

## **Homelessness Working Group Report January 2019**

### **1. Membership**

Councillors Jenny Roach (Chair), Rosemary Berry, Heather Bainbridge, Nick Way, Gill Doe, Frank Rosamond

### **2. Officers supporting the Working group**

Claire Fry (Group Manager for Housing), Mike Parker (Housing Options Manager), Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer) and Kevin Swift (Public Health and Scrutiny Policy Research Officer)

### **3. Rationale**

The number of homeless and the likelihood these numbers would rise.  
Looking at existing service provision and whether the service provided meets the needs of the homeless.

### **4. Scope**

The new act and the implications for Mid Devon.  
Identify what is being done and what the potential barriers are.  
Explore existing initiatives and determine if they are appropriately joined up.  
Compare our policies with those of a neighbouring authority.

### **5. Desired Outcomes**

To try to prevent homelessness using legislation on homelessness prevention.  
To explore alternative ways of working with a view to delivering efficiencies.  
Provide recommendations to council on how to move forward with the homeless strategy.  
To ensure the authority complies with legislation.  
Being sure that existing provision is cost effective.

### **6. Approach and Methodology**

Calling witnesses such as Shelter, neighbouring authorities, from Devon Somerset, CHAT, CAB, Alison Mawson from Devon and Cornwall, Housing Options Partnership.  
Consider report from Housing Options at MDDC.

### **7. Target body for report**

Scrutiny Committee and then directed to the Homes Policy Development Group.

### **8. The Homelessness Reduction Act**

The new Act was the biggest change to homelessness legislation in 20 years.  
It will result in more people presenting to the Council and the authority would have a duty to prevent homeless up to 56 days in advance, which could result in having to accommodate the homeless person(s).

Current legislation from 1996 and amended in 2002 stated that anyone could approach the local authority for advice if homeless and if in a priority group (such as vulnerable young/old, medical issues, dependent children) had to be provided with

accommodation. Those not in a priority group did not have to be provided with accommodation.

Under the new Act if someone approached the authority that was at risk of becoming homeless, the council has to make investigations. If it was established that there was a threat, they have a duty to work with that person for 56 days to help prevent them becoming homeless. This could include helping them to find accommodation. This was one duty and there were about 11 appeal processes, which were all in law.

Once the 56 days expired and the person became homeless there was another 56 days to relieve them from being homeless. So in total 112 days could be spent with one person. This help could include helping them to find private accommodation and again there was an appeal process if they were not being helped.

Currently costs might extend to a couple of nights' accommodation (approximately £500 per week to provide) new legislation could be 56 days at £500 a week for a single person. B and B costs were around £35 - £55 a night. Officers currently used B & B accommodation that included Premier Inn, Travel Lodges etc. and 17 units of 1bedroom flats plus 3 shared room units from the Housing Service for temporary accommodation. The Council also had a duty to protect belongings which could include putting dogs in kennels. One homelessness family could have a big impact on the budget.

It was recognised that the budget would need to be managed carefully following the implementation of the new legislation because of the additional duties which could be costly to implement. Authorities that had started implementing the new methods had found that the number of people in temporary accommodation increased by about 140% and approaches for help increased by around 150%.

The new legislation would result in a need to replace current software systems. The current system that had been built in house would not be sufficient and the IT service did not have the capacity to build a new system. Officers were looking with other authorities to hopefully save costs and it was considered that an 'off the shelf' system might be the most cost effective. There was no allocated budget for this.

A number of challenges were highlighted including:

- the lack of B and B accommodation available in the area;
- Devon Home Choice and the banding used for those threatened with homelessness;
- a lack of shared housing in the district and plans to encourage house sharing;
- working with the private sector to get empty homes back into use;
- working with Housing Associations using affordability checks to make sure that tenants would be able to afford rent;
- current Housing benefit payments for the under 35s were not sufficient to cover rent and it was anticipated that this would cause future problems;
- Universal Credit would be implemented in 2018 which could result in rent payment delays to landlords, potentially resulting in even less accommodation being available.

## **9. Budget and service delivery information**

### **9.1 Partnerships and joined up-working**

The Devon and Cornwall Partnership included all local authorities and provided joined up working regarding new policy to put forward a joint approach. The partnership funded an officer and work undertaken saved a lot of officer time.

The Domestic Violence Partnership provided a safe house for women and children escaping domestic violence.

Funds from Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) were ring-fenced for homelessness and DCC currently funded an officer working with youth.

