

Housing Executive

Please use this consultation template for submitting your responses and comments.

Alternatively, the online consultation template can be downloaded at:
<http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/corporate/consultation.htm> where you can also view the full consultation report and the associated screening documents.

If you are completing an electronic version of this form, it should be emailed to:
homelessness.strategy@nihe.gov.uk

Alternatively, you can return hard copies of the completed form to:

Richard Tanswell,
Homeless Strategy Manager
The Housing Centre
2 Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8PB

The Housing Executive welcomes any comments you wish to make on all of the proposals or just on those issues that are of particular interest to you in the consultation.

All responses should be received by 5pm on Wednesday 8th February 2017 to ensure they can be fully considered.

Freedom of Information Act 2000 Confidentiality of Consultations

The Housing Executive will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Housing Executive can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

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The Housing Executive should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature.

Acceptance by the Housing Executive of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner. For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (or see the website at: <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>)

YOUR DETAILS (All answers to be provided in grey boxes)

Organisation: Belfast City Council

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1. Vision Statement "Ending Homelessness Together"

a) Do you agree with the vision statement of this Strategy?

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments below

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Housing Executive Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017 - 2022 "Ending Homelessness Together" and supports the continued drive to prevent homelessness by addressing significant challenges, through a multiagency approach, which aims to provide long term, sustainable housing support solutions, for those households and individuals faced with homelessness.

b) In your view what are the key priorities required to end homelessness

Belfast City Council considers that the key driver for any future strategy should be to prevent homelessness from happening. Council recognises that a more coordinated approach to tackling homelessness across Northern Ireland is needed. Council considers that the key priorities which are needed to support a reduction in homelessness are as follows:

- a baseline study to determine the extent of homelessness across Northern Ireland with robust processes in place to maintain accurate, rich data to inform future trend analysis;
- cross party political commitment to end homelessness;
- development of a new role of a "Homeless Champion" with authority to operate cross departmentally;
- an unambiguous commitment to end homelessness through the Programme for Government, which includes explicit targets to end homelessness and is supported with the right preventions, responses and solutions;
- recognition of the role of Councils, particularly through leading the Community Planning process, as this will provide all households and individuals presenting as homeless, the opportunity to influence and shape local services to meet very challenging individual customer needs;
- recognise and further emphasise the important role Community Planning has for other Government Departments and agencies who will need to develop and deliver targeted resources to achieve agreed outcomes;
- Development and delivery of a properly resourced time-bound interdepartmental government strategy with the clear priority to end homelessness;
- a longer term strategy is needed to assertively tackle rough sleeping and chronic homelessness, utilising multidisciplinary teams to target those clients with complex, multiple needs;

- multi-annual budgeting, with 3-5 year budgets which will facilitate pipelines to programmes and increase effectiveness;
- improve the utilisation of vacant homes to support increased long term housing solutions;
- improve access to quality private rental sector housing with continued improvements in regulation controls in the private rental sector to protect tenant's rights and reduce the rate of homelessness. The Council notes that Social Housing is becoming increasingly hard to secure and that the private rented sector will play an important role in the future housing market for the city. The Council however would request that if this option is chosen, that support programmes are put in place to identify vulnerable households in this sector;
- a robust, equitable and consistent process is in place to accelerate the provision of social housing to those in greatest need;and
- appropriate and timely advice should be available to all clients, ensuring an early referrals procedure can be activated by all agencies, even ones not always involved with homelessness.

2. Objective One: Preventing Homelessness

a) Do you agree that preventing homelessness should be the primary objective of this Strategy?

- Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below:

The strategy indicates that homelessness has dropped 5.6% between the period 2011/2012 and 2015/2016 based on homelessness presentations, however it also acknowledges that there is hidden homelessness which remains unaccounted for. This information suggests that the problem of homelessness is greater than statistics identify. Further commitment is encouraged on effectively capturing, recording, reporting and sharing relevant data to provide accurate meaningful statistics to ensure the problem of homelessness can be fully addressed.

The Simon Community Northern Ireland has undertaken research in relation to homelessness in Northern Ireland. This research consolidates the complex problems which contribute to homelessness and the need for aligning departmental strategies to prevent homelessness.

