



National Practitioner Support Service

# HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY TOOLKIT

**PART 2:  
OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Version 4: November 2017

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## Introduction

This toolkit has been produced in order to support local authority colleagues to develop preventing homelessness strategies that are fit for purpose; strategies that seek to deliver improved and improving services to anyone in the local area that is homeless or threatened with homelessness, regardless of whether they may be owed the main statutory homelessness duty or not.

Every local authority in England should, by law, have an up to date preventing homelessness strategy that sets out its plans to prevent and tackle homelessness<sup>1</sup>. Local authorities' homelessness strategies should have a lifetime of no longer than 5 years, and local authorities should keep their homelessness strategy under review modify it from time to time in order to respond to new policy direction and comply with legal duties<sup>2</sup>. This is particularly important in light of recent legislative change<sup>3</sup>.

The first versions of this toolkit were produced to take account of the welfare reforms introduced by successive governments from 2010. It was also developed in the context of the Localism Act provisions that came into force in 2011<sup>4</sup>, and to support local authorities in light of the introduction of s148 and s149 of the Localism Act 2011<sup>5</sup>, which came into force on 9th November 2012. The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 also came into force on 9th November 2012 and the "Supplementary Guidance on the Homelessness Changes in the Localism Act 2011<sup>6</sup> and the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012" was published the day before<sup>7</sup>.

Version 4 of this toolkit has been updated to take account of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017<sup>8</sup>, the most significant change in the legislation governing homelessness for 20 years. The toolkit also has regard to the new Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (currently in draft form)

The toolkit considers the 10 "Local Authority Challenges" set out in the government report "Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness"<sup>9</sup> and how local preventing homelessness strategies can contribute to local authorities achieving 'Gold Standard' housing options services.

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<sup>1</sup> s.1 Homelessness Act 2002 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/section/1>

<sup>2</sup> s.3(8) Homelessness Act 2002 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/section/3>

<sup>3</sup> Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, Localism Act 2011, Welfare Reform Act 2012, Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, Deregulation Act 2015

<sup>4</sup> s.145, s.146, s.147, s.150, s.153 Localism Act 2011 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents>

<sup>5</sup> S.148, s.149 Localism Act 2011 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents>

<sup>6</sup> Supplementary Guidance 2012 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-changes-in-the-localism-act-2011-supplementary-guidance>

<sup>7</sup> Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/2601/contents/made>

<sup>8</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The second Ministerial Working Group report on homelessness, "Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness", August 2012 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-every-contact-count-a-joint-approach-to-preventing-homelessness>

The toolkit has been split into three parts. This part covers broad strategic considerations, legal imperatives and provides advice on homelessness reviews, consultation and partnership working. It provides practical advice on how to go about developing a homelessness strategy.

The second part focuses on practical operational suggestions to support local authorities to develop 'Gold Standard' services and align their strategies and plans with the 10 'local authority challenges' set by government.

Part three provides a factsheet summarising the overall content of the toolkit, and includes some good practice examples.

Local authorities are encouraged to ensure robust preventing homelessness strategies are in place, and that they are delivered in partnership.

*Please note that this toolkit represents the views of practitioners. It does not represent legal advice or opinion, nor does it represent statutory guidance or government. Local authorities are encouraged to seek specific advice to satisfy themselves on any issues or questions raised.*

## Preventing homelessness strategies and the Gold Standard Programme

The operational delivery checklist below outlines a range of considerations relevant to local preventing homelessness strategies. They are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive and may reflect approaches and services that are already available, and that have been embedded at a local level. They are intended only to provide ideas and highlight relevant generic considerations for local authorities across England. They should be interpreted within the local district context.

Whilst the local preventing homelessness strategy is a strategic document, it must be 'live' and fit for purpose – it must therefore have a significant operational element.

This section has been structured to reflect the 10 local authority 'challenges' contained in the "Making Every Contact Count" report. The 10 challenges were specifically developed to represent all the elements of an early intervention and prevention model that would reduce statutory and non-statutory homelessness, while enhancing the client experience.

Local authority preventing homelessness strategies should align themselves with the national agenda and reflect local commitment to developing services that meet the 10 challenges. The following checklist provides a range of suggestions for local authorities that demonstrate how the local preventing homelessness strategy could incorporate elements of the 'Gold Standard Programme' in local plans.

