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Homelessness Strategy 2011 - 2014




Stafford
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Foreword

Since the publication of Stafford Borough Council's last Homelessness Strategy the Housing Group and in particular the Housing Options Team have endeavoured to deal with the causes of homelessness within the Borough. To increase the supply of affordable homes, work with private sector landlords to remove potential barriers to the private rented sector, bring empty homes back into use and make more efficient and better use of housing stock offering a more sustainable service.

As Portfolio Holder for Community I am continuously reminded of the huge influence that homelessness can have on employment, health, education, life chances and the welfare of some of the borough's most vulnerable members of our community.

This new 3 year Homelessness Strategy will drive the continuous improvement of the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service, along with continued partnership working between the Council and its key stakeholders and agencies.

Preventing people from becoming homeless and helping others to move successfully into settled, more secure homes is intricate and time-consuming. Although the Council has a vital role to play in this, I know we cannot do this on our own. Instead we must all work together to find solutions to common problems.

The Council considers itself to be a 'learning' organisation and as such we will continue to embrace innovation and apply best practice for the benefit of its communities.

We have also developed a Customer Engagement Strategy that will ensure we stay in touch with the views of service users, and that we continue to improve and put customers first.

Councillor Patrick M Farrington
Portfolio Holder for Community

Chapter 1 Aims of the Strategy

1. Purpose

This strategy marks a fresh approach to tackling homelessness in Stafford. It provides the necessary framework for effective partnership working and for the delivery of efficiently managed and co-ordinated advice, housing and support services for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Stafford Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy has been developed by the Housing Options Service in consultation with a broad cross-section of stakeholders including service users, and service providers.

The overall aim of this strategy is to reduce both the causes of homelessness in Stafford and provide a quality response to those affected by homelessness, offering a range of solutions where possible.

The overall aims of the strategy are therefore to:

- Continue to prevent homelessness by early intervention
- Ensure that homeless people have access to quality services to assist them when faced with or when facing homelessness
- Proactively work with all relevant local organisations to provide a co-ordinated approach to tackling and preventing homelessness
- Meet the Government's expectations, aims and outcomes relating to tackling and preventing homelessness.

Delivery of the priorities as outlined in Chapter 3 will ensure that Stafford Borough Council is able to offer a range of quality services to meet the needs of those people that are in housing need.

This strategy supports the Housing Strategy, Corporate Plan, Empty Homes Strategy, Health Strategy, Sustainable Communities Strategy, Local Investment Plan and Local Development Framework.

This strategy has been developed both in response to the findings of Stafford Borough Council's Homelessness Review 2010, which provides a comprehensive understanding of homelessness within the Borough, and in partnership with members of the Stafford Homelessness Forum.

It is intended that the strategy be inclusive in its approach and partner agencies continue to work closely with the council to assist in the delivery of its objectives and priorities. The Stafford Borough Homelessness Forum will help monitor and develop the action plan against its outcomes.

Many people have multiple, complex needs that extend beyond the basic need for a home. It is not possible for Stafford Borough Council to meet those needs in isolation. It is therefore essential to work in partnership in order to prevent homelessness and offer sustainable housing solutions. This strategy should be seen as a multi-agency document focused on collaborative prevention work.

2. Continuous Improvement:

The Audit Commission carried out a Strategic Housing inspection in March 2009, and left a number of recommendations for improvement.

Stafford Borough Council learns from the feedback of others including that of the Audit Commission and has incorporated recommendations from the Audit Commission into this strategy.

In February 2009 the CLG Specialist Advisor carried out a 'critical friend' assessment of the Housing Options Service. He returned again in May 2010 and made the recommendations. These have also been incorporated into the Dynamic Action Plan.¹

For the strategy to be meaningful it needs to reflect local / real issues that impact on homelessness. This often means moving away from statutory definitions of homelessness and looking beyond statutory duties.

3. Learning – How we developed this plan:

As a Council, we aim to continue learning and seek to continually improve our service.

A Learning and Development Seminar took place on 6 July 2010 as part of the Homelessness Forum, which included the following stakeholders:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Community Safety Partnership
- Connexions
- Domestic Abuse Partnership
- Housing Benefit
- Housing Plus
- League of Friends
- Midland Heart
- Stafford & Rural Homes
- Staffordshire Women's Aid
- Staffordshire County Council
- Staffordshire Police
- Staffordshire & West Midlands Probation Trust
- Stonham Housing
- Substance Misuse Teams
- Youth Offending Service

Key staff from the forum were asked to tell us what was being done well, what could be improved and help us to identify our objectives for the future. These are now set out in Chapter 3.

¹ A Dynamic Action Plan is one that is updated continuously to ensure relevance.

4. Customer Consultation and Engagement

We have developed a Customer Consultation and Engagement Plan, which enable us to shape our service around customer feedback. The Plan ensures that all members of the community are involved including the traditionally hard to reach groups, and serves to inform our priorities for action.

Chapter 2 Outcomes from our work since 2008

Since 2008 significant progress has been made in prevention of homelessness in Stafford Borough. Specific outcomes have been achieved during 2009/10 including a reduction in homelessness acceptances by 57% and an increase of 65% in households, approaching the Council, who are prevented from becoming homeless. This is the result of a range of successful prevention measures that help households to remain in their own homes or find a new one. Figure 1 shows the progress made since 2008.

