

September 2016

FOREST OF DEAN HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY 2012 - 2017 (Review 2016)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The 2012-2017 Homelessness Prevention Strategy set out what the Council would try to do to tackle homelessness in the Forest of Dean District over a period of five years. This is the third such strategy to be developed in the district since the requirement to publish a homelessness strategy was introduced by the Homelessness Act 2002.
- 1.2. The Strategy was reviewed in March 2013 and again in July 2015 this is the third and final review pending a new review in 2017. The causes of homelessness in the district remain broadly similar to those set out in 2012. There were significant changes to national policy and local circumstances that were reflected in the 2015 review document. *2016 Commentary in italics*
- 1.3. 2016 update This review brings the council's understanding of homelessness in the district up to date, reflects the changes over the past year and sets out some of the challenges now facing the council's homelessness service and its partners.
- 1.4. The strategy consists of three key objectives:

Objective 1: To prevent homelessness by providing appropriate services and initiatives.

Objective 2: To provide appropriate support for people when vulnerable.

Objective 3: To provide more settled homes.

- 1.5. These objectives reflect those of the Department of Communities and Local Government and build on our previously successful strategies and those of high achieving Councils elsewhere.
- 1.6. Since the strategy was adopted there have been a number of changes to national policy and where relevant the review now incorporates these. A more recent analysis of available data has shown where work has been effective within the initial Strategy and where services need to be developed in order to continue to prevent homelessness successfully.
- 1.7. *The Gold Standard Statistical Compiler has been used to compare the circumstances underpinning homelessness in the district and the performance of the Housing Options team in meeting the needs of homeless people*
- 1.8. (.See Appendix 1)
- 1.9. Summary of major changes to text :
 - 2.1/2.2 - H.M. Government paper “Making every Contact Count”
 - 2.3 - The Homelessness service Gold Standard accreditation
 - 2.6.1-2.6.7 – Welfare Changes listed
 - 2.7.4 - Improvements to Rough sleeping provision
 - 3.6 - The use of Private Rented Sector (PRS) to discharge homelessness duties
 - 4.4.7 – Improvements to provision for young homeless people

2. NATIONAL/REGIONAL CONTEXT

- 2.1. In 2012 the Government published the document “Making Every Contact Count”. This sets out the key underlying causes of homelessness and what agencies should be doing to prevent homelessness occurring.
- 2.2. The government’s Homelessness Prevention Strategy also presents local authorities with ten local challenges:
 - a. To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.
 - b. To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs.
 - c. To offer a housing options prevention service to all clients including written advice.
 - d. To adopt a “No second night out” model or an effective local alternative.

- e. To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support.
- f. To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord.
- g. To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme (this scheme ended in 2014).
- h. To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs.
- i. To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- j. To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks.

This council's progress against these challenges is set out at the end of the Action Plan pages ??24/25

- 2.3.** The Government through the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) has set out a national accreditation system and is encouraging Local Authorities to strive to meet this Gold Standard. Those authorities that meet all ten of the challenges can be awarded the Gold Standard through a process of Peer review and assessment together with verification from national housing bodies. FoDDC has joined with the other five Gloucestershire District Councils and South Gloucestershire to commence the process of achieving this level of excellence. 2016 update Since 2015 two councils have decided to withdraw from the Gold Standard . FoDDC remains committed to achieving this. The first of the Peer reviews has been carried out at Stroud and participating authorities are learning from this process. The peer review for FoDDC is timetabled for April 2017,.
- 2.4.** Homelessness is not confined within District boundaries; households will migrate to where they perceive housing is available and/or will leave areas where they feel under threat because of, for example, domestic abuse or harassment. There is anecdotal evidence of individuals moving across boundaries in Gloucestershire as they become homeless but little or no empirical research. This district collaborates on countywide work to assist in homelessness prevention and provision e.g. Housing Advice and assistance for Young People; Supporting People funded outreach services and Gloucestershire Homeseeker.
- 2.5.** Homelessness presentations have risen nationally in recent years and after a decade of falling numbers there was a moderate increase in the Forest of Dean district in 2014/15. 2016 update. 2014/15 52 cases. This has again increased in 2015/16 56 cases and for the first 6 months in 2016/17 49 have presented so far.

and if national trends are followed locally a rise is set to continue into the future. (Joseph Rowntree/CRISIS “ The Homelessness Monitor England 2016”)

2.6. Welfare Reforms

2.6.1. Housing Benefit (HB) and Local Housing Allowance are in place to access and retain housing that would otherwise be unaffordable to those on low income. Most support is paid to those who are retired, on sickness and disability benefits or in low paid work.

2.6.2. There were benefit changes that had happened when the Strategy was written in 2012, a number have been rolled out since that time and some are still to be implemented.

2.6.3. The individual impacts of these changes are too many to detail in this document. In a rural district without many alternatives households with reduced Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and Housing Benefit (HB) cover are likely to struggle to maintain housing in a community where they have had support and access to work. The overall implications of the changes therefore may not be apparent for several years. *It is apparent however that options for those in receipt of benefits in the private rented sector are limited and that the ability to retain accommodation for the longer term is restricted.*

2.6.4. The Council’s benefit providers (Civica) are alerting households to changes when these are foreseen and the Housing Options Team will offer assistance to those where housing costs become unaffordable and will need to move. The risk is that households will fall into difficulties and not seek assistance until a crisis develops.

2.6.5. Under-Occupation Charge

At present we have 367 households affected by the Under-occupation Charge in the district. Of these 51 have had a 25% reduction and 316 have had a 14% reduction in benefit.

At the end of March 2014 373 households were affected. Although there has therefore been a slight reduction of households affected there remain many without an easy solution to this problem. Few have become homeless (6 in 2013/14 , none in 14/15 or 2015/16) due to this cause but those that have have posed a significant challenge to the Housing Options service in being able to assist.

2.6.6. Benefit Cap

We currently have 15 claims capped. This has not varied significantly since the cap was introduced. Again few households have become homeless through this cause but the housing options open to the Council are limited in these circumstances. It is anticipated that a larger number of households will now be affected by the further reduction in the Benefit Cap to £20,000 a year. *2016 update The DWP*

estimate that about 88 households will be affected by this from November of this year.

We have reviewed the way in which we communicate potential evictions due to these causes with our main landlord partner Two Rivers Housing. The aim is good communication between partners and to engage early before circumstances become unsustainable.