Belfast City Council is in the process of developing the Belfast Agenda which is Belfast's first Community Plan. the Belfast Agenda identifies one of its priorities as "Creating a great city and neighbourhood living experience" and one of Council's visions for 2035 is that everyone experiences good health and wellbeing. The connection between homelessness and other social issues is widely recognised, therefore it is important the strategy emphasises that it is not only about responding to homelessness after it has occurred, but also about proactive intervention as early as possible to prevent homelessness. The strategy must ensure that service provision across all sectors is complimentary, efficient and effective in adding value to improve people's lives.

Housing Executive has an opportunity to become landlord of choice rather than necessity by providing a professional service to both landlords and tenants. They should be in a position to provide packages to meet the needs of all demographics to ensure all customers

requirements are met. This can be supported through the development of an effective multagency approach which the Council is fully committed to.

It is unclear how the Strategy can practically be implemented into Council's mainstream service delivery and the impact and resources that will be involved. Although the Strategy refers to the development of Local Action Plans, further detail is needed in respect of how these plans will be developed and how Council can support them to meet the needs of local communities.

The strategy should demonstrate that there is a process to mobilise all agencies working with those at risk of homelessness away from a crisis response and towards a proactive early intervention approach.

b) Do you agree with the actions outlined in the Strategy aimed at preventing homelessness?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

Belfast City Council supports the actions outlined in the strategy which are aimed at preventing homelessness and welcomes the proposed multiagency approach and local service delivery to tackle homelessness.

It is important that a multidisciplinary team is developed to tackle the problem of homelessness and that local service delivery is developed to meet local community needs. Many people who experience homelessness have complex issues which require specialised responses together with integrated working to address longer term customer needs, ultimately preventing repeat homelessness. Through establishing local cross departmental working groups, there is increased opportunity for collaborative working to support customers' health and wellbeing.

The development of a training package for relevant key front line workers is welcomed however it will be important to incorporate flexibility into delivery of the training package to ensure that all customer needs are met on a timely basis.

c) In your view, what further actions could be taken to prevent homelessness?

Belfast City Council considers that it would be beneficial to identify "at risk" groups to ensure that priority need is focused on specific need, for example youth homelessness, rough sleeping, minority ethnic groups and repeat homelessness.

Following the implementation of Local Government Reform, Councils now have responsibility for Planning in their local areas. The Council's Preferred Options Paper (POP) and its Community Plan are currently out for consultation. Both plans aim to support the development of suitable, inclusive and well designed neighbourhoods. They also provide details of the Council's ambitions to increase the city's population and to increase the amount of land available for new homes. It will be essential that strong links are forged with Council's Planning Department to ensure the most effective use of local land development is achieved to address homelessness.

3. Objective Two: Finding appropriate and sustainable housing and support solutions?

a) Do you agree with the person centred housing and support solution approach as detailed in the Strategy?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

The strategy recognises that each client is unique and therefore has individual needs to address homelessness, this is a crucial factor in effectively addressing homelessness and repeat homelessness.

The strategy should incorporate into its actions, mechanisms which will support people to help themselves, thus building resilience and contributing to preventing repeat homelessness. Services must be responsive i.e. the services must fit clients rather than clients fitting the services.

As has been previously identified, people who are homeless frequently have complex problems and needs, therefore a unified response preventing homelessness through effective partnership working will contribute to a person centred solution, focusing intervention and support for those most at risk of homelessness.

This approach will need to ensure that vulnerable households receive the right support and advice that will allow them to maintain independence in their own home. For example it should include support for customers to manage their finances and educate them on how to follow the rules of a tenancy agreement.

Addressing homelessness is also an opportunity to achieve wider outcomes such as enhancing life chances and encouraging independence. Working with key agencies and groups will help achieve these wider outcomes.

The Council notes that the 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 support them to achieve sustainable housing solutions. It would welcome more information on the work of the unit. We understand at the Housing Executive has been invited to attend a future meeting of the Council's People and Communities Committee to discuss this matter.

The Council agrees that all agencies will have a role to play in working with the new Solutions and Support Team. The council notes that section 4.1.4 includes a number of high level actions to prevent homelessness and welcomes what has been proposed. More detail is needed on the how these actions will be delivered. The Council therefore requests that the relevant strategies, implementation plans and action plans are consulted upon in the future.