*The assessment criteria for Local Challenge 8, relating to homelessness strategies, has been included in this toolkit in Part three at Appendix 2. For full details of the criteria that underpins all 10 Local Challenges and for further information regarding the National Practitioner Support Service and the Gold Standard Programme please visit: [www.npsservice.org.uk](http://www.npsservice.org.uk)*

### Local Challenge 1

**To contribute to the adoption of a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness, which has buy in across all local authority services, the preventing homelessness strategy could include the following actions:**

- Develop the business case for ongoing investment in local front line homelessness services and present this to the corporate leadership team
- Develop a cross divisional strategy to address homelessness and ensure all departments are signed up to the homelessness strategy key objectives (this could include a strategy for mitigating potential homelessness impacts arising from welfare reform)
- Develop education and awareness raising sessions, including joint training across statutory and voluntary sector services, regarding the local response to homelessness and the importance of preventing homelessness
- Provide regular briefings to elected members on the local strategic response to homelessness
- Set out how the Housing Service will actively work to ensure the government Preventing Homelessness Grant allocation (and other funding payments for the purpose of preventing homelessness) are used to resource the front line service and support the prevention of homelessness
- Develop the local approach to Discretionary Housing Payments to ensure they are being used strategically with a focus on preventing homelessness
- Develop effective internal monitoring arrangements for the local preventing homelessness strategy
- Ensure that the local Homelessness Forum is inclusive, that local authority services are represented along with other statutory and voluntary sector partners, and that the forum meets regularly
- Develop co-location of services where it is practical and appropriate
- Jointly commission services with other departments and statutory agencies to contribute to the prevention of homelessness locally

The preventing homelessness strategy could include an explicit commitment in the foreword from the lead elected member for housing; to early intervention across all client groups and to maintaining investment in front line services. Recognising that preventing homelessness is better and more cost effective than seeking to assist households through statutory homelessness provisions or bringing them inside from rough sleeping is a key message for the local strategy.

**To contribute to active partnership working with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs the preventing homelessness strategy could include the following actions:**

- Develop strategic action plans based on outcomes of comprehensive service mapping, including gap analysis, that will be delivered in partnership across a range of agencies and organisations locally
- Where there are identified gaps in specific provision, develop alternative methods of provision such as arrangements with neighbouring district services, spot purchase of services etc.
- Develop joint working with partner agencies so that there is a named homelessness contact or 'homelessness champion' within local authority services, and within each key partner agency (statutory and voluntary, including Registered Providers) Establish regular forums for voluntary organisations and other key partners to attend (potentially face to face or virtually supported by technology) to provide updates and ensure ongoing involvement in the strategic response to homelessness locally
- Develop enhanced services locally that tackle customers' wider needs including income maximisation, education, employment and training activity
- Work with the local Health & Wellbeing Board<sup>10</sup> to develop partnership working and contribute to integrated working relationships that prevent homelessness and improve the health and wellbeing of local people
- Agree, review and refresh Service Level Agreements with partners – ensuring these are in place and regularly reviewed (setting out clear goals, service standards, and facilitating performance monitoring)
- Develop multi-agency protocols to prevent rough sleeping resulting from people squatting in residential buildings being displaced as a result of committing an offence under Section 144 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (which created a new offence of squatting in a residential building<sup>11</sup>)
- Develop effective referral arrangements to access money and debt advice (in house or through external providers)
- Develop the relationship and referral routes with relevant court desk providers
- Develop information sharing arrangements across local partnerships
- Work with partners to ensure that P1E prevention and relief of homelessness (section E10) data is captured across partnerships and included in local

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<sup>10</sup> The Department of Health "Short Guide to Health & Wellbeing Boards" guide can be downloaded here - <http://healthandcare.dh.gov.uk/hwb-guide/>

<sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Justice has produced a circular for criminal justice agencies providing further information on the offence - <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/legislation/bills-acts/circulars/squatting-circular.pdf>

authority statistical returns where appropriate (within DCLG E10 reporting guidance parameters<sup>12</sup>)

- Ensure that partners report all other relevant statistical information as may be required in an agreed and consistent format
- Develop partnership working to facilitate access to furniture/white goods and food banks
- Develop joint working arrangements with credit unions where appropriate
- Support digital inclusion locally through voluntary sector, social landlords and other partners to support people affected by welfare reform and direct payments
- Develop a holistic response to customer needs by enhancing existing housing options provision to begin to tackle wider causes of homelessness, including education, employment and training – this could be undertaken in partnership with local third sector partners, colleges, and colleagues from Job Centre Plus
- Work with Housing Management (where stock retaining) and with Registered Providers to deliver a programme of back to work support such as job clubs and training & skills opportunities for tenants
- Work with housing management colleagues in relation to tenant direct rent payments in light of Universal Credit Implementation Promote where customers can go to access good quality advice, such as national help lines and websites<sup>13</sup>, and include links on the local authority website to local and national third sector advice agencies
- Undertake periodic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis with key partners to inform improvement plans
- Establish impacts on local services resulting from changes to Legal Services Commission funding
- Engage with commissioners of housing related support, and relevant providers, regarding access to services which prevent homelessness, and that support resettlement & sustaining accommodation
- Develop co-location approaches where practical and appropriate with key partners to develop holistic responses to customers' wider support needs and improve working relationships between agencies and services