2.6.7. Universal Credit

The Forest of Dean District was the first in Gloucestershire for Universal Credit to be rolled out. Council staff have participated in countywide forums and briefing events. To date there have been few recipients and the support systems will only really be tested once families are included within the system and housing payments are paid directly to tenants. The Council has signed an agreement between the Department of Works and Pensions and Civica (the benefits contractor) to provide debt and benefit advice and assistance to use technology.

The Council funds another partner the FoD CAB to provide Housing and Benefits/Debt advice across the district. In 2014 the Council joined the CAB and other partners in setting up an advice network project funded for two years by lottery funding. Two of the Housing Options staff undertook “Advice Assistant” training under this scheme and the ability to give “first time advice” and accurate signposting has been greatly enhanced.

2.6.8. The Government originally increased the amount of funding available for Discretionary Housing Payments to allow individuals to remain in properties where LHA and HB has been reduced until households can locate cheaper accommodation. In 2014/15 this was £112,585 but this has now been reduced to £87,579 in 2015/16. With 239 cases in payment there is a concern that this amount will not be enough to cover future payments.

2.6.9. FoDDC does not have a Financial Inclusion strategy but staff regularly attend the countywide Welfare Reform Forum where the latest Welfare changes and best practise is disseminated. The Housing Options team work closely with welfare advisors from the main Registered Provider Two Rivers Housing, G3ii the provider of supported housing for Young People. *2016 update Greensquare community housing support now run drop –ins providing debt and welfare support throughout the district .Civica no longer provide Welfare Advisor service but FoDDC funding has been maintained for the CAB money advisors to ensure that customers are advised correctly.*

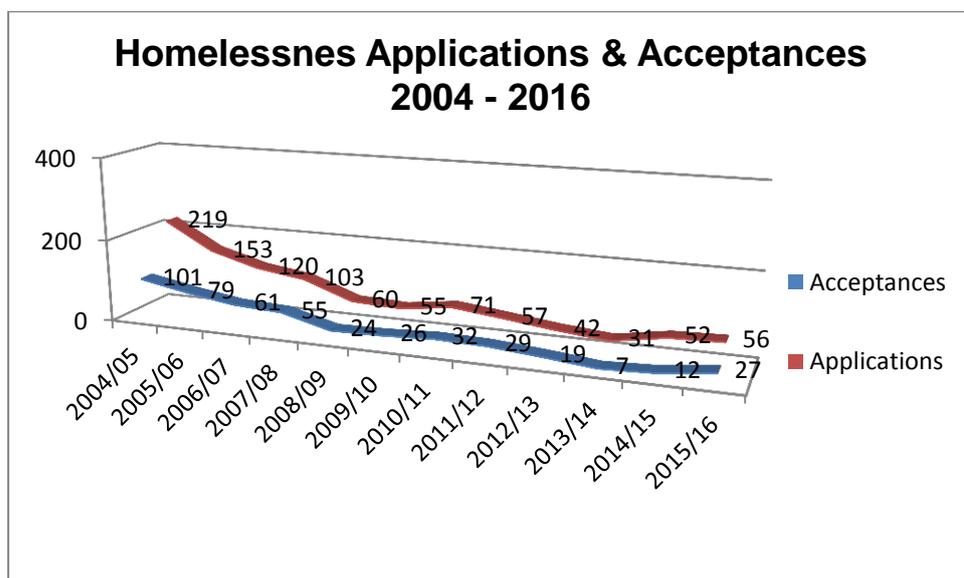
2.7. Rough Sleeping

2.7.1. “Official” homelessness figures often omit people who have no settled home and “sofa-surf”, maybe occasionally rough sleeping.

- 2.7.2.** Such households often do not approach local authorities for help. Surveys of agencies in the district encountering rough sleepers have consistently returned a low figure of individuals at any one time sleeping rough. At the time of the Strategy publication this was two, for the last two years none have been recorded at the time of the autumn estimate. *2016 update In 2015 two rough sleepers were recorded at the time of the estimate. In October 2016 the FoDDC estimate arrived at with the assistance of partners was nil.*
- 2.7.3.** Similar rates of rough sleeping are reported in the other rural parts of Gloucestershire. There is a higher incidence of rough sleeping in Gloucester and Cheltenham and this may be contributed to by individuals resorting to these urban areas from the rural areas because of greater opportunities for housing and support services.
- 2.7.4.** As rough sleeping is seen as a countywide phenomenon the Council has actively participated in the procurement exercise using DCLG money to contract St. Mungo's Broadway to work with Rough Sleepers in the county. This is an 18 month contract working on the No Second Night Out principles that have been effective elsewhere in the country. *2016 update This year a partnership of the District councils Gloucestershire County Council , the CCG and the PCC have contributed to a pot to ensure that the service continues for two years beyond January 2017. P3 , a housing support organisation already working in the county have now (Jan. 2017) taken over this contract.*
- 2.7.5.** Since the publication of the Homelessness Strategy P3 have been contracted by Supporting People to provide accommodation in Gloucester and Cheltenham with support for people with chaotic lifestyles.
- 2.7.6.** The management of allocations to supported housing for single people has improved access to schemes significantly for people from this district. Staff submit cases regularly to the Gloucester 18+ START meetings and attend to advocate on behalf of individuals when this is appropriate. Individuals who otherwise in the past may have resorted to rough sleeping have been helped in this way.

3. LOCAL CONTEXT

3.1. Graph 1



- 3.2.** Since 2003 the Council has moved from a culture of “processing” which resulted in advisers carrying out a homelessness investigation for virtually everyone approaching the team to one of “prevention” which focuses on the provision of comprehensive housing options information and homelessness prevention work.
- 3.3.** *2016 update In September 2016 the council together with partner District Councils will be using a new software system for managing housing nominations, Locata. This package includes a Homelessness Prevention Assessment module. This will assist in further embedding the Prevention agenda. There has been a great deal of interest in England surrounding the new Welsh Homelessness model particularly as this is likely to become a legal requirement in the not too distant future. The Housing Options team will start to adopt this approach when the new software is in place. This will mean that in time all homelessness cases , whether deemed to be in priority need or not will be entitled to support from within 56 days before being made homeless. This will require a review of processes already in place to ensure that this promise can be fulfilled.*
- 3.4. Temporary Accommodation Targets**
- 3.4.1.** As part of the drive to prevent homelessness the Government set a number of targets for local authorities to phase out the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) as temporary accommodation.
- 3.4.2.** Graph 1 demonstrates that the Housing Options Team has been very successful in meeting these targets, keeping the use of B&B accommodation to the minimum and reducing the use of temporary housing.