It will be important to ensure that any service provision achieves a positive customer experience.

b) Do you agree with the actions outlined in the Strategy aimed at finding person centred solutions and ensuring the right support services are in place to support this?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

To ensure that a person centred approach is delivered, which provides the right individual support services, individual client needs must be understood to ensure that the often complex reasons associated with homelessness can be tackled.

Given this, Belfast City Council considers that the actions in relation to this approach need to reflect coordinated support across all relevant agencies, particularly Belfast Health Trust and the Public Health Trust. The success of this approach is dependant on the right services being available in the right place in order to address the needs of the household.

Additionally, as previously highlighted, a mechanism to target "at risk" groups is required to ensure that the needs of everyone can be addressed, not only clients presenting as homeless. It would be beneficial to develop targeted response times which are monitored with outcomes communicated on a regular basis.

c) Do you agree that a multi-agency approach is required to find appropriate housing and support solutions for homeless clients?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

As has been previously identified the causes of homelessness are often very complex, overlapping with mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependency.

In order to address such complex problems a multidisciplinary team is required to deliver specialised responses to address longer term client needs whilst enhancing opportunities for improved living experiences and ultimately prevent repeat homelessness.

There is a perception that street activities such as begging and shop lifting are a major issue in Belfast City Centre. Through Belfast PCSP Council is delivering a range of programmes to support rough sleepers and address public perceptions surrounding homelessness and begging in the city centre.

All agencies will need training on the Housing Solutions and Support Model. The person centred approach will only work if staff have received the correct training and are aware of how their work and the work of agencies can help the household in question.

d) Which agencies, in your view, have a key role to play in finding sustainable solutions for homeless households?

Although not an exhaustive list, the key agencies that Belfast City Council considers need to be involved in developing long term sustainable solutions for all homeless are those that will help homeless people rebuild their lives whilst addressing specific, individual needs. These will include agencies that:

- encourage employment, education, training and/or volunteering;
- reduce re-offending;
- support programmes to reduce drug and alcohol misuse and addictions;
- promote good physical health, mental health, psychological wellbeing, healthy relationships and healthy lifestyles;
- ensure personal safety for example the need for appropriate, safe accommodation; and
- support sustainable accommodation and lives.

Agencies to include are:

- Public Health Agency
- BHSC
- Councils
- Active Belast
- Housing Associations
- PSNI
- Extern
- Probation Board
- Education Boards
- Colleges and Universities
- Landlords
- Community Groups and Associations

- e) In your view, what further actions could be taken to find sustainable housing solutions for homeless clients?

Although the strategy refers to monitoring and evaluation, there are no specific targets set or processes for communicating the outcomes achieved.

Belfast City Council would welcome the incorporation of specific targets into the strategy or the development of a more detailed formal action plan which will be monitored and the outcomes achieved communicated on a regular basis.

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. We look forward to commenting on this when the proposals are put out to public consultation. The strategy will need to specifically address these points.

4. Objective Three: Understanding and addressing the complexities of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping?

- a) Do you agree that further work is required to understand and address chronic homelessness and rough sleeping?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

For clarification, it should be recognised that not all rough sleepers and those suffering chronic homelessness have complex needs however evidence suggests that this is frequently the case.

Rough sleeping is perceived to be an increasing problem in Belfast City Centre. It frequently has an impact on the attractiveness of our city centre which can influence future investment and economic expansion. Additionally it has health and safety impacts not only for those that are sleeping rough but also city centre users. Belfast City Council welcomes the suggestion that further work is required to understand and address chronic homelessness and rough sleeping in all areas across Belfast City.

It is important to understand the real picture of the statistics connected to homelessness and rough sleeping or a term referred to as the "hidden homeless". Of those categorised homeless in NI almost all have a roof over their heads and evidence suggests that there are less than ten people in Belfast who are rough sleepers. Destitute asylum seekers have no entitlement to any accommodation and it is noted that this issue is not referred to in the

strategy. There is therefore a need to ensure that people who are here entirely legally, are not be allowed to become homeless, as a direct result of Government policy.

Through Belfast PCSP, Council is supporting the following programmes that are directly contributing to addressing the issue of homelessness and in particular rough sleeping.