Figure 1: Statutory homeless and prevention statistics

	Baseline	Improvement	Targets		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Number of households accepted as statutory homeless	160	68	65	60	50
Number of households prevented from becoming homeless	78	195	200	220	240

Source: Housing Group Service Development Plan

1. Outcomes from the Homelessness Prevention Toolkit

Implementation of the Preventing Homelessness – A Health Check Toolkit² that includes outcomes through the following:

- Deposit Guarantee Scheme allowing 98 people to access the private rented sector during 2009/10;
- Homelessness Prevention Fund is a small pot of money available to assist people to remain in their home or find other alternative suitable accommodation. During 2009/10 the Council assisted 13 households via the Homelessness Prevention Fund;
- Discretionary Housing Benefit is available as a short-term solution for people suffering income shocks or increases in rent. This resulted in 34 households being assisted through DHP in 2009/10 after seeking advice from the Housing Options Service;
- Service Level Agreements and Protocols to ensure seamless partnership working. These include Stafford and Rural Homes, Staffordshire & West Midlands Probation Trust, Staffordshire Womens Aid, Housing Benefit and CAB;
- Home Visits for young people who are under threat of being evicted from the family home;
- Stay Safe Scheme to enable victims of domestic abuse to remain in their home. The scheme assisted 31 households to remain safely in their home;
- Rural outreach service awareness session was completed with 16 agencies and organisations;
- Mediation to assist those at risk of homelessness.

² Guidance issued by DCLG for Local Authorities on preventing homelessness. Further information can be found at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/doc/557453.doc>

2. Helping People Stay in their homes

The Government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme commenced in January 2009 where the Scheme assists those homeowners eligible for homelessness assistance and are under threat of repossession.

The Housing Options Team has effectively used the Mortgage Rescue Scheme in partnership with CAB, Orbit Housing and Stafford and Rural Homes, which has allowed a number of households to remain within their home. Looking at the available benchmarking evidence in Figure 2 submitted August 2010, we have the highest number of successful Mortgage Rescues in Staffordshire.

Figure 2: Mortgage Rescue Scheme interventions for Staffordshire

LA	Referrals	Completed	Withdrawn	Live
Stafford	18	10	7	1
Staffordshire Moorlands	14	3	2	9
East Staffs	10	5	2	3
Stoke on Trent	30	5	12	13
Tamworth	11	2	7	2
South Staffs	8	3	2	3
Newcastle under Lyme	20	5	3	12
Cannock	21	2	11	8
Lichfield	8	4	2	2

Source Orbit First Step Summer 2010

3. Strengthening Partnership Working

We have worked hard to engage with our partners and examples of stronger partnership working include:

- Working in partnership with Stafford and Rural Homes to provide more affordable housing within the Borough. To introduce the Choice Based Letting Scheme, which gives customers more choice and better access to social housing.
- Working in partnership with support providers to ensure the use of floating support is maximised to assist vulnerable households to remain and sustain a tenancy.
- Working in partnership with Staffordshire Credit Union to enable interest free loans to households facing mortgage or rent arrears and debt consolidation.
- Work in partnership with Midland Heart, Staffordshire County Council, Police and the community in the development of Eagle House, a new 32 bed supported accommodation provision within the Borough.

- Working in partnership with Domestic Abuse Team and Staffordshire Womens Aid to enable the use of Stay Safe Scheme enabling and assisting victims of domestic violence to remain in their home.
- Working in partnership with Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire & West Midlands Probation Trust with the exchange of information and the Information Sharing Protocol.
- The implementation of Stafford Borough Council's Homelessness Forum which was launched in May 2010, to bring together all agencies, organisations and statutory partners who have an interest in enhancing housing provisions and preventing homelessness.
- The development of Learning and Development Seminars to identify areas of strength and weakness, assess our performance and follow best practice to become a better serving, more customer focussed learning organisation.

4. Raising Service Awareness

The Service works to raise public awareness of housing options and homelessness prevention through information and training of 'first responders' including partner agencies and the voluntary sector, examples include:

- Housing Options Advice Surgeries conducted at Eagle House, Lichfield House Supported Accommodation, Staffordshire & West Midlands Probation Trust, ADSIS and Staffordshire Womens Aid when required.
- The Housing Options Team has conducted 'Service Promotion and Awareness' with various partner agencies including the voluntary sector. These include Stafford and Rural Homes, Signpost Centre, Substance Misuse Teams, Job Centre Plus, GP surgeries, School Nurses, Church groups, Parish Councils, MP's constituency office and SBC Housing Benefit Team.

Chapter 3 Key Priorities and Objectives

1. Maintaining Our Key Priorities

The homelessness strategy in 2008 had the following 5 priorities:

- Preventing homelessness
- Securing accommodation for the homeless
- Providing the appropriate support for the vulnerable
- Identifying additional resources
- Investigating gaps in service provision

This strategy continues to support those priorities but helps identify a new set of objectives to advance on our approach to those priorities.

2. Objectives for 2011 – 2014

The key objectives of this Strategy have been agreed following an analysis of local needs, consultation with stakeholders about the priorities for service delivery and improvement, and consideration of how services can best meet local needs.

With its emphasis on partnership working and early intervention, the Homelessness Strategy is looking to reduce people's reliance on the homelessness legislation and social housing to meeting their housing need for example we are looking at all available housing resources.

We are committed to working more closely with private landlords, developing and promoting a range of affordable housing options, and providing people with the advice, encouragement and opportunity to access service and to have more of a say in the services they receive.

The following set out our objectives for the plan period.

2.1 Investing in early intervention and effective homelessness prevention

The aim of homelessness prevention is to help people to stay in their current home wherever possible and where this is not possible to assist them to make a planned move to alternative accommodation preventing the need for them to make an application as homeless. In addition, providing support at an early enough stage ensuring that households are placed in the most appropriate accommodation with the right level of support will prevent either homelessness occurring in the first place or where it has already occurred will prevent repeat homelessness. This can be particularly relevant to younger and/or vulnerable people.

Investment in homelessness prevention services can produce direct cost savings for local authorities, such as a reduced use of temporary accommodation and long-term pressures on wider services.

Sustaining and developing further homelessness prevention measures is key to providing a more flexible and responsive service to all homeless and potentially homeless households.

A diverse range of services contributes directly and indirectly to the prevention of homelessness through information, signposting and advice. There is a need to ensure the provision of these services meets the needs of all customers.