- 3.4.3.** There is a constant challenge in this district to locate adequate B&B properties when needed as families and individuals become homeless. Few B&B's will accept referrals and particularly in holiday periods vacancies can be few. When no other options are available individuals will be located out of the district.
- 3.4.4.** Cost of B&Bs can be between £175 and £280 per family per week. In 2014/15 it cost the Council £28,676.65 in B&B payments before costs were recouped. The Council can claim most of this expenditure back through Government HB subsidy rules if an applicant is entitled but there is a net cost to the council which staff endeavour to minimise through good management. Over the last five financial years this net cost has been on average £2,180.
- 3.4.5.** *2016 update Unfortunately B&B hotels still need to be used and it is becoming more and more difficult to secure suitable properties. Pressures on other Gloucestershire districts , particularly Gloucester City mean that rooms are often not available and staff have to use more expensive accommodation for longer periods of time. In 2015/16 £28,482.12 was spent on B&Bs gross ,,£3,711.32- net cost to the council once Housing Benefit had been deducted.*

3.5. Gloucestershire Homeseeker

- 3.5.1.** Since September 2009 all properties available to the Council for letting have been allocated through the Gloucestershire Homeseeker (Choice based lettings) system. This has enabled households to bid for properties in which they are interested rather than await an offer. There is some evidence that households have managed to resolve their housing problems by bidding rather than allowing a homelessness crisis to develop. *2016 Update : the Homeseeker partnership has carried out a retendering exercise in 2016 becoming Homeseeker Plus with the addition of West Oxfordshire District council. This has enabled FoDDC to acquire Homelessness Prevention management software for the first time which should improve the way that potential homelessness is identified and prevention measures applied.*

3.6. Use of Temporary Accommodation

- 3.6.1.** Apart from B&B as an emergency option a small number of Two Rivers properties are used as temporary housing at any one time. Within the agreement with Two Rivers these are selected from properties becoming void as required and over time the use of these is moved throughout the stock so that no one area becomes synonymous with a transient population.

3.6.2. The Council has managed homelessness well within the flexible arrangements possible with Two Rivers Housing and local B&B owners. Hotels are visited and standards are assessed before placements. There is a risk however that if presentations start to increase individuals will need to be placed farther afield and more properties will need to be used as temporary housing. *2016 Update With the increase in homelessness acceptances in the county it has become increasingly difficult to source temporary accommodation in hotels. National hotel chains and more expensive local providers are being used. This is not only more expensive but can be more inconvenient for families being placed.*

3.7. Use of Private Rented Sector

3.7.1. The use of the private rented housing sector to discharge homelessness duties has been limited in the past due to the low number of landlords available and the fact that this option has not been popular with applicants because of insecurity and high rents.

3.7.2. Deposit bonds were used extensively to secure housing for those who were able to find their own accommodation. This is a potentially expensive option for the Council and relies on staff input to monitor premises regularly. The Council will now pay rent deposits where there is a duty to house and the deposit will secure a property for someone who would otherwise be placed in temporary housing.

3.7.3. The Council has been able to use Discretionary Housing Payments and the Welfare Reform Offer in certain limited cases to allow households to gain access to accommodation but unlike other districts where resources are greater we have not been able to help those who are not in priority need or who have not yet become homeless. We will be revisiting this to see whether an improved offer can be made and homelessness prevented in these circumstances.

3.7.4. The Localism Act will allow local authorities to discharge their homelessness duties in the private rented sector. Experience has shown that households offered tenancies in the private rented sector especially those who have experienced extended periods in this sector already will still seek to gain a social rented tenancy at the earliest opportunity. This option may be of limited use in some circumstances in this district. In December 2014 Cabinet agreed a policy to use private rented properties to discharge homelessness duties where this is reasonable and possible.

3.7.5. . .

3.7.6. The Council has run Private Sector Lease schemes on a limited scale with Housing Associations in the past. On a countywide basis Chapter One have been invited in to provide private rented properties and currently have 30 (some shared)

properties in the district. *2016 update Chpt. One has now merged with Mears /Plexus . It has been agreed and that M/P will be able to take on new properties in the district.*

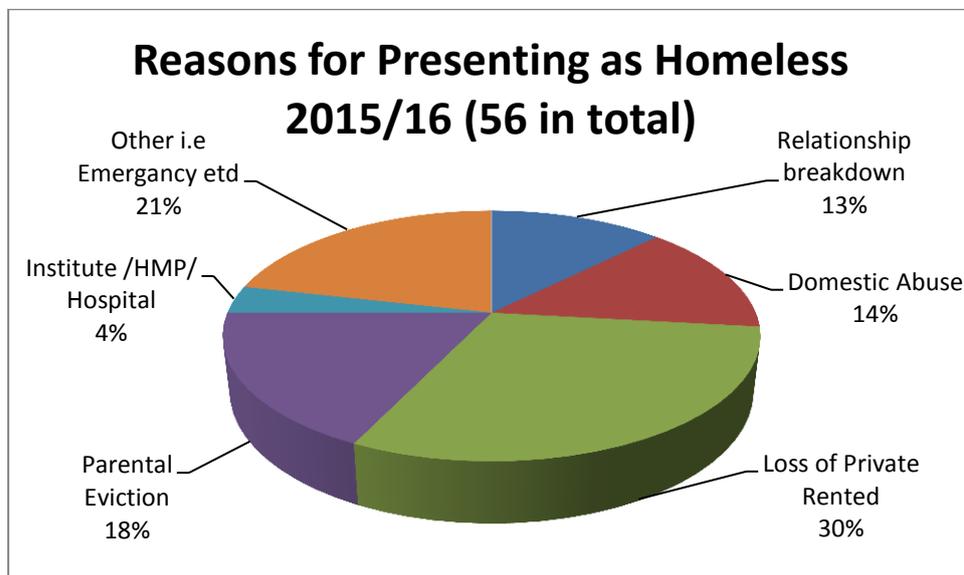
- 3.7.7.** The Council and partners are unable to meet more than a limited number of household needs through re-lets, privately rented properties and new builds. To manage homelessness, that is to provide for those where the Council has a homelessness duty, high priority waiting list cases and those where prevention is possible there has to be an adequate supply of good quality affordable housing.

4. CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

4.1. Causes

- 4.1.1.** The chief causes of Homelessness in the Forest of Dean are:
- Loss of private rented accommodation,
 - Domestic abuse
 - Relationship breakdown

4.1.2. Graph 2

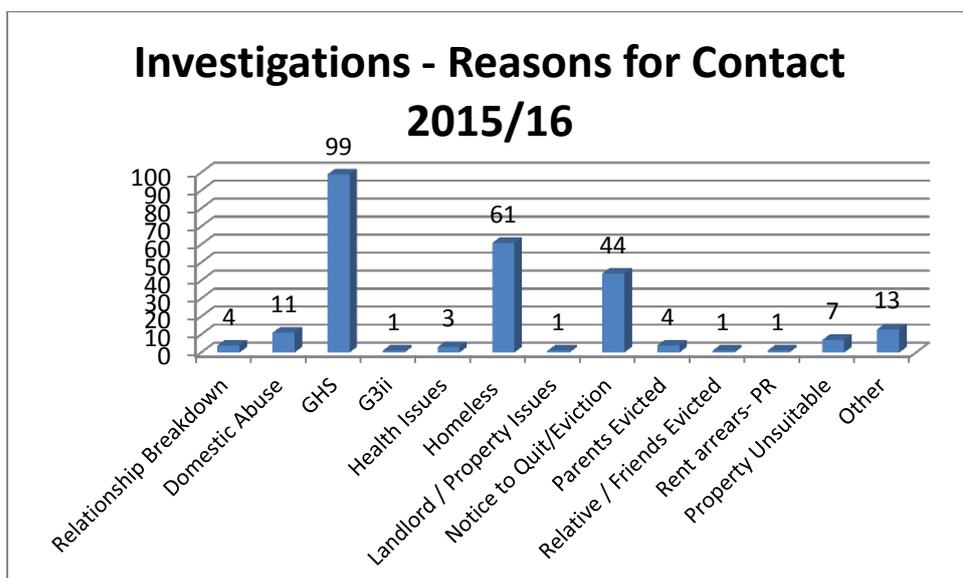


4.1.3. Landlords prepared to let to tenants at the lower end of the market and those on Local Housing Allowance are few in number. This market is subject to the vagaries of the housing market as a whole. Tenants are subject to decisions of others.

4.1.4. The Council actively promotes the countywide Fit to Rent landlord accreditation scheme. It is hoped that prospective tenants will seek out properties in the scheme thereby driving up the quality of provision.

4.1.5. The chart below shows the reasons 250 households approaching the Council as potentially homeless have given in the last financial year. These reasons may differ or be recorded slightly differently to those finally accepted at the homelessness decision stage.

4.1.6. Graph 3



4.2. Mortgage Repossessions

- 4.2.1.** Long term unaffordability in the housing market in the Forest of Dean has been compounded more recently by the need to raise significant deposits, the scarcity of homes for first time buyers and mortgage availability.
- 4.2.2.** When the Strategy was originally written mortgage arrears made up 9% of homelessness presentations. In the last financial year 2015/16 and so far this year there were no presentations. We have not seen large numbers of repossessions in recent years due in part to the nature of the local housing market which has a lack of properties suitable for first time buyers. Continuing low interest rates and other mechanisms put in place nationally have helped to support people to retain their homes.
- 4.2.3.** If the housing market is operating in the Forest of Dean in a similar way to elsewhere it is likely that those who would in previous years have resolved their housing requirements by buying are either renting privately or registering on Gloucestershire Homeseeker. This may mean that other households are being priced out of the private rented sector.
- 4.2.4.** Staff have been able to assist households in the past to remain in their homes through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme. This programme came to an end in 2014.
- 4.2.5.** It is apparent from national data and more locally from the CAB that there are many households with substantial loans outstanding who are just solvent because of low interest rates.

- 4.2.6. There has to be concern about a rise in mortgage interest rates in the medium term.
- 4.2.7. Early intervention and assistance is essential with these cases. There is little the Council can do once arrears have become too high for the household to manage. The Council's ability to manage homelessness is at risk if numbers of cases increase significantly.

4.3. **Domestic Abuse**

An area where we have seen a significant fall in presentations from the past has been domestic abuse. Domestic Abuse still remains the second leading reason for homelessness applications but this needs to be seen in the context of overall presentations and final acceptances ie 6 out of 52. This year 2015/16 numbers have increased 8 out of 56 .The way that the service manages cases of homelessness through domestic abuse has been transformed since 2003. In that year (02/03) 21 households were accepted as homeless, by 2010/11 this number had fallen to 2 and remained at 2 in 2014/15.This has happened because of improved joint working with partners. The amount of domestic abuse in the Forest of Dean does remain unacceptably high but the way this is managed by partners does mean that fewer victims actually become homeless.

- 4.3.1. The District Council is a signatory to the Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Strategy and there is an active local Domestic Abuse and Sexual violence Forum.
- 4.3.2. The Sanctuary scheme whereby victims can continue living safely in their own homes with security measures installed has shown some promising results. The Police Crime Commissioner has invested money into this scheme to be match funded by District Councils. Most work is of a limited target hardening nature which keeps a victim safe and increases confidence.
- 4.3.3. With the awarding of the new Domestic abuse support contract to Greensquare (GDASS) the local Women's Refuge closed. There was concern that this would mean that those fleeing violence would have nowhere to go locally. GDASS are receiving significantly more referrals from across the county than previously and individual households are being found Places of Safety where appropriate.
- 4.3.4. In December 2014 FoDDC led a consortium of councils in bidding for DCLG money to improve refuge provision. It has been agreed for local Registered Providers to set aside some properties that can be used as dispersed refuges with support to allow households to remain safely in the community.
- 4.3.5. Staff are working closely with the Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) Supporting People team to ensure that the new contracts for Domestic abuse support based in Gloucester and the Forest of Dean reflect the specific needs of this district and maintain the quality of services currently provided.

4.3.6. *2016 Update : In 2016 the FoDD Community Safety Partnership sponsored a local Domestic Homicide Review following the death of a local resident . From the recommendations of this and other Gloucestershire DHRs it has been agreed to adopt the Glos. D.A Housing protocol and explore ways in which the council can improve work with local Registered Providers to improve the service given to survivors of D.A. seeking to move.*

4.4. Parental Eviction and Young People

4.4.1. Parental eviction had seen a significant reduction in importance as a homelessness factor in 2012 but this cause had risen again by 2015. *This rise as a percentage of overall homelessness has continued in 2016/17 from 8% (4 cases) 2014/15 to 17% (10 cases in 2015/16)*

4.4.2. The fact that Young People become homeless in the district has always caused concern not because they have applied for services in large numbers but because they are especially vulnerable and provision in rural areas is limited.