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<sup>12</sup> The DCLG 'Further Guidance' on reporting E10 published in December 2009 can be downloaded here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recording-homelessness-prevention-and-relief>

<sup>13</sup> From 17th October 2012, directgov and businesslink have been replaced – the new place to find government services and information is at GOV.UK - <https://www.gov.uk/>

## Local Challenge 3

To support local authorities to **offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients**, the preventing homelessness strategy could include the following actions:

- Use the Diagnostic Peer Review Toolkit<sup>14</sup> to develop a standard of service that incorporates commitment to improved access, quality, recording & monitoring of outcomes, and delivering value for money – ideally through a peer review process
- Develop local systems to capture and report relevant data associated with non-statutory homelessness approaches
- Deliver training and undertake quality assurance checks on a regular periodic basis
- Develop clear procedures and operational guidelines for front line staff
- Consult with partners and service users to develop local service quality standards
- Work with partner local authorities, such as Diagnostic Peer Review cluster groups, to develop a baseline threshold of service that any person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness can expect to receive, including support to access the private rented sector for people who do not fulfil the statutory homelessness criteria
- Ensure anyone approaching the local authority housing service receives a comprehensive assessment of available housing options - including proactive advice and support to enable them to sustain their existing accommodation wherever practicably possible (and appropriate), or to access alternative accommodation solutions where necessary
- Undertake Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) or refresh a previous EIA, relating to the accessibility of the service
- Brief all contact points on housing options services locally and ensure that they can make effective and timely referrals into Housing Options
- Ensure the Housing Options Service is making effective use of NHAS Local Authority Housing Advice Line, training (including training on offer through the 10 Step free resources available through NPSS & NHAS and bespoke Gold Standard training), Mortgage Debt Advice and information resources
- Provide written advice to all clients presenting to the Council for housing advice – consider using the third sector advice and assistance letter template which is included at *Appendix 4 of Part 3* of this toolkit

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<sup>14</sup> NPSS Diagnostic Peer Review Toolkit<sup>14</sup> for local authorities can be downloaded at [www.npsservice.org.uk](http://www.npsservice.org.uk)

- Ensure there are adequate local arrangements for assisting people who are unable to read or write, or speak English
- Provide outreach surgeries at access points around the district to ensure the Housing Service is accessible to anyone in housing need
- Carry out structured home visits to verify circumstances, deliver advice and assistance, negotiate with excluders and prevent homelessness locally
- Ensure the local authority website is up to date and develop self- help options on-line to improve customer access to quality advice – aim to reduce pressure on front line services by seeking to support more capable people to resolve their own housing needs
- Consider the needs of, and options for, people from abroad who are ineligible for benefits and housing support, to prevent and tackle rough sleeping among foreign nationals. Eligibility matters are complex and subject to change – local authorities should seek advice from the NHAS Local Authority Advice Line<sup>15</sup> and refer to the latest statutory position when making decisions regarding the eligibility of those seeking housing assistance. Ensure front line services are responsive to demands by reviewing rotas, appointment systems and any other service related delivery procedures
- Deliver ongoing effective housing options support and assistance to ensure accommodation options are proactively explored with people who have received a s184 decision letter – whether the main housing duty is accepted or not

## Local Challenge 4

To support local authority, work to adopt a **No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative**<sup>16</sup>, the preventing homelessness strategy could include the following actions<sup>17</sup>:

- Undertake street counts or estimates bi-annually (minimum once a year) and ensure annual street count or estimate is within the scope of DCLG guidance and with reference to Homeless Link resources
- Establish a local definition of ‘new rough sleeper’
- Develop a single service offer or local service offer, backed up by protocols with local services and other relevant bodies, to ensure that where rough sleepers are identified there is an appropriate response in place to secure accommodation and support
- Brief local partners, elected members and stakeholders on the local response to single homelessness and rough sleeping Promote the national

<sup>16</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government published “*Vision to End Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide*” in July 2011 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vision-to-end-rough-sleeping--2>