A range of housing options have been developed since the last homelessness strategy in 2008 and the provision of housing options and advice has become an integral part of the homelessness service. There is a need to provide a much wider spectrum of advice to all residents across all tenures that are in housing need. This needs to be identified and completed at an earlier stage through working with other agencies and stakeholders.

2.2 Actively supporting and promoting a partnership approach to preventing homelessness

A continued objective for this strategy will be to build upon the success and continue to work in partnership in order to co-ordinate the provision of services and develop new services to best meet the needs of homeless and potentially homeless households. Key areas to develop in relation to joint working will be to:

- Further improve knowledge and working relationships between agencies (particularly through the Homelessness Forum)
- Work more closely with Housing Providers partners to tackle and prevent homelessness
- Develop protocols and service level agreements with partners to provide the best possible service which meets the needs of the customer
- Ensure that homelessness and housing support services are given priority and are recognised for the contribution made in improving outcomes for individuals

The voluntary sector also plays a key role in providing housing related information, advice and signposting to other organisations including Citizen's Advice Bureau, Age Concern and Connexions.

2.3 Ensuring that those ready to Move-on from Supported Accommodation can do so effectively

A need to provide effective move-on for residents of supported accommodation schemes has been identified and a review of the borough's Choice Based Letting Scheme (CBL) will be undertaken to ensure that move-on from supported accommodation is effective and timely. The CBL scheme processes should be transparent about how decisions are made and by sharing this information with support providers will help them to better manage the client's expectations.

There is also a need to monitor the demand for and take-up of the services currently in place as well so those ready to move-on, can do so.

The Authority will closely monitor this situation and will engage supported housing scheme managers directly over this issue where necessary. This will help ensure value for money from the Supported Housing funds invested in these schemes – freeing up space for those that need it, that the valuable support that has been invested in clients does not become undone through a lack of move-on, and allowing those that have completed their support programmes to move-on in a timely fashion.

2.4 Seeking to provide education in schools in order to educate and prevent youth homelessness

The development of a targeted Education in Schools programme, in partnership with Midland Heart, will deliver homelessness prevention classroom sessions to Year 11 pupils in schools within Stafford Borough and is linked to the Citizenship elements of the National Curriculum. Feedback will be sought and evaluation provided to the Council on a quarterly basis. This scheme is due for implementation in early 2011.

To complement this service, Stafford and Rural Homes are educating school children of all ages about anti-social behaviour and holding a tenancy. Their campaign has been centred on schools where they hold social housing stock.

2.5 Identifying and addressing gaps in services provided to 16 and 17 year olds

Since the G v LB Southwark judgement and subsequent guidance issued on the matter it has been identified that a countywide protocol be developed for assisting 16/17 year olds that are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

For this reason it is important that all agencies and organisations both statutory and voluntary are aware of the pathways such as the draft Young Persons Housing Protocol, to enable the correct advice and assistance to be provided to the young person when they need it.

2.6 Ensuring better use of mediation allowing people to remain their home if it is safe to do so

The Council currently uses an external agency to perform counselling/mediation services, but this is proving inefficient. The Housing Group Service Delivery Plan 2010 to 2013 has identified that Housing Options Officers undertake training in mediation so that an alternative option can be provided in-house.

2.7 Ensuring that our policies and procedures are consistent, fair, transparent and widely understood

As a Service we aim to become more reflective, open to learning and to change. The Service is looking to work smarter, not harder, have a greater impact and how we can deliver more for less.

The Quality and Performance Team was formed on the 1st February 2010. Their main role will be to work with all parts of the Environmental and Health Service to introduce new, and improved, customer performance, satisfaction and quality

systems including reviewing all policies and procedures to ensure that they are consistent, fair, transparent and widely understood.

2.8 Developing a co-ordinated approach to offering advice on housing benefit and debt, and welfare benefit

The provision of debt advice is currently undertaken by Citizens Advice Bureau as well as National Debt Helpline Services. There is a need to explore other possible provisions of debt advice as well as further developing a co-ordinated approach to welfare benefits and the promotion of such benefits.

The Council currently work in partnership with Staffordshire Credit Union to enable interest free loans to households facing mortgage or rent arrears and debt consolidation, but there is a need to promote the scheme more widely within the Borough.

Stafford and Rural Homes have a dedicated Money Management Advisor who assists in preventing homelessness through rent arrears eviction and improving their customer's quality of life through maximisation of benefit entitlements.

2.9 Improving customer service, involvement and satisfaction

Meeting the overall aims and objectives of this strategy and the delivery of key actions will lead to service improvement for customers. However specific areas need to be addressed in improving services to customers. These include:

- Improving the quality of housing options information available to customers and raising awareness of the range of services available, offering earlier advice and assistance to all potentially homeless households
- Ensuring that all literature and information is accessible and tailored to meet the needs of the customer
- Providing appropriate support and assistance tailored to meet individual needs to all homeless and potentially homeless households
- Improving communication with customers, monitoring customer satisfaction with the services provided and by shaping the service to the needs of the customer
- Developing and monitoring housing options for customers with identified vulnerability and ensuring that they are provided with the relevant support to engage in the process

The Housing Group has developed a Housing Group Customer Consultation and Engagement Plan. This plan considered the Service's approach to consultation, why we consult, with whom and when.

The plan builds on the Housing Group's commitment to increasing engagement and consultation with customers, local residents, businesses, stakeholders and partners. This will help to ensure that our services are customer focused.

2.10 Providing choice and encouraging independence

Some households face more challenges than others when accessing settled housing and support services. Feedback from stakeholders during consultation

on the Homelessness Strategy identified the need for more specialist housing options for young people and the vulnerable. Whilst there are specific plans to address these needs, we can do much to support these issues, in particular:

- Young people (under 25s) may experience a limited range of options because of the Housing Benefit rules for this age group. Also the need for rent guarantors.
- The number of older people is increasing. Changes in health may mean that their housing needs change. Many older people own their own homes and may not be aware of the services available to enable them to remain there, or to enable a return to home after a stay in hospital.
- The need to provide more support and choice based options to victims of Domestic Violence and harassment

Providing the right level of support at the most appropriate time and providing wider options with a focus on helping people to avoid homelessness is key to preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness.