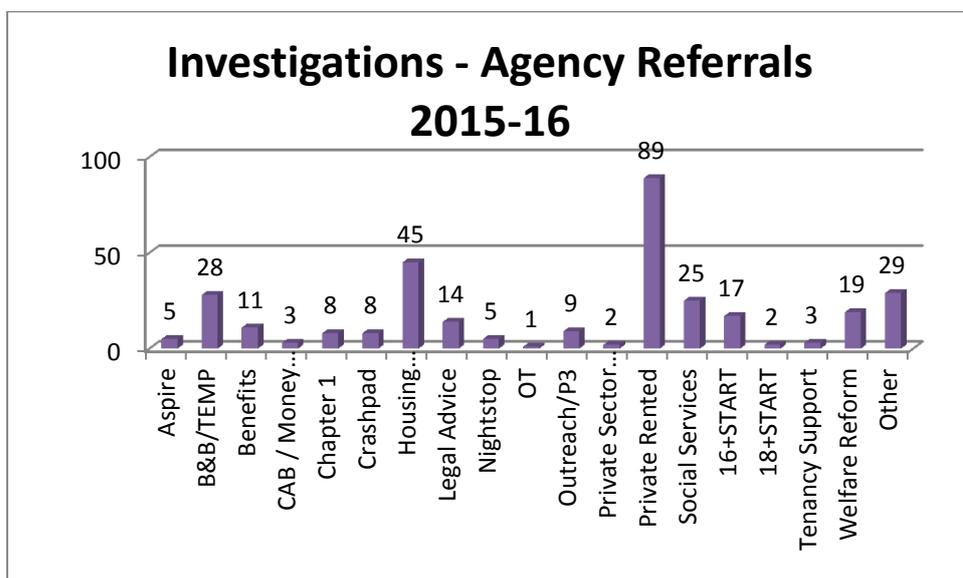
4.4.3. Schemes such as Shelter's Peer Education Project and the Infobuzz project working in local schools may have had a long term impact on young people but it is difficult to assess this locally. The funding for these schemes has been withdrawn and is unlikely to be replaced.

4.4.4. The Gloucestershire Youth Homelessness Strategy and the 16/17 year old protocol have given a lot more prominence to housing prevention for Young People through better support and mediation. The results of this are being seen but there remains a core group of young people who will run out of options.

Records of preventions show that a large number of families do resolve a potential homelessness crisis by using Homeseekerplus and staff will continue to encourage and support families to use this.

4.4.5. Since 2012 we have set up a "Crashpad" for young people with partners G3ii at the Lydney Gateway. This has worked well for a limited number of young people and recently a countywide policy has been drawn up to cover all the Crashpads in Gloucestershire. This should then avoid the need to use Bed and Breakfast placements in emergencies for Young People. *2016 Update : Unfortunately following a review of the Supporting People funding for supported housing services the Young Person's crashpad was removed in 2016 . Whilst some Young People can still be referred to Nightstop this is not suitable for all and emergency access remains a challenge. Bed and Breakfast accommodation does have to be used in some instances, as mentioned previously this is difficult to secure much of the time and is not suitable for young people.*

- 4.4.6.** Nightstop is a countywide service that provides young people with temporary accommodation in the homes of trained, vetted and approved householders or hosts. Where this works well this “time out” can be used to re-establish relationships and set out an alternative planned move into independence. The Council will work with Nightstop and county colleagues to maintain and enhance the service.
- 4.4.7.** With county partners we have recently reviewed the Gloucestershire Southwark protocol and the way this operated. There have been fewer homeless approaches to the Council by young people because of better joint working. As a result we have been able to avoid the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year olds. There remains the issue of the lack of adequate housing for young single people in the district. This may well be compounded by the intention by the Government to further restrict the ability to claim benefits for those under 25.
- 4.4.8.** In 2014 the ASPIRE project was set up in Gloucestershire. This aims to work with young homeless people who are not in Education, Employment or training (NEETs). *From the Statistical Compiler there are estimated to be 710 NEETS in Gloucestershire .There are no separate figures for the FoDD but it is apparent that a number of Young People remain disengaged here from employment and/or education and therefore have difficulty accessing housing. This is likely to prove more difficult as Benefit changes continue. Schemes such as ASPIRE are therefore to be welcomed.* To date there has been some success in engaging a number of young people who would otherwise be hard to reach.
- 4.4.9.** The Supporting People contract for supported housing for Young People has been reviewed and a new contract brought in locally for G3ii at Lydney and Cinderford. This does emphasise intensive work with homeless young people needing support and partnership working to ensure successful outcomes. A partnership team (16+ START) has been set up to oversee the allocation and move-on processes for the schemes.
- 4.4.10.** Graph 4



5. THE FOREST OF DEAN HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE

5.1. Housing Options Service

- 5.1.1.** The Council's Housing Options service cannot work in isolation. Graph 4 shows the main agencies where customers were referred to by the service. By far the highest referrals were to private rented landlords this graph also demonstrates the increasing use of outreach support services to prevent homelessness.
- 5.1.2.** In 2003 the housing stock owned by the Council was passed over to Forest of Dean Housing (now Two Rivers Housing). The remaining housing staff were brought together into one team. A Housing Advice Team was set up and operated from Lawnstone House, Coleford from 2003 to 2009. In 2009 the service was brought back into the main Council building and the team was reconfigured into a Housing Options service.
- 5.1.3.** This team is responsible for ensuring that the Council fulfils its statutory duties to those who are homeless or likely to become so. It takes a proactive approach to working with customers and provides comprehensive advice about housing options in order to prevent homelessness from occurring.
- 5.1.4.** In 2009 the Council introduced Gloucestershire Homeseeker, a Choice Based Allocations scheme that puts an individual household in control of their housing application. It was acknowledged from the commencement of this exercise that

the system needed to strike a balance between widening choice and ensuring that the needs of those most in need of housing e.g. the homeless were recognised.