Homelessness was increasing, particularly with youngsters. 16 and 17 year olds could not be placed in B and B so the authority relied on projects in Exeter to place them. Under 35's could only claim rent for a room so often could not afford properties that were available. Mediation was available to help if young people had been kicked out of their homes by parents.

### **9.2 Mid Devon**

£40k was set aside for discretionary rent allowance. This could be used to help people find alternative accommodation by providing rent and deposit in advance. Sums lent varied between £1k and £1.5k. An overspend was anticipated but this was a better investment than paying for B and B which could be the alternative. These funds were a loan and would need to be paid back. There was currently just over £200k outstanding.

There was currently a grant of £10K which was ring fenced for homeless prevention. This was being used to undertake early intervention work with landlords, asking them to let the council know at an early stage of the eviction process so that the council could work with the family. However, the funding provided did not cover the workload.

There were no grants paid to the Churches Housing Action Team (CHAT) from the Housing Service, although they did receive a grant of £12,500 from the Corporate Grant scheme. From next year there would be an obligation for the authority to provide homelessness advice and therefore CHAT would need to divert customers to the council for their entitlement. CHAT did not provide accommodation in their new Hub but could provide showers which could help homeless people find employment.

It was estimated that it would cost £100k a month to accommodate every homeless person in B and B and currently only the Travelodge at Junction 27 would accept bookings from the team. Officers were working with the Procurement Team to try and build a network of providers.

Should the temperature drop below freezing for 3 consecutive nights the authority would provide overnight accommodation as good practice. Most homelessness situations had some form of mental health issues or drink and/or drug problems.

The authority had issued 52 DARS (Deposit and Advanced Rent Scheme) in the previous financial year to date (2017/18).

## **10. Presentations from other agencies**

10.1 Exeter City Council/Teignbridge District Council and Community Housing Aid Chris Stocks of Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council and Stuart Hooper of Community Housing Aid provided their perspectives on homelessness to the Working group. A number of issues were raised and information provided as follows:

- Universal Credit and the potential issues it could create;
- Homelessness numbers increasing year on year;
- Impossible to know true numbers such as those sofa surfing;
- Street Link was a national campaign to which homeless people could be directed;
- Julian House and the work it carried out;
- Services not available to stop people getting into crisis in the first place;
- Lack of rehab care in prisons;
- The benefits of shared housing (HMO) and the need to encourage landlords to do this;
- Hostels and the amount it cost in housing benefit, making it prohibitive for people to work if they were within this system;
- The need to educate people to eat healthily as they often did not even when provided with facilities;
- Gabriel House in Exeter, the waiting list for this and the Red House at Crediton;
- Train tickets being purchased to send people back to their home towns.

### 10.2 Churches Housing Action Team (CHAT)

Stella Beever, Team Leader from CHAT explained that their service dealt with the front line; helping people that were in housing crisis or were homeless. They provided advice, as well as issuing sleeping bags, tents, fuel top ups and referrals to other charities.

They were finding it more and more difficult to find landlords that would accept people who were homeless. They could offer a deposit guarantee scheme but this was often not enough. When there was a history of housing issues applicants would be expected to engage with tenancy support.

Housing benefit levels did not meet the cost of local housing. Ms. Beever explained that it was illegal for letting agents to discriminate against people on benefits but that this was common place.

CHAT would soon be implementing an assisted tenancy scheme whereby they would help someone that had no other hope of getting housing by guaranteeing the landlord his rent.

### 10.3 Devon and Cornwall Housing Options Partnership Manager

Alison Mawson from the Devon and Cornwall Housing Options Partnership explained that she worked with 11 housing authorities that met bi-monthly and her work involved carry out actions from a work plan set out by the group. The purpose of the partnership was to bring together any work that could be done collectively. Work undertaken included providing feedback on the code of guidance, consultations such as supported housing and domestic abuse and a severe winter weather protocol. Mid Devon contributed £5k to the pot.

Family breakdown was considered a key contributor to homelessness and that it was important to get better at working with children's services. Drug and alcohol abuse along with mental health issues were also main contributors.

### 10.4 Citizens Advice

Vikki Phillips from Citizens Advice (CA) explained that housing was one of their main enquiry areas. They could help by providing guidance to the process, help look at eligibility, provide debt and guidance support and look into other issues such as employment.

Ms Phillips stated that she would like to do more preventative work, helping with financial capability, rather than being reactive. She would also like to be able to provide home visits.