Maximising the use of floating support to help prevent homelessness amongst a range of client groups with complex needs.

2.11 Promoting the Housing Options Team and the services provided

In 2009 a Rural Homelessness Study was completed within the Borough. The study was designed to identify issues related to rural homelessness, including areas of the Borough to target. This enabled the Council and partners to plan and arrange interventions with the aim of preventing homelessness. The study also links the prevention of rural homelessness to the wider issue of sustainability in rural communities.

The study identified a need to improve the knowledge of front line non-housing professionals (first responders) and the public about what housing options and other related services do and how they can be accessed.

This objective builds on the existing 'first responder' initiative implemented in 2009.

The service could be better publicised and more widely available and where information is received at a much earlier stage in a households problems may help to prevent homelessness. In order to ensure that early advice and assistance is available partner organisations need to be made aware of the services available. This includes working with a range of partners to ensure better links, advertise and train frontline officers on the range of services available and agree signposting processes so that households in housing need are able to access relevant services at the earliest opportunity.

2.12 Meeting housing needs through the supply of permanent, temporary and supported accommodation

Affordable Housing; The Council has been working with its partners to increase the supply of affordable housing within the Borough. Figure 3 shows the new affordable housing provision.

Figure 3: Affordable Housing

Affordable Housing in Stafford Borough			
Year	Number of affordable homes built	Social Rented	Shared Ownership
2005/06	77	54	23
2006/07	54	30	24
2007/08	42	33	9
2008/09	100	80	20
2009/10	46	46	0

Source: National Indicator 155

Social Rented Sector; The provision of new social rented housing and other affordable options can help to reduce the length of time homeless households have to wait for permanent, settled accommodation.

At the same time, however, recognising that demand continues to increase at a faster rate than supply and that as a result the number of new social housing units is unlikely to match the level of need. It is equally important to make the best use of existing social housing stock by addressing under occupation with the possibility of incentives to move and to explore the re-designation of sheltered schemes for use by younger people.

Temporary Accommodation; There is a need to both reduce the use of temporary accommodation and at the same time ensure that the accommodation that is provided to homeless households in emergency situations (for which there is always likely to be a need) is of a high standard and suited to the needs of those placed there.

Preventing homelessness in as many cases as possible will help to ease the pressure on temporary accommodation as will the provision of new units of social rented accommodation.

Stafford Borough Council currently uses two methods of housing families temporarily – 2 flats leased from Stafford and Rural Homes and Bed and Breakfast Hotels.

Since 2006 the approximate average length of bed and breakfast stay is 19 days. The majority of placements have been in single figures.

In emergency situations bed and breakfast is used, but every effort is made to ensure that no families or young people remain there longer than necessary.

Supported Accommodation; There is a range of supported accommodation schemes within the Borough that try to meet the varying and complex needs of the community. The supported accommodation provision within Stafford Borough is included as Appendix 1.

The Private Rented Sector; This accounts for approximately 8% of the total housing stock in Stafford Borough.

The Council organise at least two landlord forums a year giving landlords the opportunity to access Council Officers and representatives from external organisations. Guest speakers are invited to join us for every meeting.

The private landlord forum aims to promote good practice in the private rented sector and develop partnerships between the Council, Landlords, Managing and Letting Agents.

Customers can access the private rented sector through the use of the Council's Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

Homelessness arising from evictions from this sector is high suggesting that this form of tenure does not offer the same level of security as social rented housing.

There are two particular issues for landlords in accommodating homeless or more vulnerable households:

- They are often in receipt of housing benefit and this is not paid direct to landlords
- There is a perception that more vulnerable households are unable to maintain property to the acceptable standard

During the review process a number of stakeholders identified the need to explore the development of a local Accredited Landlord Scheme; this has also been suggested through the Council's Landlords Forum; the need to 'sell' benefit claimants to private sector landlords ensuring the right support packages are in place and the need to promote discretionary housing benefit payments. Improving issues faced by under 18 year olds accessing accommodation and the need for rent guarantors.

Summary of the Objectives of the Homelessness Strategy

- Investing in early intervention and effective homelessness prevention;
- Actively supporting and promoting a partnership approach to preventing homelessness;
- Ensuring that those ready to move on from supported accommodation can do so effectively;
- Seeking to provide education in schools in order to educate and prevent youth homelessness;
- Identifying and addressing gaps in services provided to 16 and 17 year olds;
- Ensuring better use of mediation allowing people to remain in their home if it is safe to do so;
- Ensuring that our policies and procedures are consistent, fair, transparent and widely understood;
- Developing a co-ordinated approach to offering advice on housing benefit, debt and welfare benefit;
- Improving customer service, involvement and satisfaction;
- Providing choice and encouraging independence;
- Promoting the Housing Options Team and the services provided.
- Meeting housing needs through the supply of permanent, temporary and supported accommodation

Chapter 4 Delivery of the Strategy

1. Risks to Delivery of the Strategy

Key risks to the Council's ability to prevent homelessness include the Government's proposed changes in public sector spending and the Homelessness Grant. The annual homelessness grant from the CLG has been protected, but frozen at current levels. The grant is important in funding many of the homeless prevention initiatives and affects Stafford Borough Council's ability to prevent homelessness.

The risks also include the significant challenges and impact of the Coalition Government's plans to introduce legislation to reform the welfare system for example, Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance, potential increase in unemployment and more demand for social housing.

The proposed changes to social housing in the Government's Fairer Futures Consultation Paper, particularly the expected increased role of the private rented sector and housing providers having to use 'affordable rents' and 'flexible tenancies'.

A final risk is the increasing complexity of the support needs amongst homeless people, which is increasing. Since 2009, Staffordshire County Council funding is no longer ring fenced and therefore, it is important to work with partners to highlight the need for housing related support.