- 5.1.5.** *In September 2016 a new software provider, Locata was procured and this package includes a Homelessness Prevention Assessment module which will assist in monitoring cases through the various stages of Housing options, Prevention and Homelessness application. The use of the system is being monitored carefully and the service remains available to assist those who may have difficulty in accessing it.*

5.2. Resources

- 5.2.1.** The team consists of one Senior Housing Advisor; two Housing Investigators and two Full Time Equivalent Housing Interviewers.
- 5.2.2.** A temporary Administrative post has also been created to free up some of the team time to concentrate on casework.
- 5.2.3.** Homelessness Prevention Funding – an amount of £50,000 has been granted to the Council by Government for each of the last five years. Of this £30,000 each year had been made available to the team to date. This has been used for the administrative post and the remainder has been used for homelessness prevention.
- 5.2.4.** An amount of £5,000 per annum has been set aside for use for deposit *bonds and other prevention measures*. *This is being increased to £10,000 from 2017/2018.*
- 5.2.5.** Nightstop funding - £4,000 per annum.
- 5.2.6.** Supporting People – for breakdown of funding see GCC Supporting People Strategy.
- 5.2.7.** An amount of £340,000 of Government funding is held by Cotswold District Council on behalf of the County District Councils and South Gloucestershire to assist in preventing rough sleeping.
- 5.2.8.** *As part of the Council's 20:20 programme the housing options service will be reviewed alongside the other housing services and Revenues and Benefits looking to a joint service with partners at Cotswold and West Oxfordshire. Following the retirement of the Senior Housing Advisor in September and to optimise the use of the new software and recognise the likely move to a 20:20 structure in 2017 the team has been reconfigured temporarily. This should give a greater emphasis to homelessness prevention whilst making it as easy as possible for those needing housing to find their own resolution. Whilst benefitting from the potential savings that this may bring it is important for the good aspects of the service that work to be retained and that it remain a locally accessible service.*

6.

Objective 1: To prevent homelessness by providing appropriate services and initiatives.

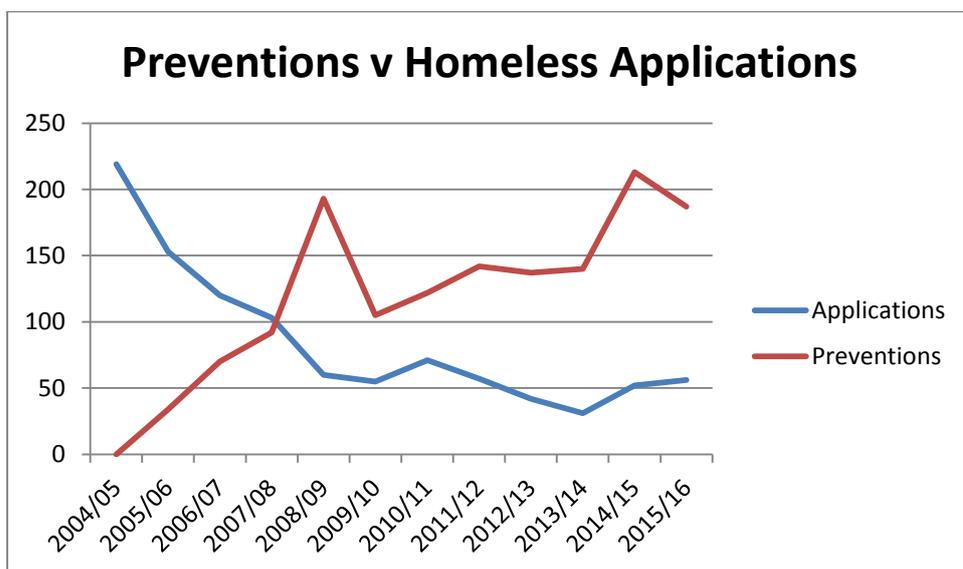
6.1. Forest of Dean District Council embraced the change in approach to homelessness set out by Government in 2002. The emphasis of the Council's housing service has been on the prevention of homelessness by the provision of comprehensive housing options information, together with a range of tools to help people at risk of homelessness to find and keep a home.

6.2. These include:

- The development by Supporting People of a range of outreach and accommodation support services aimed at prevention of homelessness.
- The introduction of rent bond guarantee scheme to help people find homes in the private rented sector.
- A Sanctuary Scheme for victims of domestic abuse.
- The delivery of a Peer mentoring scheme run by Shelter for Young People in schools.
- The joint protocol with Children and Young People Directorate on young people following the Southwark ruling.
- Work with the Private Sector Housing and Housing Benefit teams with landlords to maintain tenancies.
- Use of a flexible Homelessness Prevention fund.
- Work with CAB and Housing Associations to use the Mortgage Rescue Scheme to prevent repossessions.
- Housing Associations reviewing procedures to reduce risk of tenancy failure and subsequent homelessness.
- The use of Gloucestershire Homeseeker service to assist households facing homelessness choose their own homes.

6.3. Successful homelessness preventions have been recorded since 2005. Graph 5 demonstrates the success of this approach when compared to applications over time. *In 2015/16 there has been a falling away of recorded preventions and applications have increased. Whilst there is a time lag between a reduction in preventions and an increase in applications it is undoubtedly the case that a successful prevention agenda resourced adequately will result in a drop in applications.*

6.4. Graph 5



- 6.5.** Graph 6 shows the significant increase in options interviews over an extended period. *Whilst still continuing at an historical high level there was a reduction in actual options interviews in 2014/15 and 15/16 due to a combination of factors* This initial groundwork may lead to preventions that can be directly attributable to Council intervention. This leads to households making informed decisions and resolving their own housing problems in due course. *The Housing options team are reviewing the way in which Housing Options are delivered with the aim of maintaining high levels of early intervention.*
- 6.6.** *It is now the intention of the Housing Options team building on past success to explore the principles of the recent Welsh Homelessness legislation in preparation for the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Bill in England.*
- 6.7.** Graph 6



- 6.8.** The incidence of repeat homelessness is negligible in this district, one or two a year which again indicates that options taken up are sustainable over the medium to longer term.
- 6.9.** It is important not to be complacent about the reduction in the number of households accepted as statutorily homeless. Over one thousand households continue to approach the Housing Options team for help with housing problems each year. Households are facing continued financial pressure because of national economic factors and limited affordable housing provision in the district.
- 6.10.** Evictions from Housing Associations have made up a small proportion of households claiming homelessness. The team has been able, in a number of cases to prevent homelessness with Housing Association colleagues. Housing Associations are facing greater business pressures and there are indications elsewhere that some Housing Associations are placing greater barriers in the way of individuals seeking to be housed. FoDDC are working with local Housing Association colleagues to ensure that those most vulnerable will continue to be assisted.