Belfast PCSP has established a Street Management Strategy Working Group. This group is made of key statutory, community and voluntary organisation that have focus on homelessness / rough sleeping and city centre management. The group held two planning workshops in 2016 and a multi-agency, short to medium term action plan has now been agreed with work currently underway to deliver the actions.

Belfast PCSP is currently considering proposals on a range of projects, associated with the strategy which organisations are seeking financial assistance with. A review of the strategy will be held in February 2017.

Some of the work that is currently being undertaken includes:

- Developing a Street Management Strategy for the City Centre with the involvement of key statutory and community stakeholders. As above.
- 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.

Through the PCSP, Council will continue its programme of work to support tackling the problem of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping.

b) Do you agree with the actions outlined in the Strategy to address chronic homelessness?

Yes

No

Please provide supporting comments below

Belfast City Council supports the actions outlined in the strategy and appreciates that providing effective services for people with such complex needs is a huge challenge. Given the complex needs of many of these clients Council recommends that a robust multi disciplinary approach is implemented to address the causes that leads to homelessness and rough sleeping.

The timescales for implementing rough sleepers action plans are 2 - 3 years. Belfast City Council recommends that consideration be given to reducing this timescale to a short term action i.e. 1 year given the increasing problems created through rough sleepers in Belfast City Centre.

c) In your view, what further actions could be taken to address chronic homelessness?

Belfast City Council supports the actions outlined in the strategy however given the complex needs of many of these clients recommends that a robust multi disciplinary approach is necessary to address the needs of both chronic homelessness and rough sleeping.

Addressing rough sleeping and causes of homelessness is a long term action therefore should be incorporated into ongoing action plans. Persistence and flexibility in any future approach is needed by all service providers to address this issue effectively and ensure that when the time is right for individuals with such complex needs, suitable accommodation and support is available.

Relationships and links with other relevant strategies, policies, frameworks and action plans should also be forged to ensure a joined up integrated service delivery is provided.

5. Objective Four: Overseeing and delivering the Homelessness Strategy

a) Do you agree with the inter-departmental and local approaches to overseeing and delivering the Strategy as outlined in the document?

Yes

No

Please provide supporting comments below

Belfast City Council supports interdepartmental collaboration in particular the joint ministerial offices of the Department of Health (DoH), Department of Justice (DoJ) and the Department for Communities (DfC) and local approaches to implementing the strategy and recommends that suitable accountability procedures are introduced to support the process.

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to support such an interdepartmental structure and looks forward to building this into its community planning process to deliver real improvements for local people.

Council would welcome regular updates from Housing Executive senior officials in relation to the workings and outcomes from the cross Ministerial Group on Housing.

b) Do you agree with the actions outlined to oversee and deliver the Strategy?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

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. Although the actions are identified as short, medium and long term there is no indication as to the implementation date. This is essential, particularly in relation to a multidisciplinary approach to ensure that all service providers can build support and relevant actions into their business planning processes.

Council would welcome regular updates through its Committee structure from Housing Executive senior officials in relation to outcomes.

c) In your view, what further actions could be taken to oversee and deliver this Strategy?

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. Although the actions are identified as short, medium and long term there is no indication as to the implementation date. This is essential, particularly in relation to a multidisciplinary approach to ensure that all service providers can build support and relevant actions into their business planning processes.

Council would welcome regular updates through its Committee structure from Housing Executive senior officials in relation to outcomes.

6. Objective Five: measuring and monitoring existing and emerging need

a) Do you agree that improved cooperation/data sharing between agencies and better quality data will improve service planning and provision?

- Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below:

Belfast City Council will continue to work effectively with partner agencies and groups to improve service delivery and client experience.

b) Do you agree with the actions outlined in the Strategy aimed at ensuring adequate analysis of existing and emerging need?

- Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below:

It will be important to ensure flexibility is built into future action plans to ensure that improvements and adjustments can be introduced to meet emerging needs.

c) In your view, what further actions could be taken to ensure adequate analysis of existing and emerging need?

It will be important to ensure flexibility is built into future action plans to ensure that improvements and adjustments can be introduced to meet emerging needs.

7. Below, please provide any further comments you may have on the Strategy

It will be important for Housing Executive to ensure that sufficient budgets are in place to reflect the cost of implementing the strategy, its recommendations and action plans.

