



Subject:	Council response to Housing Executive Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017 – 2022
Date:	7 February 2017
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director, City & Neighbourhood Services Department
Contact Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Assistant Director, City & Neighbourhood Services Department

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	In December 2016 the Council received an invitation from the Housing Executive to contribute to a consultation in relation to its Homelessness Strategy 2017–2022 “Ending Homelessness Together,” a copy of which is provided at Appendix 1. Full details of the consultation are available at: http://www.nihe.gov.uk/draft_homelessness_strategy_2017_22.pdf
1.2	The aim of the consultation is to seek views on the strategic direction Housing Executive has set out in its Strategy document.
1.3	The purpose of this report is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ inform Members of the Housing Executive’s consultation exercise;▪ seek approval of the proposed response from Council, which is provided at Appendix 2;▪ subject to approval by this Committee, it is proposed that a final response is submitted to Housing Executive by 8 February 2017, with the proviso that this is subject to full Council approval at its meeting in March.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the draft consultation response to the Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017–2022, “Ending Homelessness Together” and agree the response to Housing Executive.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	<p>The Strategy sets out key objectives and the associated actions aimed at preventing homelessness where possible, and also to develop long term sustainable housing and support solutions for those households faced with homelessness. The Strategy supports a multi-agency approach to tackling homelessness and recognises the importance of local service delivery.</p>
3.2	<p>The Strategy document has four main areas to be considered, which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Defining the problem of homelessness in Northern Ireland. ▪ The strategic context in relation to Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and the European dimension, taking into consideration the Programme for Government 2016 – 2021 and other key policies and strategies. ▪ An evaluation of the previous Housing Executive Homelessness Strategy 2012 – 2017. ▪ Vision, aims and objectives.
3.3	<p>The document’s overarching vision is to “end homelessness together”, specifically aiming to prevent homelessness, ensure that households experiencing homelessness are supported to find suitable accommodation and support solutions as quickly as possible and to ensure a cross departmental and interagency approach to ending homelessness.</p>
3.4	<p>The Strategy sets out five key objectives with recommended short, medium and long term actions as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To prioritise homelessness prevention. ▪ To secure sustainable accommodation and appropriate support solutions for homeless households. ▪ To further understand and address the complexities of chronic homelessness across Northern Ireland. ▪ To ensure the right mechanisms are in place to oversee and deliver the strategy.

- To measure and monitor existing and emerging need to inform the ongoing development of appropriate services.

3.5

The draft consultation response welcomes the continued drive to prevent homelessness by addressing significant challenges which aim to provide sustainable housing solutions for everyone in need. Additionally, it reflects Council's desire to work as part of a multiagency team at every opportunity and to integrate our resources where practicable to ensure effective and collaborative delivery across Belfast. There are however key areas we would welcome greater detail on, to provide further clarity and inform how best we can become involved. These areas are fully detailed in the consultation response. The following points summarise the key areas Committee may wish to consider:

- Council recognises that the Housing Executive has adopted a Housing First Model approach to support homeless people with chronic needs. Council welcomes this approach, which offers permanent, affordable housing to vulnerable people in our communities as quickly as possible whilst providing intensive support appropriate to their needs in order to create sustainable tenancy and avoid recurring homelessness.
- The Strategy acknowledges that each client is unique and therefore has individual and, often complex needs to address homelessness. This is a crucial factor in effectively addressing homelessness and repeat homelessness. Council welcomes the Housing Executives proposal to tackle this difficult issue through the development of multidisciplinary teams. There is a specific need to support those homeless people with mental health issues and chronic drug and alcohol addictions to achieve better life outcomes. Council would welcome the provision of services which target these specific issues, through collaboration with medical health experts such as Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and Public Health Agency, thus supporting the long term prevention of homelessness.
- The Council understands that the housing waiting list in Belfast is 10,000 with a high number of those households experiencing housing stress. It is recognised that a sustainable housing solution will differ from household to household. A key aspect of finding the right solution will be identifying a supply of housing that is sufficiently flexible to prevent households from becoming homeless and to ensure permanent, long term accommodation can be found for those that find themselves homeless. The Council is aware that the Housing Executive is in the process of reviewing its points allocation system and looks forward to commenting on this when the proposals are

put out to public consultation. The strategy will need to specifically address these points.