2. Financial Constraints

Each local authority funds the majority of their revenue expenditure on homelessness, prevention and related activities through their General Fund. This includes the costs of providing a comprehensive housing options and advice service; working in partnership with Stafford and Rural Homes in respect to Choice Based Lettings and the Agency Agreement; and on grant funding to third sector organisations such as Staffordshire Credit Union and CAB who provide services to homeless people.

Preventing people from becoming homeless and helping others to move successfully in a planned way is complex and time consuming. Financial resources to addressing homelessness issues can be limited and in response to the economic downturn and since the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review it is anticipated that further cuts at local authority level will have to be made.

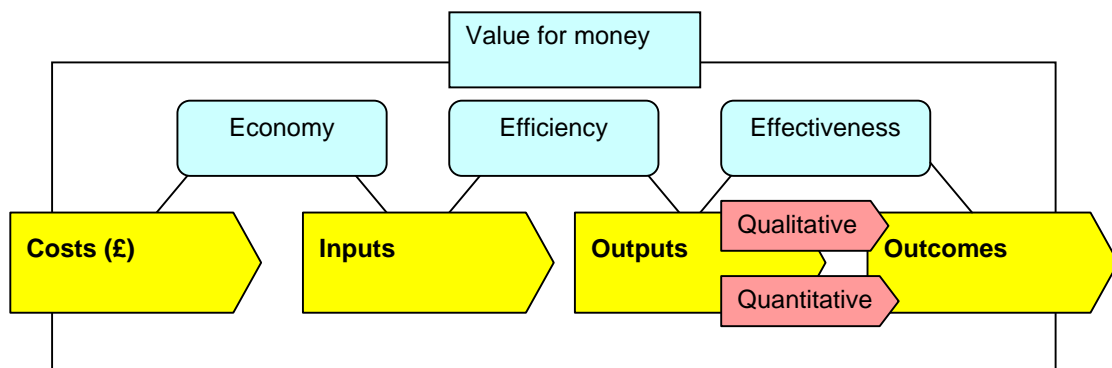
In the current economic climate and with the acknowledged challenges on local authority budgets we believe it would be important to have a focused approach.

3. Achieving Value for Money and Efficiencies

In 2009 we commissioned Housing Quality Network (HQN) as part of a wider partnership of local authorities to carry out a Value for Money Review. We have also tasked an officer to continue pursuing and evaluating our approach to value for money for the future. This Council accepts the findings of the HQN Value for Money study and we will be looking to see how we can make best use of this information to ensure value for money and continuous improvement.

Value for money is usefully defined as the relationship between economy, efficiency and effectiveness, sometimes known as the 'value chain'. This is set out more clearly below in Figure 4 – The Value Chain.

Figure 4: Value for Money Chain



Source HQN Value for Money in Strategic Housing: benchmarking group report Dec 2009

Value for money is high when there is an optimum balance amongst all three – relatively low costs, high productivity and successful outcomes. Value for money is not achieved if, for example, cost is low but quantity and quality are also low. This often represents wasted effort.

Benchmarking against other local authorities allows us to evaluate our own value for money and good practice. We have completed benchmarking exercises with other higher performing Councils in respect to homelessness prevention measures and the Deposit Guarantee Scheme to learn from their successes and help improve the services further. We will be seeking to benchmark against other high performing authorities for the future.

We have achieved very high value for money on the Governments Mortgage Rescue Scheme (refer to Figure 2 pg 8), having achieved these outcomes on the same staff resources. We will continue to improve as a service and achieving more for less will also be a focus for the service over future years.

4. Monitoring and Review

In order to ensure that all of the actions identified through this review are implemented a clear and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound) action plan is required. Government guidance suggests that all actions identified through the review process should be set out in an action plan which identifies who will take the lead of various actions, what partners will be involved, the resource implications and a target date for each individual

action. Setting all of the actions out in this format will ensure that progress can be easily monitored and the impact of the actions measured.

The actions detailed throughout the strategy have been compiled into a detailed action plan. The action plan details the timescales, lead responsibilities, key partners and milestones. Wherever possible, we have included SMART actions in the action plan, and these can be readily measured. However some outcomes are broader or less certain, and these will be refined through an annual review of the strategy action plan.

The strategy and action plan will be monitored annually to ensure that our outcomes meet local needs and national policy. These annual reviews will be carried out in partnership with the agencies that have assisted in the development of both the strategy and the action plan.

This strategy covers a three-year period and will run until the end of 2014. In order to ensure the continued relevance of this strategy and action plan over the three years to 2014 additional actions may be developed and implemented and existing actions changed or updated.

Homelessness Strategy Monitoring Mechanism	
Homelessness Forum	Meets quarterly. The action plan is updated and progress will be reviewed at the Forum, taking into account any developments at local, regional or national level.
National Performance Indicators and Statutory Returns	Performance will continue to be monitored through quarterly P1E returns and will be reviewed regularly by the Council
Local Performance Indicators and Priority Promises	The Housing Group Service Plan 2010-2013 will continue to monitor national and local indicators relating to homelessness. Whilst these figures are not reported to central government they will continue to give a detailed picture and allow comparison with previous years. The targets are monitored by the Council on a quarterly basis.
Action Plan Update	The action plan will be formerly updated on a 6 monthly basis and will be made available on the Council's website as well as being circulated to key partners and members of the homelessness forum.
Reporting to Cabinet Member and Community Scrutiny Committee	Regular reports will be taken to the relevant cabinet and Scrutiny members to highlight progress made against the action plan.

Appendix 1

Supported Housing Schemes within Stafford Borough

Lichfield House – A 12-bed young person's hostel managed by Midland Heart Housing Association. The Hostel is specifically for young people who are in housing need. Housing and support needs are assessed through the referral process.