<sup>17</sup> Homeless Link have published tools & good practice to support the development of NSNO or equivalent services - <http://homeless.org.uk/effective-action/NSNO>

Street Link service<sup>18</sup> and/or local rough sleeper alert service to members of the public

- Capture the numbers of, and profile of, all current and recent rough sleepers including planned interventions to resolve rough sleeping for each individual living on the street in the area
- Develop available support for single homeless people, including emergency beds to prevent rough sleeping and/or provide on the day accommodation options for people sleeping rough
- Work with partners locally to develop reconnections (within England and also for people from abroad where appropriate<sup>19</sup>) Work with partner local authorities, such as within Diagnostic Peer Review Cluster Groups, to develop support networks that promote best practice in tackling single homelessness and pool available resources for single people experiencing acute housing need
- Ensure preventing rough sleeping is a fixture on the agenda for all local Homelessness Forum (or equivalent) meetings

## Local Challenge 5

Local authorities will need to have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support - the preventing homelessness strategy could include the following actions:

- Undertake periodic reviews of local need & service provision and amend and develop pathways to respond to emerging needs<sup>20</sup>
- Develop local support provision, including pathways into support with local providers (including registered providers, health and other relevant partners)
- Ensure the local floating support provision is meeting needs, available across all tenure types, and that referrals are being prioritised appropriately
- Consider what other specialist support may be appropriate for the area in light of the findings of the review of homelessness and consultation
- Ensure there are adequate move-on arrangements with supported housing providers to ensure the goal of independent living is attainable where appropriate and there is movement through local schemes to ensure availability of supported accommodation options for new customers
- Ensure the authority has effective protocols with local hospitals, Community Mental Health Teams, prisons, probation and other agencies as may be appropriate, to prevent homelessness resulting from hospital discharge or prison release

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<sup>18</sup> Streetlink is delivered in partnership by Homeless Link and Broadway charities and funded by DCLG - <http://www.streetlink.org.uk/>

<sup>19</sup> The Routes Home website provides advice and guidance regarding reconnecting EU nationals to their countries of origin - <http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/routes-home/>

<sup>20</sup> DCLG previously commissioned Homeless Link to develop the Prevention Opportunities Mapping & Planning toolkit to support local authorities to identify opportunities to prevent rough sleeping – this toolkit may be helpful in reviewing local housing and support pathways - <http://homeless.org.uk/prompt>

- Provide active support for offenders and ex-offenders to ensure there are accommodation options available for these client groups, including access to private rented sector housing options<sup>21</sup>
- Review and develop pathways into accommodation and support for young people, in partnership with Children’s Services, other statutory partners and local third sector agencies
- Develop local approaches that are flexible enough to deliver personalised pathways for individuals who require a different approach, to prevent repeat homelessness and ensure there can always be a route back into services
- People in temporary and supported accommodation have move- on plans and housing options are discussed in a targeted way on a periodic basis
- Engage partners to actively support the implementation, review and modification of positive pathways into accommodation and support in a coherent way that reflects the local strategy – including training staff working in other services (such as healthcare, prison, police et cetera) so they have a basic understanding of vulnerability to homelessness & ways to identify those who are homeless. Briefings should include information on how to refer to appropriate local services

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<sup>21</sup> Crisis have produced a toolkit - “*Finding and sustaining a home in the Private Rented Sector – The Essentials: A guide for frontline staff working with homeless offenders*” – <http://www.privaterentedsector.org.uk/ex-offenderstoolkit.asp>

## Local Challenge 6

To enable local services to develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords, the preventing homelessness strategy could include the following actions:

- Map local private rented sector to profile the stock in terms of location and numbers
- Work with Private Rented Sector Enforcement teams to profile the standards in local private rented sector stock (including how many actions have been taken against landlords in the past year) – this may have been undertaken as part of the local review of homelessness
- Ensure that advice and support is provided for anyone facing issues with private landlords across both the Private Rented Sector Enforcement Officers and Housing Options Service Develop a local landlord Accreditation Scheme
- Review Local Housing Allowance rates and how they compare to local market rents, and develop a plan to target local landlords to lower rents to reflect benefit levels through comprehensive offers of support
- Map local private rented sector access schemes in the area and engage existing schemes to look at provision across the district<sup>22</sup>
- Consult & involve local landlords and their agents in developing local services, strategies and plans<sup>23</sup> - and consider whether there may be a need for a specific strategic plan to inform future working arrangements with the private rented sector
- Review and develop options for landlords and customers across statutory and voluntary sector services – including local Choice Based Lettings schemes to include private rented sector advertising and self-help
- Develop communications with the local private rented sector Complete the Crisis Key Principles for PRS Access Schemes self-assessment tool<sup>24</sup> and develop an improvement plan based on the findings
- Review the local authority back office functions so that they contribute to a positive landlord experience
- Hold regular meetings with Housing Benefit colleagues to mitigate welfare reform impacts and develop local PRS work Develop the local offer for landlords so that it is attractive but does not over-incentivise<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Crisis provide a search facility that may assist you to identify private rented sector access schemes in your area:  
<http://www.privatedrentedsector.org.uk/schemes.asp>