Universal Credit was of course an area of concern. Other areas of the country that had already implemented it had seen a huge increase in the number of visits to the local CA centres.

## 11. Public Sector Housing (MDDC)

Approximately 650 private ownership properties had been identified as vacant by the Public Sector Housing team. There were many complex reasons for this including a slow housing market, complex probate issues, properties in very poor condition or in very remote locations on unadopted roads and those with agricultural ties. Those that had remained empty in excess of two years were classed as long term. In 2016, 33 empty properties had been brought back into use rising to 128 properties in 2017.

There were various schemes available for owners to bring properties back into use such as lower rates for DIY loans. MDDC also had powers to compulsory purchase empty properties in extreme cases and an officer group had been set up to explore the options for these properties.

In relation to empty properties there were a number of products available to home owners including some which were mandatory such as the Disability Facilities Grants. Loans could also be offered to home owners and landlords for home improvements.

## 12. Resources for dealing with homelessness

A report was provided to the Working group in October 2018 (Appendix A) by the Housing Options Manager providing a comprehensive picture of the impact of the new Act, the homelessness situation in Mid Devon, and the changes to staffing that has occurred to address this challenge.

### **13. Recommendations**

The Housing Options Manager to commence consultation regarding the new homelessness strategy by:

Setting up a series of workshops with stakeholders:

- 1 The Housing Options team
- 2 Members with an interest in the subject
- 3 Colleagues from the Neighbourhood teams, Revenues and Benefits team and the Private Sector Housing team
- 4 Other agencies which work with those who are rough sleeping such as staff from Julian House, the Police, CHAT, the CA etc

Each workshop to think about the following strands:

- Preventing homelessness including rough sleeping
- Partnership working
- Reducing the use of temporary accommodation
- Supporting those with complex needs

Each workshop to consider:

- What does the Council do well in relation to this area of work?
- What can we do better?
- Challenges
- What additional work can be done?
- What work should be prioritised?

This initial consultation will inform the draft of the new strategy.

#### 14. Appendix A – Homelessness Statistics 2012/13-2017/18

Number of housing approaches:

	2012/13				2013/14				2014/15				2015/16				2016/17				2017/18			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Total Number of Housing Options Approaches</b>	151	151	133	183	158	136	94	127	96	124	106	131	104	103	92	109	104	140	103	119	130	103	110	112

Homeless decision based upon old legislation:

Homeless Decisions: (During Quarter)	2012/2013				2013/2014				2014/2015				2015/2016				2016/2017				2017/2018			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Advice Only	95	72	66	98	97	75	50	24	62	97	87	79	58	34	38	33	58	50	37	53	55	33	60	44
Intentional	5	5	3	3	2	2	0	4	2	1	3	0	1	1	4	4	5	4	3	5	2	2	0	2
Not In Priority Need	11	23	19	18	13	10	13	8	2	4	3	2	5	4	2	2	3	8	5	7	8	7	8	4
Accepted	4	7	4	0	5	3	3	7	2	5	8	5	8	11	3	8	15	12	10	8	12	8	4	7
Not Homeless	32	42	39	55	34	21	14	21	1	4	5	6	28	18	13	14	16	25	40	28	31	23	29	30
Ineligible	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	147	149	133	174	153	113	80	64	69	111	108	92	100	68	60	62	97	99	95	101	108	73	102	88

Snapshot of households placed into B&B at the end of each quarter:

Snapshot of B&B (End of quarter)	2012/2013				2013/2014				2014/2015				2015/2016				2016/2017				2017/2018			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
REF:p3 E6 p1e B&B	1	0	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	2	0	0	1	1	0	5	9	7	3	1	3	2	0	2
Own Stock	4	7	6	6	4	4	5	8	10	9	11	7	11	12	11	11	17	16	14	11	10	14	12	14
<b>Total</b>	5	7	7	7	5	5	8	9	13	11	11	7	12	13	11	16	26	23	17	12	13	16	12	16

Number of deposit and advance rent issued during quarter:

	2012/2013				2013/2014				2014/2015				2015/2016				2016/2017				2017/2018			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Number of Deposit and Advance Rent Issued</b>	9	11	19	17	17	13	14	10	19	14	9	4	10	8	15	13	12	11	24	11	19	12	11	17

Homelessness reasons summary:

Homeless Reasons: All approaches)	2012/2013				2014/2015				2014/2015				2015/2016				2016/2017				2017/2018			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
0. Emergency	0	0	1	0	2	3	0	1	3	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	1
1. Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	19	24	27	24	19	17	7	16	16	16	12	23	14	22	17	6	11	13	22	12	19	15	12	11
2. Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	22	16	10	17	20	20	16	21	7	8	14	17	10	7	4	11	6	10	6	7	7	8	12	5
3. Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner	25	20	13	31	22	15	15	10	5	10	15	16	12	12	7	14	14	22	7	13	14	8	10	10
4. Violence																								
a. Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner	2	5	7	8	5	7	12	7	7	10	3	9	10	8	7	8	6	7	11	7	7	7	7	4
b. Violent breakdown of relationship involving associated persons	1	1	2	0	3	4	0	1	0	2	1	1	4	2	1	5	4	2	4	1	2	2	2	3
c. Racially motivated violence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	3
d. Other forms of violence	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	0	2	1	1	4	4	2
5. harassment, threats or intimidation																								
a. Racially motivated harassment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
b. Other forms of harassment	1	0	0	1	0	1	1		0	1	2	4	2	0	0	0	5	0	0	6	4	0	0	5
6. Mortgage arrears (repossession or other loss of home)	4	7	2	11	5	4	2	2	1	1	2	1	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
7. Rent arrears on :																								
a. Local authority or other public sector dwellings	6	13	14	4	8	10	4	4	1	3	2	1	3	4	4	4	1	7	3	1	1	2	0	2
b. Registered Provider dwellings	1	1	6	1	2	2	0	2	0	0	1	2	2	0	1	4	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0
c. Private sector dwellings	3	0	3	2	0	1	1	2	0	3	1	2	4	4	5	8	3	7	3	12	3	0	3	4
8. Loss of rented or tied accommodation due to :																								
a. Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	23	27	10	43	31	20	21	34	22	26	21	18	18	13	5	13	9	24	11	21	15	13	11	23
b. Reasons other than termination of assured shorthold tenancy	10	11	6	7	10	4	6	15	12	16	9	15	7	9	10	11	17	20	10	9	9	8	12	16
9. Required to leave acc. provided by the Home Office as asylum support	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. Left an Institution or LA care:																								
a. Left prison/on remand	0	1	4	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	1	1
b. Left hospital	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	2	5	1	0	0
c. Left other institution or LA care	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	1	0	2
11. Other reason for loss of last settled home																								
a. Left HM Forces	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
b. Other reason	29	24	26	33	28	25	8	9	20	27	18	19	13	13	21	17	27	20	17	25	37	32	32	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>112</b>



Homelessness preventions or reliefs for quarter:

	2012/2013				2013/2014				2014/2015				2015/2016				2016/2017				2017/2018			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Prevention Remain</b>																								
Mediation	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	2	3	0
Conciliation	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	1	1	1	2	1
Financial payments	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Debt advice	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Resolving Housing Benefit	16	37	53	32	50	80	84	78	35	41	73	48	22	40	51	21	19	10	20	16	27	8	19	26
Resolving Rent/Service Charge	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Sanctuary Scheme	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	3	0	3	0	5	3
Crisis intervention	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	3	3	6	3	5	7	5	3	6	13	5	6
Negotiation or legal advocacy	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	6	0	0	1	1	0	1	3	2	3	10	2	1	20
Providing other assistance	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	2	7	4	5	1	0	3	4	10	12	9	0	6	9	11	7
Mortgage arrears interventions	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>64</b>

	2013/2014				2013/2014				2014/2015				2015/2016				2016/2017				2017/2018			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Prevention Alternative</b>																								
Hostel or HMO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	1
Private rented sector with Cash incentive	4	6	9	16	8	5	8	10	15	11	5	3	7	3	8	8	5	7	13	4	16	7	10	10
Private rented sector no Cash incentive	5	0	4	0	4	3	1	7	2	11	6	6	5	5	7	4	6	3	5	1	10	5	8	5
Accommodation with friends	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	3	1	1	4	6	2	0	2	2	5	1	1	2	2	4
Supported Accommodation	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	3	6	3	3	4	2	9	1	4	2	6	4
Social Housing Management move	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	2	2	0	0
Housing Part 6 Offer	1	0	0	1	1	2	5	4	4	8	4	4	14	12	6	10	12	14	9	3	12	5	4	15
Housing offer outside Part 6	2	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	0	2	1	4	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	5	1
Home Ownership	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>40</b>