Scott's House – A block of 12 one bedroom unfurnished flats also managed by Midland Heart Housing Association. This accommodation is used as move-on accommodation for residents at Lichfield House. It aims to provide essential skills to residents so that they can maintain a long term tenancy when they move out of the supported housing unit.

The Eagle Project – A new supported housing scheme, which opened in February 2010. It comprises 32 units, of which 20 are self-contained supported units and 12 are direct access units. The Eagle project is for people aged 18 and over with low to medium support needs and complements the work being done at Lichfield and Scott's House.

Quantic Court – A supported family accommodation scheme with 7 units, managed by Bromford Housing Association. This scheme is for households with dependent children where on-site training is provided to develop housing skills, so that residents can sustain future secure tenancies. Access to this scheme is by referral.

Domestic Violence Refuge – Managed by Stafford Women's Aid this is an 8 bedroom supported accommodation facility for women who have been victims of domestic violence. This facility provides essential support that develops skills to sustain future tenancies. There is a 24-hour helpline, for victims of domestic violence, and the project has resettlement support for women who have left the refuge. Stafford Borough Council is currently leading a steering group to increase refuge provision in the Borough from 8 to 12 units.

Re-Think – Provides supported housing for people with severe mental health problems. Re-Think have two schemes in the Borough, which offer a total of 11 units for people with mental health problems. Access to this project is through a referral process.

Staffordshire League of Friends – Provides accommodation for people with mental health problems and comprises of 37 units. The scheme provides low-level support and aims to provide essential skills to residents so that they can maintain a long-term tenancy when they move out of the supported housing unit. Support needs are assessed through the referral process.

Stonham, Fernleigh House - Provides care and supported accommodation for people recovering from alcohol addiction.

Appendix 2

Floating Support Providers within Stafford Borough

Service Name	Provider	Primary Client Group
Nacro Floating Support in Staffordshire	NACRO Community Enterprise Ltd	Offenders or People at risk of Offending
Staffordshire Womens Aid (Outreach Service)	Staffordshire Womens Aid	Women at Risk of Domestic Violence
Rethink Floating Support	Rethink	People with Mental Health Problems
Floating Support Service for High Risk Offenders	Heantun Housing Association	Offenders or People at risk of Offending
Lifestyles (Stafford/East Staffs)	Choices Housing Association	People with Learning Disabilities
Breaking the Cycle	Staffordshire Womens Aid	Women at Risk of Domestic Violence
CRISP Floating Support in Staffordshire	NACRO Community Enterprise Ltd	People with Drug Problems
Domestic Violence Outreach Support Services	Arch (North Staffs) Ltd	Generic
The Everywoman Project	Staffordshire Womens Aid	Women at Risk of Domestic Violence
Staffordshire Offender Floating Support Service	Heantun Housing Association	Offenders or People at risk of Offending
Community Re-integration Support Project Newcastle	Burton Addiction Centre	People with Alcohol Problems
Positive Housing Support	Staffordshire Buddies	People with HIV / AIDS
Bridges	British Red Cross	Refugees
Floating Support for Older People Stafford	Age UK South Staffs	Older people with support needs
Stafford Floating Support Service for Socially Excluded	Midland Heart Limited	Generic
Communication Support Service	BID Services	People with a Physical or Sensory Disability

Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2011 – 2014

Key Objectives – Investing in early intervention and effective homelessness prevention

Action No	Task	Outcome	Lead Role & Key Partner	Milestone	By When
1	<p>Monitor and review existing prevention initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Move-on - Stay Safe - Deposit Guarantee - Mortgage Rescue - Mediation - Prevention fund - DHP - Money advice 	<p>Reduction in homeless acceptances sustained through homelessness prevention initiatives and housing options.</p> <p>Further reduction achieved through review and where applicable further development of homeless prevention</p>	SBC, CAB, HB, DAP, HA's Private Landlords	<p>Framework for monitoring homeless prevention initiatives to be agreed (to include equalities monitoring)</p> <p>Regular quarterly monitoring in place</p> <p>Learning & Development Seminar to review prevention initiatives</p>	Ongoing – Review quarterly
2	<p>Deliver effective housing advice and options</p> <p>Develop a wider Housing Options and Advice Service by linking in with other service providers</p>	<p>Homeless/potentially homeless able to access a wide range of advice and options</p> <p>Homelessness prevented through effective housing advice and options</p> <p>Continued reduction in homeless presentations and acceptances</p>	SBC, CAB, HB, Probation HA's Private Landlords	<p>Continue to monitor homelessness / prevention quarterly to ensure targets are being achieved</p> <p>Continue to monitor repeat homelessness quarterly</p> <p>Ensure Value for Money and how addressing homelessness leads to savings in other areas</p>	Ongoing to be reviewed December 2011
3	<p>Improve procedures for dealing with hospital discharge in order to improve planned move on and the prevention of homelessness</p>	<p>Produce new procedures for the planned move on of hospital patients</p> <p>Implement hospital discharge protocol with Stafford General Hospital and St Georges Hospital to ensure homeless people have links to appropriate services</p>	SBC and PCT	<p>Agree protocol with SGH and St Georges Hospital</p> <p>Monitor delivery of protocol and referrals</p>	<p>September 2011</p> <p>Ongoing to be reviewed annually</p>