7.

Objective 2: To provide appropriate support for people when they are vulnerable.

- 7.1. For some people the causes of homelessness are clear-cut. For others these can be more complex and reflect the fact that tackling homelessness is not just a problem of finding people somewhere to live. Factors such as substance abuse, a history of offending, a chaotic lifestyle, and having experienced domestic abuse, as well as never having lived independently before can also compound the difficulties homeless households experience in trying to find and sustain a settled home.
- 7.2. It is unrealistic to expect that once the immediate need to find somewhere to live has been addressed all homeless people will be able to maintain an independent tenancy. The availability of different accommodation pathways is vital, as is a range of housing support packages.
- 7.3. Funding for support to secure and maintain accommodation is almost wholly provided in this district through the Supporting People regime. The reconfiguration of the Supporting People scheme in Gloucestershire has had consequences for homelessness support in the Forest of Dean. We work closely with Greensquare community support team to enable people to remain in their own home or if homeless move on to settled housing in time.
- 7.4. The need for support in the district has been documented within the needs analysis work undertaken by the SP team in 2010. The results of this and the actions following the SP strategy mean that there will be some contraction in service provision. The challenge has been to ensure that floating support is focused and responsive to needs locally.
- 7.5. The Housing Options Team have played an active role in the FoD Families First (Troubled Families) partnership. It has proved difficult to identify families that are known to the Council with the necessary eligibility i.e. in receipt of benefits; school absence and antisocial behaviour but with the extension of the programme and the emphasis on “Early Help” it is hoped that more families can be supported through this process if for example they are threatened with homelessness or facing Domestic Abuse.

8.

Objective 3: To provide more settled homes.

- 8.1. The Council has been successful in gaining high proportions of affordable housing on new development sites through the planning Section 106 process and other mechanisms. In 2010-11 and 2011-12 over 100 properties were delivered each year, the largest number for at least a decade. Performance at this level has continued each year during the lifetime of the strategy. In 2014/15 142 affordable

properties were delivered by the council's partnership. Our monitoring of homelessness prevention work has demonstrated that families who in previous years would have become homeless and spent significant time in homelessness accommodation have been permanently housed in this way

- 8.2. There are significant amounts of affordable housing in the planning process awaiting start on site. Some of this is fully funded through the HCA but other sites are more problematical and it is not clear what provision will come on stream in future years. Council officers therefore need to continue to identify new sites with partners and apply mechanisms for optimising the amount of affordable housing into the future. To assist in achieving this the Core Strategy reduced thresholds from 15 to 10 properties in towns over which affordable housing will be sought. Counter to this however the Government has now proposed reducing the requirement to provide affordable housing on sites less than 10 properties. It is not known how this will impact on delivery overall but there have to be concerns over the availability of new properties in rural areas.
- 8.3. *In 2015/16 the council and its partners again managed to secure over 100 new affordable properties (114) built in the district. With the completion of the Homes and Community Agency (HCA) funding programme for affordable rented properties it is predicted that only around 40 new properties will be completed in this financial year. This does mean that there will be fewer options available for households who are in danger of becoming homeless.*
- 8.4. *The Housing and Planning Act with its emphasis on delivering "owner occupation" rather than rented housing further diminishes the ability of the Local Authority to secure the type and tenure of housing that is needed locally for those on the housing waiting list.*
- 8.5. *Whilst other aspects of the Housing and Planning Act do not as yet directly affect the housing stock in the district eg. "Pay to Stay" and the sale of higher value council properties when they become void there may well be a regional knock-on effect as social housing becomes scarcer elsewhere.*
- 8.6. *The impact of the rolling out of the Right To Buy (RTB) to housing association properties will not be known for some time but if it develops in the same way as the original RTB there is likely to be a reduction overall of affordable properties to let. There has to be a concern that the promise to replace one property sold by a new "affordable" property will not be achievable in a district where developable land is in short supply and that replacements by Housing associations will be outside the area and/or at a price and tenure that cannot be afforded by those seeking housing on the council's waiting list.*

ACTION PLAN PROGRESS

Overall Progress

2002/03 Homelessness Applications : 462; Homelessness Acceptances : 42

2012/13 Homelessness Applications : 42; Homelessness Acceptances : 19

2014/15 Homelessness Applications : 52 Homelessness Acceptances : 12

| Action | How | Ownership and Partners | July 2015 | July 2016 |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| 1. Provide more self-help information about housing options available in the FoD district. | Review use of website and links and leaflets. | Strategic Housing Manager(SHM)/ Housing Options team/ICT | Housing Website improved. Housing Options Drop-in set up 2014. Homelessness leaflet produced May 2015. | New FoDDC website autumn 2016 Improved Homeseeker Plus layout Sept. 2016 |
| 2. Work with Gloucestershire Young People's partnership to develop initiatives to help prevent young people becoming homeless. | Mediation training and access to county schemes. Peer education programme. | SHM/GCC Care Services | Project completed 2014. To explore future opportunities with County Colleagues. | No new project planned Mediation training for Housing Options staff planned |
| 3. Work with the FoDD Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Forum to | Work with SP to retain support services Improve work of | SHM/Housing Options Team/MARAC | Sanctuary scheme now on firmer financial footing. Places of Safety scheme in | Sanctuary scheme and Places of Safety remain active. |

| Action | How | Ownership and Partners | July 2015 | July 2016 |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| support victims remain safely in their own homes to avoid homelessness. | Sanctuary scheme Establish long term funding. | (Domestic Abuse) partnership | place across county. | Need to ensure funding in place 2017/18 from PCC |
| 4. Work with Gloucestershire probation within the ex-offenders housing strategy to ensure that those leaving prison have somewhere to live. | Work with colleagues Ex-Offenders strategy – see no's 12 and 17. | SHM/Housing Options Team/Probation Trust/Chapter 1 | Discussion with Probation colleagues re-protocol on-going. Chapter One have 30 Properties in FoD. | Chapter One now merged with Mears/Plexus –commitment to take on additional properties. |
| 5. Improve our ability to help people with debt and money problems. | See no. 2 & 14. | SHM/CAB | Cab contract in place. Civica Welfare Benefits advisors and Universal Credit contract in place. | CAB funding agreed 2016 Civica no longer providing Advisors Greensquare now arranging drop-ins |
| 6. Work with CYPD to embed Southwark protocol. | Establish a FoD Young Person's Allocation Meeting (YAM as per | SHM/Housing Options Team/Social | Southwark Protocol reviewed. Monitoring ongoing. | Start 16+ meeting regularly Southwark protocol to be |

