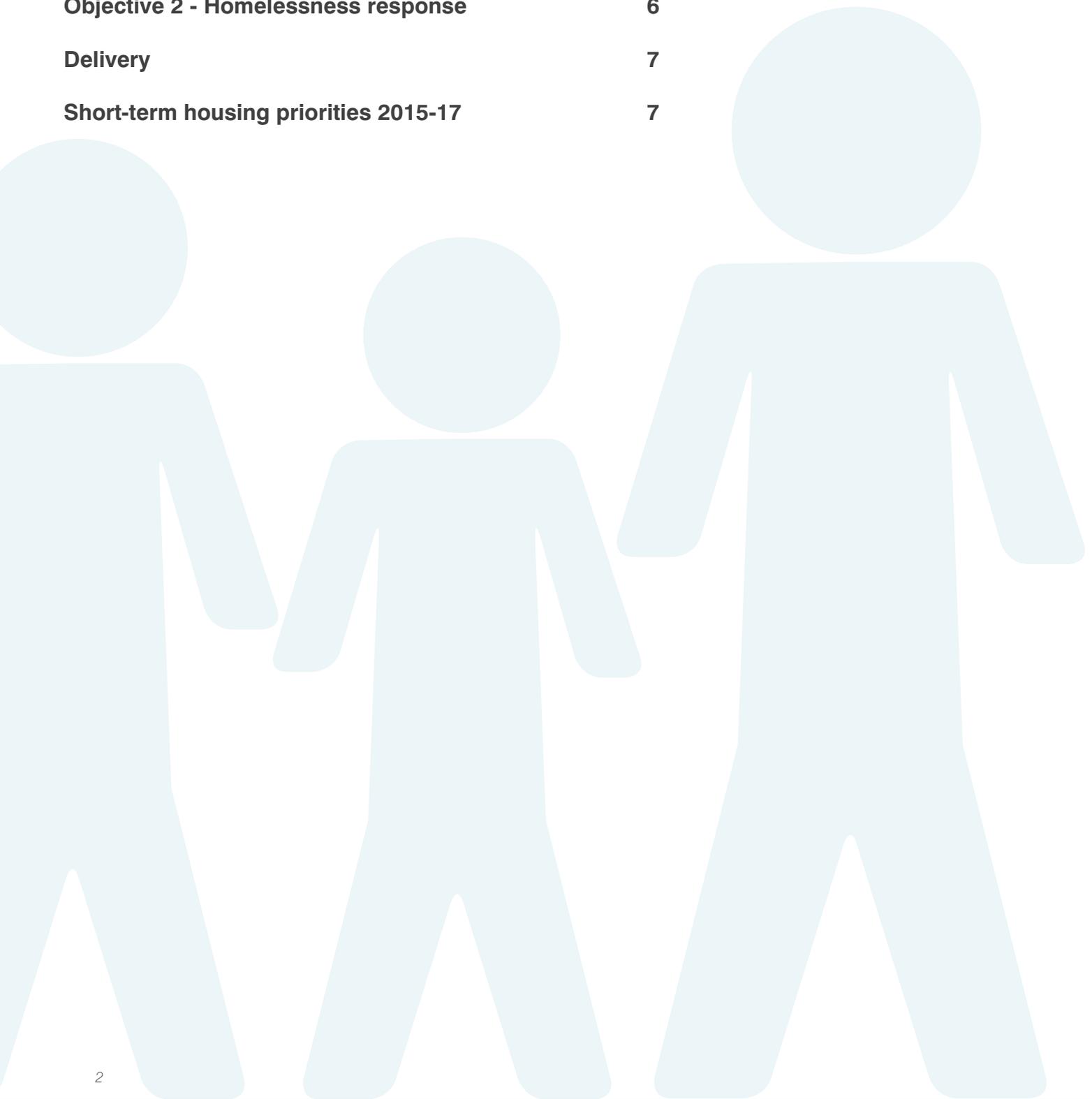


Homelessness Strategy

2015-2020

Contents

Introduction	3
Our housing vision	4
Current context	4
Local context	5
Objective 1 - Homelessness prevention	6
Objective 2 - Homelessness response	6
Delivery	7
Short-term housing priorities 2015-17	7



Introduction

The Homelessness Strategy has been developed at a time of change to national policy and public sector budget cuts. Evidence of the impact of Welfare Reform in Doncaster shows increases in the use of food banks and access to discretionary housing payments leading to an increase in the demand for affordable housing, housing advice and support services, and health services. Homelessness acts as a barrier to those seeking employment, and the introduction of Universal Credit in 2015 may provide greater demand in this area.