<sup>24</sup> The Crisis Key Principles for PRS Access Schemes self-assessment tool can be downloaded here -  
[http://www.privatedrentedsector.org.uk/key\\_principles.asp](http://www.privatedrentedsector.org.uk/key_principles.asp)

<sup>25</sup> See Part 3 of the NPSS "*Working with the Private Rented Sector and Developing a Private Rented Sector Offer Policy*" Toolkit for further advice on working with private landlords – [www.npsservice.org.uk](http://www.npsservice.org.uk)

- Provide processes that enable PRS landlords to notify the housing service whenever tenancies might be failing, or where notices are being served, to prevent homelessness or facilitate planned moves where accommodation is unsustainable
- Develop the local offer for customers to ensure tenancies succeed and accommodation placements are appropriate and suitable based on individual circumstance
- Enable private rented sector access for both statutory *and* non-statutory homeless households
- Develop the availability of shared accommodation for under 35s at the LHA level and support landlords to convert or improve their properties for sharing and for managing shared tenancies
- Develop effective hand holding support for more vulnerable people to access the private rented sector
- Be proactive about preventing tenancy failure and train teams to recognise trigger points in tenancy breakdown and how to mitigate them
- Develop a local Private Rented Sector Offer policy to provide a framework that supports the end of duty into the private rented sector without requiring applicant consent<sup>26</sup>
- Develop local private rented sector accommodation offer standards with the aim to provide the highest possible standard of accommodation across all lets created by local landlord incentive schemes – for example, aim to meet the requirements set out in the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 across all private rented sector lets  
Develop local approaches to recruiting landlords to work with local services
- Ensure the enforcement arm of the authority works in partnership with the incentives offered to landlords
- Work with landlords across partnerships to reduce ‘rogue’ landlord issues – seek to bring them under the strategic umbrella with attractive offers of support and guidance<sup>27</sup>
- Develop information sharing with PRS landlords to build trust
- Ensure that wherever practicably possible, the Council discharges homelessness duties into accommodation that is situated locally<sup>28</sup>
- Ensure the authority has a standard process of notifying local authorities (and other relevant agencies as may be appropriate depending on the needs of individual households) when providing PRS accommodation out of area
- Ensure the authority has an inclusive landlords’ forum

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<sup>26</sup> See Parts 1 & 4 of the NPSS “*Working with the Private Rented Sector and Developing a Private Rented Sector Offer Policy*” Toolkit for further advice on Localism Act homelessness changes and developing a private rented sector offer policy – [www.npsservice.org.uk](http://www.npsservice.org.uk)

<sup>27</sup> Department for Communities & Local Government “*Dealing with Rogue Landlords: A Guide for Local Authorities*”, August 2012 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dealing-with-rogue-landlords-a-guide-for-local-authorities>

<sup>28</sup> The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2012/2601/made>

The NPSS toolkit, “*Working with the Private Rented Sector and Developing Private Rented Sector Offer Policies*”, is available to download from the NPSS website – [www.practitionersupport.org](http://www.practitionersupport.org). The toolkit is a resource covering key elements of working with the private rented sector, focusing not only on gaining access to private rented sector accommodation for households in housing need, but on sustaining existing tenancies in the private rented sector. It also provides both practical and technical advice on ways to develop local approaches, including adoption of the Localism Act powers contained in sections 148 and 149.