| Action | How | Ownership and Partners | July 2015 | July 2016 |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| | Stroud). Set in place procedure for assessing Children in Need turning 18. | Care | | reviewed --GCC |
| 7. Develop accommodation pathways for YP and make sure appropriate support is available. | See no. 6. | SHM/Housing Options Team/Social Care/3G (supported housing for young people) Supporting People | Work with S.P. and G3ii. New contract in place for 16+START. | New contract in place for supported housing for Young People . Crashpad removed. Aspire working locally with chaotic Young People |
| 8. Work with other D.Cs to develop the countywide Places for Change project. | Bid Timetable. Ensure countywide involvement. | Gloucester City lead/Supporting People | New contract with St. Mungos for Rough Sleeping in place April 2015. | Funding in place for further two years Jan. 2017. Retender exercise Sept. 2016 |
| 9. Work within the FoDDC DV/SA forum to maintain and improve services for those affected by DV. | To improve and continue funding Sanctuary scheme. | SHM/Housing Options Team/DV/SA partnership/ | As per 3 | Take forward recommendations from local Domestic homicide Review including adoption of |

| Action | How | Ownership and Partners | July 2015 | July 2016 |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| | | Supporting People | | county D.A. housing protocol . |
| 10. Continuously review use of Glos. Homeseeker to ensure vulnerable people gaining access and are able to bid. | Review timetable Eq. Impact work. | Gloucestershire Homeseeker Partnership | Glos Homeseeker Software retender (2016). Opportunity to improve access to system for vulnerable people. Consultation with users and support groups as part of process. | New software procured Sept. 2016 including H.P.A. module Groups of service users consulted during procurement process. |
| 11. Work with S.P. to adapt and improve floating support services to ensure responsive to needs of homeless people. | SP Strategy timetable. | SHM/Strategy and Enabling Officer/SP | Greensquare now providing community outreach support. P3 providing supported housing. St. Mungos providing support for Rough Sleepers. | Greensquare now providing comprehensive drop-in coverage across district |
| 12. Continue to play full part in MAPPA and MARAC processes to ensure suitable housing assists in public protection. | Staff trained and capacity to attend mtgs. Child and vulnerable adult safeguarding understood and implemented. | SHM/Housing Options Team | FoDDC staff participating regularly in process to support victims of domestic violence and public protection process. | MARAC process under review . FoDDC participating through county representative. |

| Action | How | Ownership and Partners | July 2015 | July 2016 |
|--|--|------------------------|--|---|
| 13. Housing Options developed. | Use of private rented sector through deposits and PSL schemes. | SHM/Landlords | Policy to use private rented sector introduced Dec. 2014. Deposit policy to be revisited (Sept. 2015). | Limited use of private rented sector to prevent and relieve homelessness . Ongoing review of use and availability of deposits through homelessness prevention ;DHP and Welfare reform fund. |
| 14. Money Advice. | Ensure CAB capacity to provide service, write into CAB specification. | SHM/CAB | CAB contract in place. Civica and TRH welfare Benefits advisors available. | New SLA with CAB in place – funding secured . Civica no longer providing Benefits advice . Greensquare providing drop-ins. Two rivers providing Benefits advice for tenants. |
| 15. Supporting People – ensure adequate services for district. | Work with partners on implementation of SP Strategy including specs. for new services meeting needs of FoDD residents. | SHM/SEO/SP | New outreach and Domestic Abuse contracts now in place. | Services for Young People reviewed Home Improvement Agency being reviewed Drug and Alcohol contract to be retendered. |
| 16. Work with Chapter One | See no. 4. | SHM/Chapter | See 4 | Chpt. One now merged with |

| Action | How | Ownership and Partners | July 2015 | July 2016 |
|--|--|-------------------------------|--|--|
| to maximise numbers of properties becoming available through PSL scheme. | | One | | Mears/Plexus . Commitment to procure additional properties . |
| 17. Continue to seek willing Housing Assns. to work in the FoDD to extend PSL options. | Government Empty Homes Strategy – support funding bids by RPs. Possible PS Lettings Agency. | | No progress | No progress therefore work with Mears/Plexus |
| 18. Work to maximise supply of new accommodation through Section 106 planning agreements and other mechanisms. | Explore use of planning changes and funding e.g. New Home Bonus. | SHM/SEO | Delivery of --- properties since Strategy published. | Slow down in RP development programme and hurdles in way of securing properties through sect. 106s mean reduced supply |

| Progress against Government 10 Local Challenges | | Review July 2016 |
|--|---|--|
| To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services. | Reviewing Strategy and adoption by Cabinet demonstrates this. | Strategy Review Agreed by Cabinet 2015 |
| To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs. | The Council works actively with Supporting People (SP) and other partners to help address some of the underlying causes of homelessness e.g. G3ii; Greensquare; P3; Aspire. Need to draw up comprehensive list and address gaps in provision. | Preparation of new review 2017 At partnership meeting October 2016 |
| To offer a housing options prevention service to all clients including written advice. | As part of Gold Standard process service is being reviewed to ensure that all clients covered in this way. | Adoption of best practise under Gold Standard underway with commitment to explore Welsh homelessness legislation |
| To adopt a “No second night out” model or an effective local alternative. | St. Mungos/Broadway engaged to provide this type of service across county from April 2015. | Funding in place for 2 years Jan. 2017. Retendering exercise |
| To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support. | Pathways process now in place (April 2015) for Young People G3ii and for Adults with need for support – P3 and Greensquare. Need to examine effectiveness of this with SP partners and gap | Services still in place but limited take-up |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | analysis. | |
| To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord. | Policy agreed Dec 2015. Further work required to identify Landlords willing to work with the Council. | Limited resources available to take this forward |
| To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme (this scheme ended in 2014). | MRS no longer available. Housing Options team working with those facing repossession but limited options available. | |
| To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs. | Homelessness Strategy in place – to be reviewed annually from 2015. | Reviewed July 2016 |
| To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. | Alternatives to B&B in place – Southwark protocol working; Crashpad and Nightstop mean B&B avoided by Council for 16/17 year olds. | No 16/17year olds placed in B&B by FoDDC 2015/16 |
| To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks. | This remains an ongoing challenge but the Council has a good record on meeting this target. | No placements beyond 6 weeks |