	Work with RSLs to ensure that tenants who are in breach of their tenancy conditions are actively encouraged to access local advice services	Ensure that all RSL front line staff are aware of local advice services Arrange that contact details of Housing Options Services are included on letters relating to breaches of tenancy	SBC, HALG	Agree programme of continued awareness raising Agree and implement draft Housing Provider Protocol Utilise the Housing Association Liaison Group (HALG) – letters amended to include advice details	Ongoing to be reviewed quarterly September 2011
4	Assess the needs of people from BME communities and ensure that the range of homelessness and housing related services respond to their needs	Services to prevent homelessness and support vulnerable people	SBC	Equalities Impact Assessment on Homelessness Strategy Respond to recommendation of EIA	Ongoing – to be reviewed quarterly
Key Objectives – Actively supporting and promoting a partnership approach to preventing homelessness					
5	Produce a directory of homelessness service	Investigate all advice, support and accommodation providers and distribute. Also place on relevant web pages	SBC	Directory to be circulated to partner agencies and stakeholders	January 2012
6	Develop protocols for joint working and information sharing	Identify gaps, delays, inefficiencies and highlight examples of good practice	SBC, Homeless Forum	Protocols written and approved Procedures amended and training provided	Ongoing - Review annually
7	Ensure that all partner organisations and frontline service providers have up-to-date accurate information on housing options Provide training / information sessions to frontline officers	Partners are adequately trained to identify problems, access information and signpost customers to appropriate provision.	SBC	Information circulated on an annual basis Regular updates to be provided through Homelessness Forum/website/email Programme of training sessions organised, delivered and to be refreshed	Ongoing – annual review Ongoing – quarterly review Ongoing – annual review

				Housing Options and Advice Surgeries run on monthly basis	
Key Objective – Ensuring that those ready to move on from supported accommodation can do so effectively					
8	To ensure that Move-on from Supported Accommodation providers has a clear pathway for customers into independent accommodation	To avoid stagnation and bed blocking of supported accommodation beds Review of CBL policy to ensure Value for Money and sustainable communities	SBC, SARH, Supported Accom providers	Review of CBL policy in partnership with Stafford and Rural Homes and in consultation with stakeholders	August 2011
9	Monitor the operation of CBL and move-on procedures in the Borough and increase access to move on for people ready to live independently	People ready to move out of supported accommodation are able to access suitable move on options with appropriate support and supported accommodation places are freed up for other clients	SBC, SCC, SA providers	Monitor progress of Homesfirst scheme Access to move on prioritised	August 2011
Key Objectives – Seeking to provide education in schools in order to educate and prevent youth homelessness					
10	Education In Schools	Implement Homelessness Education Prevention program in partnership with Midland Heart aimed at Year 11 pupils Sessions to be monitored and reported back	SBC, MH	Midland Heart contracted to provide the program commencing in 2011.	September 2012
11	Work with local schools, colleges to raise awareness of homelessness and housing options	Increased awareness of homelessness amongst young people. Reduction in youth	SBC, MH	Monitor the schools attended by 16/17 year olds approaching Housing Options Work with partner agency to deliver education programme in schools,	Ongoing, bi-annual review

	Launch the Homelessness Education Prevention Programme in partnership with Midland heart	homelessness		Service awareness in local colleges.	
Key Objectives – Identifying and addressing gaps in services provided to 16 and 17 year olds					
12	Implement protocol for vulnerable young people between Social Care & Health and Staffordshire local authorities	Social Care & Health Working Group implemented Task & Finish group formed to produce County wide Young Persons Protocol	SCH, LA's	Agree and implement draft Young Persons protocol	April 2011
13	Provide joined up services that meet the needs of young people and focus on homelessness prevention	Identify practical ways in which services for young people could be successful and meet the needs of service users Carry out discussions with Staffordshire Womens Aid about improving outcomes of victims of Domestic Violence for 16/17 year olds	SBC, SCC, SWA	Research best practice and options available in other local authority areas. Consult with partners and young people to establish and implement preferred options	September 2012
Key Objectives – Ensuring better use of mediation allowing people to remain in their home if it is safe to do so					
14	Review current facility for offering mediation	Housing Options Officers to be training in mediation to ensure a comprehensive service offered to customers and where possible prevent homelessness	SBC	Implement training for all Housing Options Officer and monitor outcomes	March 2013
Key Objectives – Ensuring that our policies and procedures are consistent, fair, transparent and widely understood					
15	Consult with partner agencies to ensure that they are	Arrange a briefing with partner agencies through Homelessness	SBC	Implement awareness	September 2011

	familiar with our policies and procedures and understand the reasoning behind them	Forum, HALG to assist in their understanding of relevant policies and procedures Ensure that all policies and procedures are managed through Quality and Performance Team		Reporting and monitoring framework to be agreed	
Key Objectives – Developing a co-ordinated approach to offering advice on housing benefit, debt and welfare benefit					
16	Prevent homelessness amongst social housing tenants	Existing tenants of social housing are provided with advice and assistance to help them maintain their tenancy. Reduction in social housing evictions in Stafford	SBC, HA's	Information Sharing Protocol with HA's currently in draft format Ensure co-ordinated approach for offering advice and assistance	December 2011
17	Monitor presentation and acceptance from people in mortgage arrears and ensure a range of housing options are in place to assist households affected by economic downturn	Homeless presentation, acceptances and approaches for advice and assistance resulting from mortgage arrears and repossessions monitored and reported on regularly Households who qualify assist to avoid repossession through national mortgage rescue scheme Referrals to Staffordshire Credit Union	SBC, CAB, HA's	MRS monitored and reported to scrutiny committee (05/11/09, 01/07/10) Information Sharing Protocol with CAB agreed and signed Contract and loan agreements with Staffordshire Credit Union agreed and signed	Ongoing – reviewed quarterly

Key Objectives – Improving customer service, involvement and satisfaction					
18	Monitor the quality of homelessness, housing options and prevention services	<p>Improve the quality and consistency of the advice given to customers and ensure that this advice is reinforced as a matter of routine</p> <p>Undertake periodic Customer Service surveys inviting service users to provide feedback on the quality of the service receive</p>	SBC	<p>Monitor quality of service / customer satisfaction in line with equalities information</p> <p>Monthly evaluation of the process for completing homelessness / prevention applications</p> <p>Continue to monitor homelessness / prevention quarterly to ensure targets are being achieved</p> <p>Continue to monitor repeat homelessness quarterly</p>	<p>Quarterly – annual review</p> <p>Ongoing – annual review</p> <p>Ongoing – annual review</p> <p>Ongoing – annual review</p>
19	Actively seek feedback from service users and stakeholders through regular forums, surveys, focus groups to measure the quality of service provided	Establish a range of methods for capturing the views and ideas of service users.	SBC	Continue to innovate, monitor and shape the service	Ongoing – annual review
20	Ensure the quality of customer service and that all customers are treated with courtesy and respect	<p>Produce and publicise Service Standard</p> <p>Scrutinise and learn from customer complaints</p> <p>Identify and provide staff training on customer service</p>	SBC	<p>Monitor quality of service / customer satisfaction in line with equalities information</p> <p>Monitor feedback from Service Standards. Learn and shape service as a result of feedback.</p>	Ongoing
Key Objectives – Providing choice and encouraging independence					
21	Provide and promote the range of affordable housing options	Consider the range of available housing options:	SBC	Review the range of housing options and homelessness prevention information available	January 2012