Crisis has developed a website providing advice, guidance and tools to support local services develop improved and improving access to the private rented sector. The website can be accessed using the link below:  
<http://www.privaterentedsector.org.uk/>

## Local Challenge 7

Local authorities who wish to **actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions** could include the following actions in their preventing homelessness strategy:

- Develop the local authority website so that it provides up to date advice and information that is accessible and available in a range of formats, including leaflets and posters that are available on reception and at partner agency receptions
- Promote national help lines and where quality self-help advice is available on line
- Undertake marketing campaigns to highlight local services and where to go to seek help if someone is struggling with their housing costs
- Develop “no wrong door” approach to ensure that anyone approaching front line services in the area can be signposted to the right place so that they can access the most appropriate help at the earliest opportunity
- Deliver training to ensure contact center / reception staff / switchboard / call center staff have a basic understanding of the local response to people who are in mortgage
- Ensure front line officers are trained in preventing mortgage repossessions and that they are actively using the NHAS Housing Debt Casework and Local Authority Housing Advice lines
- Review and develop referral processes with key partners where necessary, such as local money advice provision, the Housing Possession Duty Court Desk
- Review Ministry of Justice Court possession statistics and any other relevant data held centrally, or locally, to continuously monitor trends and identify actions to mitigate identifiable pressures
- Review and/or develop the local Preventing Repossessions Fund to ensure it is available to support struggling homeowners where appropriate. The effective use of a local Preventing Repossessions Fund can facilitate access to advice services (could be sub regional), reduce priority debts, support access to employment for training, support for maximising income and reducing household outgoings, access to cheaper white or household goods – support for education needs et cetera
- Identify named ‘Preventing Repossessions’ champion(s) within the Housing Service, and within all relevant partner agencies locally who may come into contact with homeowners in mortgage arrears.

## Local Challenge 8

Local authorities should have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs. In addition to the other elements of this toolkit, colleagues may wish to consider incorporating some or all of the following considerations that may be applicable to the local context (please note the overall content of this toolkit is summarised at *Appendix 1 of Part 3*):

- Ensure all legal requirements are met, statutory guidance observed and that the review of homelessness is robust (please see *Part 1* of this toolkit for detail)
- Clear commitment to early intervention and prevention
- Consider publishing funding allocated to preventing homelessness including any match funding the authority has committed to deliver alongside the preventing homelessness grant
- Clear commitment to partnership working and shared responsibility for delivering the aims of the strategy across statutory and voluntary sector partners, including across Council departments
- Review local service structures to support an early intervention and prevention model
- Clear stated aspiration and/or commitment to meeting the 10 “Local Authority Challenges” set by government<sup>29</sup>
- Actions to address any specific local housing supply issues<sup>30</sup> and actions to contribute to improved access to accommodation options for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness including:
  - *Social rented housing*
  - *Affordable rented housing*
  - *Flexible tenure*
  - *Supported housing*
  - *Private rented sector housing*
  - *Low cost home ownership options*
- Engaging 3 or more partner local authorities in undertaking peer reviews of local housing options and homelessness services using the NPSS Diagnostic Peer Review Toolkit<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> As set out in “*Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness*”, August 2012 – further information regarding the NPSS and Gold Standard programme is available at [www.npsservice.org.uk](http://www.npsservice.org.uk)

<sup>30</sup> For the current Affordable Homes Framework: DCLG & HCA “*Affordable Homes Programme 2015 to 2018: guidance and allocations*” - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/affordable-homes-programme-2015-to-2018-guidance-and-allocations>

- Undertaking regular periodic bite size reviews of specific elements of the service, such as case file audits, to monitor delivery and promote continuous improvement<sup>32</sup>
- Developing the local response to mitigating potential homelessness impacts of welfare reform<sup>33</sup> – this could form a separate multi-agency action plan that includes:
  - *Joint work with Housing Benefit colleagues to identify affected households*<sup>34</sup>
  - *Joint communications strategy across local services targeting households who will be affected*
  - *Joint approach between Housing Options and Housing Benefit to ensure best use of Discretionary Housing Payments – to maximise capacity to prevent, relieve and tackle homelessness and demonstrating good practice approaches to partnership working*
  - *Proactive affordability assessments in all cases presenting for advice and assistance who are affected by welfare reform changes*
  - *Partnership working with Housing Management and/or Registered Providers to identify households affected by changes to Housing Benefit for working age people under-occupying social housing*<sup>35</sup>
  - *Partnership working with Housing Management and/or Registered Providers to deliver budgeting and basic financial literacy advice, support downsizing and identify households for whom accommodation may become unaffordable to provide planned moves into more suitable accommodation*
  - *Work with local private landlords and other accommodation providers to develop shared room accommodation for people in receipt of local housing allowance and under 35 years old*
  - *Promote rent a room schemes locally*<sup>36</sup>
  - *Develop partnership working with DWP (e.g. Job Centre Plus) to tackle worklessness<sup>37</sup> and reduce homelessness impacts of welfare reform*