The Homelessness Strategy shows a commitment to early intervention and prevention and includes reactive and preventative priorities that we will use to respond to homelessness and reduce the risk of homelessness. It will identify partnership working opportunities to provide housing related support for our most vulnerable residents, and create sustainable accommodation solutions – all of which must be delivered with reduced resources.

Through extensive consultation with our partners, we have identified the some long-term strategic themes which will form the basis of our homelessness-related activity over the next 5 years.

We would like to thank all those that have contributed to this strategy, including staff within Doncaster Council, our external partners, local councillors, and those residents and businesses that took the time to tell us what they thought about Doncaster's housing priorities.

Regards,



Ros Jones
Mayor of Doncaster



Jane Nightingale
Cabinet Portfolio
Holder for Housing



Jo Miller
Chief Executive
Doncaster Council



Susan Jordan
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St. Leger Homes



Our housing vision

Residents will be able to access suitable, quality accommodation to meet their needs.

Viable, quality options will exist within the social rented, private rented or home ownership sectors; and homes in the rented sectors will be managed by high quality housing providers.

Residents will be able to live in safe, healthy and supported communities within vibrant and well-managed neighbourhoods.

The below Housing vision for Doncaster is set out in the Housing Strategy. Tackling homelessness supports, or is supported by the achievement of each of the 3 strategic objectives.

Providing a home to meet household's needs, which is of appropriate standard, combined with the provision of appropriate housing-related support will allow them to live independently within the community.



Current context

The Government recognises the importance of preventative work and the support needed for disadvantaged households by tackling the underlying problems that contribute to homelessness.

The Government recommends that local authorities deliver a housing options service that strives for continuous improvement in homelessness prevention to tackle the causes of homelessness.

Health Services are supported through the Government's **Public Health Outcomes Framework** to help identify those at risk of and prevent homelessness by "making every contact count". A Ministerial Working Group is in place to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, and provide communities the tools to tackle rough sleeping and prevent people from spending a second night on the street, e.g.

Homeless Transition Fund administered by Homeless Link. The **Welfare Reform Act** was passed by Parliament in March 2012 and the following reforms were introduced:

- Disability Living Allowance replaced with Personal Independence Payments.
- Housing Benefit entitlement restricted for social housing tenants whose accommodation is larger than they need
- Local Housing Allowance rates change according to the Consumer Price Index
- Statutory child maintenance scheme amendments
- Payment of contributory Employment & Support Allowance limited to a 12 month period.
- Caps for the total amount of benefit that can be claimed.

This has an impact on those reliant on benefits, and a potential impact on future homelessness. The Homeless Link paper **A High Cost to Pay: The impact of benefit sanctions on homeless people** explains this further.

The **Localism Act 2011** has given local Authorities the power to discharge their homeless duty to the Private Rented sector, and the ability to introduce fixed term or continue with flexible or lifetime tenancies.

The Government's White Paper for Homelessness dated 10 April 2014, Homelessness in England states that more should be done for those who are not owed a statutory homeless duty. It states that "everyone who is at risk of homelessness gets help at the earliest possible stage to prevent them from losing their home". The White Paper also discusses the **Statutory Instrument 2012 No 2601 The Homeless (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012** which gives guidance on the suitability of accommodation for Homeless people when discharging homeless duty.

Homeless Link (June 2013) explores the causes of homelessness among 16 and 17 year olds, its long term impact and whether they are being safeguarded by local authorities: **No Excuses – preventing homelessness for the next generation.**

The Government recently published an Evidence Review of the Costs of Homelessness in which it estimated that the gross annual cost to be £24,000-£30,000 per person, with

a total annual gross cost of up to £1billion.

This comprises benefit payments, health costs in supporting homeless persons with mental health, substance abuse or alcohol dependency problems, and costs to the criminal justice system from crimes committed by the homeless.