		<p>Social rented sector Sheltered housing Supported housing Private rented sector Home ownership Stay Safe Scheme Mortgage Rescue</p> <p>Collate and produce suite of information leaflet.</p>		<p>Ensure housing advice and related info is publicised through all customer access points</p> <p>Programme of training sessions implemented to frontline staff on the range of options available</p>	
22	Explore the production of a health advice pack for people who are homeless and/or living in temporary accommodation	<p>Identify good practice</p> <p>Consult with service users</p> <p>Publish and distribute pack</p>	SBC	<p>Promotion of healthy lifestyles.</p> <p>Provision of information on nutrition, physical activity, alcohol awareness etc in pack format</p>	April 2011
23	Provide jointed up services that meet the needs of vulnerable adults and focus on homelessness prevention	<p>Identify practical ways in which services for vulnerable adults can be more successful in preventing homelessness and meeting the needs of specific service users</p> <p>Consult with service users to see what changes they think would make service more joined up and successful</p>	SBC, HF, SCC	<p>Explore good practice and options available in other local authority areas</p> <p>Consult with partners and service users to establish preferred options</p>	December 2012
Key Objectives – Promoting the Housing Options Team and the services provided					
24	Advertise and raise awareness of prevention services, offering earlier advice & assistance to all potentially homeless households	<p>Raise awareness of information and services to encourage people facing homelessness to seek early advice and support</p> <p>All information meets the diverse</p>	SBC	<p>Review of information literature and web site.</p> <p>Ensure literature meets the needs of the community</p>	December 2011

	<p>Improve the quality of housing options information available to all customers to ensure accuracy and transparency</p> <p>Ensure that all literature is accessible, tailored to meet local needs and widely communicated via numerous channels e.g. website, posters</p>	<p>needs of customers and is available through a range of access points</p>		<p>Produce poster advertising Housing Options and ensure distribution</p> <p>Ensure information is available and publicised through customer access points</p>	
Key Objectives – Meeting housing needs through the supply of permanent, temporary and supported accommodation					
25	<p>Better use of existing stock in the Borough through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tackling under occupation - enabling people to live independently through aids and adaptations and Stay Safe - explore the re-use or more flexible use of sheltered accommodation 	<p>Increased access to settled accommodation for homeless households</p> <p>Prevention of homelessness</p>	SBC, DV Co-ordinator, HALG, HA's	<p>Explore movement incentive</p> <p>Work with HA partners to tackle under occupation in their stock (CBL, HALG)</p> <p>Work with HA partners to explore the re-use or more flexible use of sheltered housing to meet the demand for general needs accommodation</p> <p>Provide a wide range of options to assist people who want to remain in their home (DFG, Handyperson)</p>	December 2013
26	<p>Improve access to the private rented sector for homeless and potentially homeless households through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -further development of the DGS - increased partnership 	<p>Private rented sector is seen as a viable alternative to social rented housing for customers in housing need</p>	SBC	<p>Monitor access to DGS in line with equality strands</p> <p>Research best practice, evaluate further options for working with private landlords</p>	Ongoing – review quarterly

	working with private landlords to develop new initiatives			Benchmark DGS with other local authorities	
27	Landlords Forum	More effective use of Landlords Forum to increase awareness of services provided by Council Increase in effective partnership between Council and private rented sector	SBC	Explore the use of local Landlord Accreditation Scheme Explore greater partnership working between private rented sector and housing benefit Explore viability of credit checks completed by Council	Review bi-annually Ongoing December 2011
28	Improve communication / information provided to customers in temporary accommodation	High quality, appropriate temporary accommodation available for homeless households in emergency situations	SBC	Temporary accommodation standards in place and available to customers Information available to all households placed in temporary accommodation making them aware of the standards and support they can expect Provision of health packs to residents of temporary accommodation	December 2011
29	Improve the condition of TA ensuring that they are well managed and that all repairs are completed with agreed timescales. Routine inspections of TA to be completed	Ensure the terms of contracts for leased accommodation, standards and timescales are robust to meet the needs of the residents in TA Review inspection arrangement and enforce standards. TA to be inspected at least annually. Undertake customer survey of TA and to provide feedback on suitability and condition	SBC	Establish the level of need, number and type of units required Liase with key partners and stakeholder and research best practice Agree and implement procedures	March 2012

Monitoring and addressing any emerging issues that are agreed at the Homelessness Forum

30	Monitor the delivery of the homelessness strategy action plan	Action Plan to delivered, ensuring that homelessness in Stafford is prevented wherever possible and that those who are affected by homelessness are provided a joined up and quality service	SBC, Homelessness Forum	<p>Delivery of the action plan</p> <p>Monitoring on a quarterly basis through Homelessness Forum</p> <p>Dates set for future Homelessness Forums:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 October 2010 14 December 2010 9 March 2011 29 June 2011 21 September 2011 14 December 2011 <p>Evaluating Value for Money via benchmarking clubs and performance networks e.g. Sub-Regional Homelessness Forum</p> <p>Regular updates provided through Priority Promises to Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Regular updates provided to Cabinet Member</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Quarterly</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>Quarterly</p> <p>Quarterly</p>
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