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<sup>34</sup> Housing & Council Tax Benefit Circular A5/2012 (regarding Welfare Reform Act 2012 sections 130 to 133 and the Social Security (Information-sharing in relation to Welfare Services etc.) Regulations 2012) - <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/a5-2012.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> The CIH have produced "Making it Fit: A Guide to Preparing for the Social Sector Size Criteria", June 2012 - [http://www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/Making\\_it\\_fit\\_a\\_guide\\_to\\_preparing\\_for\\_the\\_social\\_size\\_criteria](http://www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/Making_it_fit_a_guide_to_preparing_for_the_social_size_criteria)

<sup>36</sup> GOV.UK - <https://www.gov.uk/rent-room-in-your-home/the-rent-a-room-scheme>

<sup>37</sup> Department for Communities & Local Government 2009 report "Tackling worklessness - A review of the contribution and role of English local authorities and partnerships" – <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/10523/1/1161160.pdf>

- *Actions to develop digital inclusion strategies across key partners in preparation for Universal Credit*<sup>38</sup>
  - *Monitor effect of localisation of Council Tax on the district to identify potential homelessness impacts*
  - *Monitor effect of localisation of Social Fund on the district to identify potential homelessness impacts*
  - *Monitor changes to Legal Services Commission funding on the district to identify any potential issues arising*
  - *Work in partnership with local Credit Union or other partners to support rent payment to landlords and good budgeting & money management among tenants claiming Universal Credit*
  - *Where Private Sector Leasing schemes are reliant on the use of subsidy, undertake impact assessments on any future changes to the subsidy system*
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- Develop local approach to tackling under-occupation and over-crowding across tenure
  - Ensure local services provide realistic and appropriate options for people fleeing domestic violence and promote a 'safety paramount' approach across services
  - Develop joint working relationship with local Ministry of Defence to prevent homelessness resulting from irregular occupation of forces quarters or through people leaving the army
  - Develop joint working arrangements locally to ensure people displaced as a result of committing the offence of squatting in a residential building do not end up on the street<sup>39</sup>
  - Joint working through local Health and Wellbeing Board to explore partnership opportunities<sup>40</sup>
  - Joint working with Registered Providers & Housing Management to pool resources and develop appropriate responses to tenants needs, including end of tenancy options packages for tenants who may be required to leave flexible tenures
  - Ongoing commitment to monitor impacts of new approaches and ensure people are receiving timely & comprehensive advice and support:
    - *Allocations policy*
    - *Tenancy Strategy*
    - *Private Rented Sector Offer policy*
  - Commitment to identifying and developing best practice and innovation in service delivery

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<sup>38</sup> Department for Work & Pensions Universal Credit information pages - <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/universal-credit/>

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Justice "Criminal Offence of Squatting in a Residential Building" circular, August 2012 - <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/legislation/bills-acts/circulars/squatting-circular.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Department of Health information on Health & Wellbeing Boards - <http://healthandcare.dh.gov.uk/hwb-guide/>

- Outline and intentions for future service delivery including any ‘payment by results’ commissioning considerations or other commissioning related intentions that may be relevant to the preventing homelessness strategy and associated action plan Focus on exit strategies and developing long lasting services and interventions
- Clear monitoring process in place and undertaken by a partnership of agencies and on a regular basis - consider the role of the local homelessness forum as part of this approach and how the strategy will be linked through to wider strategies and delivery streams to ensure ‘buy in’ from elected members and the wider corporate management team. Consider a corporate monitoring process to support this
- Develop a framework for performance monitoring and target setting – including key performance targets for lead officers and/or partners to progress elements of the strategy
- Ensure there is a focus on value for money delivered through efficient, but effective, local service delivery models
- Clear review process involving a minimum of 1 annual review each year

## Local Challenge 9

To enable the local housing service to **not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation** the preventing homelessness strategy could include the following actions:

- Develop and/or regularly review a Joint Working Protocol with local Children & Young People’s Services<sup>41</sup>
- The protocol should include a statement of commitment from Housing and Children’s Services directors
- Undertake joint assessment of all 16/17 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness<sup>42</sup>
- Undertake prevention focused home visits in all cases of family breakdown, where it is appropriate to do so
- Develop co-location of Children’s & Housing Services assessments where practicable to do so
- Identify resources that can be pooled locally to support the protocol
- Set up a steering group to oversee the Joint Working Protocol and review operational experiences – amend the protocol and approaches accordingly and accommodate emerging best practice

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<sup>41</sup> Colleagues may wish to consider the July 2012 report from the LGO - <http://www.lgo.org.uk/news/2012/aug/kent-amp-dover-councils-criticised-inexcusable-failures-homeless-teenager/>