Most of the identified costs relate to non-statutory homeless single rough sleepers and hostel dwellers but the costs of statutory homelessness incurred by local government are included. Preventing homelessness won't remove this cost completely, but it will significantly reduce it.



Local context

The options for homeless households who are ready to move into their own accommodation are limited to social rented and private rented accommodation.

Evidence suggests that the following affordability issues are present for those living on benefits:

The council's housing waiting list currently includes around 8,700 households (Mar 2015).

St Leger Homes of Doncaster has around 1,500 social rented properties becoming available for re-let each year, and we have a target to deliver around 800 new council homes over the next decade, and many more in partnership with other registered housing providers.

Affordability Issues for Households on benefits.

Adults aged 18-34 years are not able to afford the cheapest properties in any postcode area & therefore shared housing is the only option available.	An adult/couple with 2 children (different gender) or with 3 children would receive enough housing benefit to afford the cheapest appropriate property in all postcode areas.	Unemployment is fluctuating at around 10%; an increase of over 10,000 (260%) in 10yrs.
Adults over 35 years, who are entitled to more Housing Benefit, would be able to afford the cheapest rental properties in all postcode areas except DN9 and DN10.	An adult or couple with a child or two children (same gender) would not be able to afford the cheapest appropriate rental properties in around half of the borough's postcode areas; DN2, DN3, DN7, DN9, DN10 and DN11.	39th most deprived local authority area in England; 3rd most deprived out of 21 in the Yorkshire & Humber Region. Most deprived area in South Yorks & the Sheffield City Region.

The rental market represents a more accessible market, but for many households, the proportion of household income required for rent payments will be above the threshold for affordability. Single person households relying on housing benefit will largely have to live in shared accommodation; and demand for the private rented sector is expected to increase; which in turn could increase prices and cause more affordability issues for many households.

The single/shared accommodation demand may be met by the existing and additional Houses in Multiple Occupation stock, but there is evidence to suggest that there are issues around both the standard of properties and management of the properties.

Consultation evidence for Doncaster's Housing Strategy has shown that the impact of Welfare Reforms could start to reduce the numbers of privately rented properties available as landlords feel the risks are too high and are moving away from applicants on benefits. This could result in an increased demand for social/affordable rent accommodation.

Housing in Doncaster comprises mainly 2/3-bed properties with very few 1-bed properties available. 1-bed properties make up 7% of Doncaster's total stock (8,887 1-bedroom properties and 204 bedsits); 5,220 of these are council-owned.

This is roughly in line with other surrounding local authorities, and slightly less than the SCR (9%) and Yorkshire and Humber (10%) levels. Doncaster also has 908 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO), with many unregistered HMOs being created across the borough to meet the needs resulting from welfare reform. Most HMOs are situated around the Town Centre. 127 HMOs are required to have a licence and have been licensed.

Doncaster also has an Empty Property Purchase Scheme where empty properties are brought back into use as council stock for affordable rent. These tend to be 2 and 3-bedroom properties which will not reduce the impact on accommodation need for single people on benefits. It is anticipated that the lack of suitable accommodation will generate an increase in demand for housing advice, support and homelessness services in future years.

Objective 1 - Homelessness prevention

- We will adopt the following standards for our Housing Options Service:
- We will adopt and embed a corporate **commitment to prevent homelessness** across all local authority and St Leger Homes services.
- We will ensure our homelessness strategy maintains a focus on a **proactive approach to prevention**; and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs.
- We will work with faith groups on **adequate referral mechanisms** and we will work with mental health providers to **support Rough Sleepers** with their psychological and emotional needs; in particular young people and rough sleepers with histories of complex trauma and personality disorders.
- We will develop a suitable **private rented sector offer** for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord. Where appropriate, and where resources allow, we will provide landlord and tenant mediation services to resolve disputes about behaviour or repairs to prevent loss of assured short-hold tenancies.
- We will **work in partnership** to deliver a housing options prevention service; working with the Homeless Partnership group & other voluntary/local partners to address health, support, education, employment & training needs.
- We will **work with the Children's Trust** under joint working protocols to assess and meet the needs of 16/17 year olds that seek help because of homelessness and work. Our approach will preclude placing them in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- We will **preclude placing any families in Bed & Breakfast accommodation** unless in an emergency & for no longer than 6 weeks.
- We will work to the **No Second Night Out principles** - working with potential rough sleepers to keep them off the streets; working in partnership to identify target groups such as offenders, ex-service personnel, and young care leavers so they do not become tomorrow's rough sleepers.