- In early 2016, Members will recall that a multi-agency action plan was developed to address many of the city centre issues, which included addressing the problem of rough sleepers and homelessness. This multi-agency team, which includes Belfast PCSP has developed a short to medium term Street Management Strategy. This strategy was agreed in June 2016 and the delivery of programmes, directly contributing to addressing the issue of homelessness and in particular rough sleeping has now commenced which includes:
 - Supporting the Lord Mayor's interagency approach to tackling the issue of homelessness and the associated problems. The Lord Mayor Homeless Stakeholder forum was held in November 2016 with a range of representation from across the voluntary, community and statutory sectors. Some actions included a health and homeless workshop, training and a homeless Christmas lunch. This group is due to convene again in February 2017.
 - Working with key community and voluntary sector organisations to develop a media campaign, led by the community and voluntary sector groups, to raise awareness of issues relating to begging. The Begging for Change Working Group continues to meet and has planned further work around the issue of begging. The Group has agreed to commission a piece of research that will explore the reasons for and the impact of begging on the streets of Belfast. This research will support wider conversations in terms of effective intervention around the issues of begging ASB and alcohol / drug misuse.
 - Developing links with key community and voluntary sector organisations to raise awareness with rough sleepers and homeless clients about public health and safety issues.
 - Belfast PCSP continues to work with a range of community and voluntary sector organisations on the issues of rough sleeping and homelessness. Belfast PCSP is currently supporting work with the Welcome Organisation, Extern, PSNI and the Housing Executive that will enhance working relationships within the sector. Belfast PCSP is funding Extern and the Welcome Organisation to deliver rough sleeping multi-disciplinary support and outreach services. Further work is being explored with street pastors and the night-time volunteering group.
 - Engage with Belfast City Centre Management to help improve areas of the City Centre that have become hotspots for rough sleepers and homeless people.

- The Strategy states that it supports a multiagency approach to tackling homelessness that recognises the importance of local delivery. Council welcomes an unambiguous commitment to end homelessness and recognises the need for the development and delivery of a properly resourced, time bound, interdepartmental government strategy with clear priorities and outcomes. Whilst a fully coordinated approach is welcomed, there is no detail in relation to how partners will deliver on the actions set out in the Strategy. Further clarification is needed regarding accountability, roles and responsibilities.
- The Strategy refers to actions which aim to achieve the Strategy objectives that have been set out. There is a need to have clear outcomes and indicators for these actions against which they can be monitored and evaluated. The Council would welcome regular updates through its Committee structure from Housing Executive senior officials in relation to progress.
- The actions identified in the Strategy should seek to clarify the full extent of work and programmes planned to tackle homelessness, in the short, medium and long term. The Council would welcome further opportunity to respond to the full Implementation Plan and Local Action Plans which are referred to in the Strategy.
- There is a need to recognise and further emphasise the important role Community Planning has in relation to the other Government departments and agencies who will need to develop and deliver targeted resources for agreed outcomes. It is recommended that multi-annual budgeting, with 3 to 5 year budgets which facilitate pipelines to programmes and increase effectiveness are considered.
- Following the implementation of Local Government Reform, Councils now have responsibility for the Planning function in their local areas. It will be essential that strong links continue to be forged with Council's Planning function, to ensure the most effective use of local land development is achieved to support the prevention of homelessness.
- It is recognised that hidden homelessness remains an issue and it is suggested that a baseline study is undertaken to fully determine the extent of homelessness in Northern Ireland. It is recommended that further commitment is encouraged through the Strategy, to capture, record, report and share data effectively in order to provide accurate, meaningful statistics which will ensure the problem of homelessness can be fully addressed.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is recognised that there is increased reliance on the private rented sector to support a reduction in homelessness. The Strategy should reflect the need for increased regulation of the private rented sector to protect tenants’ rights and to reduce the rate of homelessness. ▪ Whilst there is a significant and concerning problem in relation to chronic homelessness and rough sleeping, evidence suggests that there are less than ten people in Belfast who are rough sleepers. Destitute asylum seekers have no entitlement to any accommodation however it is noted that this issue is not referred to in the Strategy. Given this, there is therefore a need to ensure that people who are here entirely legally, are not allowed to become homeless, as a direct result of Government policy. <p>3.6 Housing Executive has developed a Housing Solutions and Support model that aims to provide person centred services, which are tailored to meet the needs of individual customers and supports them to achieve sustainable housing solutions. It is understood that the Housing Executive has been invited to attend a future meeting of the Council's People and Communities Committee to provide information on the model and its practical operation in local service delivery.</p> <p>3.7 <u>HR Implications</u> There are no HR implications to report.</p> <p>3.8 <u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> There are no financial or resource implications to report.</p> <p>3.9 <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> There are no equality or good relations implications to report.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – Housing Executive Homelessness Strategy 2017 – 2022 “Ending Homelessness Together”</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Proposed consultation response</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Covering Letter</p>