<sup>42</sup> See *G v Southwark* on appeal to the House of Lords

- Develop the local commitment to early intervention and prevention responses to meet young people's housing needs Ensure local pathways into accommodation and support reflect the needs of younger service users and that homelessness is not the only trigger that enables access to local services
- Develop a 'Youth Homelessness Panel' of young service users to consider improvements in the local accommodation and support pathway, or another mechanism to engage young people
- Develop a process through which views on local services can be received from parents and carers as stakeholders
- Establish and/or review move-on processes with local young person's supported accommodation providers, and how the process of transition from children leaving care to living independently is being managed
- Develop a local protocol to support young people leaving care to access accommodation and support
- Develop information packs geared towards meeting the needs and aspirations of young people
- Develop local Night Stop / Supported Lodgings / Crash Pads / other emergency accommodation options such as beds in local supported housing projects as appropriate to meet demand Develop Private Rented Sector Access Scheme(s) that support young people to secure private rented sector accommodation options
- Provide briefings to partner agencies and stakeholders to raise awareness around youth homelessness and the local services available to support young people
- Develop a programme of educational visits to local schools – this could be delivered as 'peer education' projects in partnership with local youth agencies
- Develop appropriate mediation / intervention services locally Develop Local Family Intervention Project or alternative model such as Troubled Families Project, where appropriate
- Improve the capture and sharing of local data and intelligence regarding youth homelessness to target resources and develop local responses to meet emerging areas of need
- Develop individual action plans in partnership with Children's Services, for all 16/17 year olds in bed and breakfast. These should represent bespoke housing plans to facilitate moves out of bed and breakfast and into more appropriate forms of temporary or settled accommodation, with support
- Assess local services against any emerging good practice and self-assessment tools

To enable the local housing service to not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks the preventing homelessness strategy could include the following actions:

- Re-focus the housing options service so that the first entry point seeks to sustain existing accommodation in every presenting case (where appropriate), *before* seeking to secure alternative accommodation – to reduce demands for temporary accommodation and facilitate ‘planned’ moves from existing accommodation – this action could be linked to the earlier commitment to develop spend to save measures to support the local prevention model
- Develop a temporary accommodation supply and demand model and link this to future strategic plans around tackling homelessness – this should include actions for Housing Management (if stock retaining) and Registered Providers to review stock options for temporary accommodation provision, such as dispersed temporary accommodation within existing social housing stock<sup>43</sup>
- Review private rented sector options for temporary accommodation provision<sup>44</sup>
- Develop a temporary accommodation reduction plan that actively considers how the main homelessness duty can be ended for existing accepted households in temporary accommodation who had applied for assistance under Part VII Housing Act 1996 before the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2012 (when the new Localism Act Private Rented Sector Offer provisions commenced)<sup>45</sup>
- Develop an action plan for each individual household in temporary accommodation that is focused on progressing appropriate move-on options
- Develop individual action plans for those households in bed and breakfast. These should represent bespoke housing plans to facilitate moves out of bed and breakfast and into more appropriate forms of temporary or settled accommodation
- Ensure existing households in bed and breakfast accommodation are receiving support including appropriate health screening
- Undertake analysis of the costs of bed and breakfast provision including forward projections – reinvest funds into preventing bed and breakfast

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<sup>43</sup> s.213 Housing Act 1996 provides that where an RSL has been requested by a housing authority to assist them in the discharge of their homelessness functions under Part 7, it must also co-operate to such extent as is reasonable in the circumstances - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/213>

<sup>44</sup> See NPSS “Working with the Private Rented Sector and Developing a Private Rented Sector Offer Policy” Toolkit – [www.npsservice.org.uk](http://www.npsservice.org.uk)

<sup>45</sup> The NPSS “Working with the Private Rented Sector and Developing a Private Rented Sector Offer Policy” toolkit provides further advice on the approach local authorities could take – [www.npsservice.org.uk](http://www.npsservice.org.uk)

placements, and sourcing more appropriate temporary accommodation options

- Provide notifications to host boroughs for every out of borough bed and breakfast placement by complying with legal duties set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended)<sup>46</sup>
- Develop the local approach to ensure that each case accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation has been fully assessed for the impacts of this accommodation on the household (including affordability, access to employment, training, health and other statutory support services)
- Ensure processes are in place so that school age children of households in bed and breakfast are supported to continue to attend school
- Monitor and review the time taken to make decisions on Part 7 applications

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<sup>46</sup> s.208 Housing Act 1996 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/208>