Objective 2 - Homelessness response

The Council's statutory homelessness response will continue to be delivered by St Leger Homes of Doncaster. Reception staff will be available at the Civic Office reception between 8:30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday; with an emergency out of hours service available evenings and weekends.

We will make available a selection of council-owned **temporary accommodation** units for eligible households, which will be used in conjunction with **private rented sector properties** and, where necessary, private sector bed & breakfast.

We will **work with private rented sector landlords** to provide affordable housing which is at a standard to enable people to settle and to access health centres and schools.

We will continue to create and develop **partnerships with the voluntary sector** and other local partners to enable swift, efficient and value for money response to homelessness.

We will work towards **ending Rough Sleeping** in Doncaster through our local approach to No Second Night Out (NSNO), working in Partnership to ensure that new

rough sleepers do not fall into a dangerous rough sleeping lifestyle, make use of reporting and referral systems, give access to places of safety where needs can be assessed, access emergency accommodation and healthcare, and reconnect to local communities where possible.

We will continue our commitment to the **Armed Forces Community Covenant** through the waiver of a local connection need when assessing eligibility for council housing. This waiver will apply to the AFC that have left service within 5 years; and those applicants assessed as being in housing need during that period will be given platinum band priority status.

We will minimise the impact of Welfare Reform by working with customers to find the most **appropriate mechanisms to maintain tenancies**. We will ensure that customers are able to sustain accommodation available to them by offering accommodation with support and by providing training to enable tenants to manage and maintain a tenancy.

Delivery

With reducing finances, we must now work together with our partners more than ever before to get the most from our collective resources. We will focus and prioritise delivery of services to those people or areas in most need.

The Council's general fund finances are under more pressure than ever before. The funding we have available will therefore dictate the amount and extent to which the solutions previously described will be delivered.

We will **raise and maintain awareness of current homelessness issues**, priorities, and legislative requirements across the senior management groups of St Leger Homes, the Council and other partners. Regular contact with the elected leadership and local councillors will facilitate a two-way communication channel to identify local priorities and issues that need tackling, and a means by which updates on progress against local and borough-wide priorities can be provided.

We will re-energise the **homelessness partnership group** in order to gain an effective contact mechanism with key delivery partners. We will review membership, identify and address appropriate additional representations, and identify a clear remit for the group and its individual members. A key function of the group will be in the monitoring and review of performance against the strategy to ensure that we are responsive to emerging needs. This will be done periodically throughout the year, with a formal review of progress completed on an annual basis in conjunction and accordance with the corporate performance monitoring frameworks in place in St Leger Homes of Doncaster and within the Council.

We will use the group as a means of providing extra capacity to identify and respond to the **specific needs of specific vulnerable groups**. It will enable productive working relationships between a variety of partners; identifying, implementing and reviewing joint working protocols to ensure statutory and efficiency requirements are met.

We will work with partners to enable a **supply of sustainable and affordable accommodation**, to lettable standards as per the Housing Health & Safety Rating System.

We will investigate, with the Councils enforcement team, the supply of appropriate single person accommodation due to housing benefit cap for under 35s currently eligible only for bedsits or shared accommodation and non-regulated HMOs.

We will work with commissioners to provide adequate data to **confirm the need** for supported accommodation for complex needs.

We will develop IT solutions to provide effective access and assessment for customers and staff; and will **work with the homelessness forum** to find means of reducing and removing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation as a solution for temporary accommodation and reducing the duration of stay for customers in temporary accommodation.

We will identify where **Disabled Facilities Grants** can be used to enable clients to remain in their home or obtain a suitable home to live in.

Short-term housing priorities 2015-17

The following list provides an insight into the key programmes/pieces of work that the Council and its partners will undertake in order to achieve the strategy's objectives.

Further detail on each can be found in the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan, and within individual Service Plans.

- Continue working relationships/protocols between St Leger Homes and appropriate Council departments.
- Achieve Gold Standard status for our Housing Options Service.



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