanent housing to the level required, in particular by:

- Implementing a County level or series of linked Choice Based Lettings schemes with appropriate levels of priority for statutory and non-statutory homeless people
- Increasing access to housing association tenancies for homeless people
- Developing a strategy for accessing the private rented sector, including building relationships with landlords and a County level scheme to help people overcome access barriers
- Ensuring suitable and sufficient provision of long-term care/support accommodation and sheltered housing, jointly-funded where appropriate.

Rationale:

- Six districts are still direct providers of social housing
- Choice Based Lettings Schemes are likely to be developed in all districts in the near future so it is possible to influence their design. A County level scheme would support the pathways model outlined above
- Allowing people greater flexibility in where they live supports the development of sustainable communities.
- No district in Northamptonshire offers a specific route (other than the general housing register) for non-statutory homeless people to access social housing
- Across Northamptonshire local authorities allocate 23 percent of lets to priority need (PN) households, while housing associations allocate just 10 percent. It should be noted however that there is considerable variation in the districts, for example housing associations allocate a greater proportion of their lets to PN

households compared to the council in Daventry and South Northamptonshire. The reasons for this variation are not clear.

- Three districts (Corby, Daventry and East Northamptonshire) operate a common housing register, the latter two also operate a common allocation policy.
- 84 percent of housing stock in the County is privately owned. However, the number of people private renting is smaller than the national average in all districts
- No nominations of priority need households were made to the private rented sector (PRS) by district councils in 2006
- Many schemes available to help people access the PRS (i.e. rent/deposit or lettings schemes) require a local connection to the district or are only available to statutory homeless people.
- Some long-term care/support accommodation or sheltered accommodation is unsuitable for the needs of formerly homeless people and there are reported gaps in provision for some client groups.

Suggested developments:

- A County level CBL scheme (or series of linked district schemes) should be developed to support the pathways model outlined above
- The design and implementation of such a scheme(s) should allow statutory and non-statutory homeless people to bid successfully for social housing. High priority should be awarded in a transparent manner to those people living in short-term supported accommodation, including non-statutory homeless people.
- The CBL scheme, with appropriate priority, should be the main (and possibly only) route homeless people use to access local authority housing
- Housing association lets should be part of the CBL scheme(s) described above so that the allocation of social housing across the County is simple and transparent
- In the short-term, current nominations and allocations policies should be reviewed to ensure that there is appropriate access to housing association properties for statutory clients and data should be gathered on access to housing association lets for those living in short-term supported accommodation.
- There should be no blanket bans in exclusion policies, in line with Housing Corporation guidance.
- A County level scheme to help people access the PRS by providing rent/deposits and a suitable lettings service should be developed at County level using resources pooled from existing district budgets. This service should be accessible to all County residents and aim to prevent as well as tackle homelessness (see link to development body in Priority 4)
- Staff running the scheme should build relationships with private landlords (perhaps utilising a County forum), support providers and housing benefits teams to ensure

successful placements and ensure that Discretionary Housing Payment is spent in full by each district

- Consideration should be given to standardising which clients in temporary or supported accommodation are referred to the PRS scheme outlined above and which are encouraged to bid for social housing
- Ensure suitable and sufficient provision of long-term care/support accommodation and sheltered housing that caters for the needs of formerly homeless people. Extra care housing, 'very supported' developments and joint funding of mental health and learning difficulties schemes, as outlined in the Supporting People strategy, are examples of where this work is already underway.

6. Protocols and partnerships

PRIORITY 11

Protocols and partnerships

In addition to the working arrangements required for priorities 1-10 and to support joint working on beneficial shared outcomes (Priority 3), protocols with the following services should be developed or strengthened. Alongside the Local Area Agreement (Priority 1) this will promote coordinated service provision for homeless people, including those with complex and multiple needs:

- Social Services
- Employment, education, training and activity providers
- Health (including hospital discharge)
- Drug and alcohol teams (DAAT)
- Prison Service and Probation
- Domestic Violence providers

Rationale:

- The County already has a number of protocols in place to guide the provision of services to different client groups. In particular there is evidence of work around prison leavers with the Prison Service and Probation and a series of arrangements with Social Services for 16/17 year olds and care leavers.
- Priority 1 recommends that the strategy's priorities are integrated into Northamptonshire's Local Area Agreement
- Priority 3 recommends homelessness services commit to working jointly with other agencies where beneficial shared outcomes can be determined, and as part of the Local Area Agreement where appropriate, to ensure effective use of a range of resources.

Suggested developments:

- Review district protocols with social services for 16/17 year olds; care leavers; people with learning difficulties and asylum seekers. Develop a protocol for intentionally homeless households (where appropriate).
- Develop a protocol for the provision of community care assessments for homeless people.
- Develop employment, education, training and activity opportunities for people in temporary and supported accommodation
- Implement the Government's hospital discharge guidelines in partnership with NHS Trusts.

- Work with Northamptonshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the Mental Health Trust to ensure appropriate access to health and mental health services for all homeless people (including counselling and therapy) and in conjunction with health and mental health services develop links to homelessness projects to meet shared outcomes
- Develop work with the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT), especially around ensuring that homeless people engaging in treatment have access to suitable accommodation during and post treatment
- Continue to work with the Prison Service and Probation on prison leavers
- Ensure that suitable services are available for those facing domestic violence
- In all cases, in line with priorities 1 and 3, consideration should be given in the action plan to developing financial commitments in these partnerships as well as protocols for joint working.

7. Evidence Base

PRIORITY 12

Evidence base

Continue to develop a sound evidence base on levels of homelessness, needs of homeless people and the impact of statutory and voluntary interventions. If resources allow, focus on:

- Collecting wider statistics on homelessness in Northamptonshire
- Understanding flows of homeless households between districts in the County
- Understanding move on need and the availability of suitable options
- The needs of specific clients groups, for example older people

Rationale:

- The review of homelessness in Northamptonshire has highlighted that certain data on homelessness are not routinely collected and that a more comprehensive evidence base would be useful to inform service delivery and policy development.

Suggested developments:

- There is strong support to expand the collection of statistics on homelessness (from the current rough sleeper counts and statutory P1E figures) to provide a greater understanding of the issues in the County. Nottinghamshire's Homeless Watch scheme, which collects information on people requesting advice on homelessness from a wide-range of agencies in the County, may provide a suitable template, as may the snapshot survey work being undertaken by Kettering Borough Council.
- All districts should undertake regular rough sleeper counts in line with Government guidance
- Seek to understand the flow of homeless people across district boundaries in the County. This information should inform the development of the pathways model, as outlined above
- Collect information on move on need and the availability of suitable options with the aim of increasing move on between pathway providers and to permanent accommodation. Use this data to inform commissioning of short and long-term supported schemes and develop actions to address access to and supply of a range of temporary and permanent options
- Collect data on the needs of specific client groups living in homelessness services (i.e. older people) to further inform supported housing commissioning decisions.