



Ideas for local authority action

Making Every Contact Count: the government's homelessness prevention strategy

1. Who is this for and why?

We've written this note for local authorities but we hope it's of interest to any partner working with households who are at risk of homelessness, or homeless.

Every Contact describes the government's commitments to homeless prevention and simply suggests that it's up to councils to make these commitments work locally. To save you time we've gone a step further and translated Every Contact into a series of activities that you might want to undertake locally, either as standalone tasks, or as part of reviewing or developing your homelessness strategy and plans.

2. What's the format?

We begin with a very short introduction to Making Every Contact Count, followed by ideas for action presented under two headings:

- 1. What can you do to prevent homelessness whilst achieving wider local outcomes?*
- 2. How can you improve your role in leading and enabling prevention activity?*

They're presented in this order because we've found it helps to focus on what you want to achieve first, and the options available to do this, before you decide what structures, policies and plans, and services, you will need in place to deliver.

There are many references in Every Contact to other, non-housing led, initiatives. We've included links to relevant websites which we hope are helpful. There's also a lot of work in progress by the government or others which will inform your work. Much of this is yet to be published, and few dates are given, but we've listed what you can expect under the relevant headings.

3. Is there more we can do?

Yes. Our suggestions are not an exhaustive list of what you could do, and we've not covered the role of new supply and the private rented sector, allocations policies and tenancy strategies¹ despite mentions in Every Contact. These are areas of activity that we feel you'll be more familiar with and we wanted to help you get to grips with what's new or different. We have however signposted you to guidance which will help inform other actions, and if you are keen for more ideas, or want to add your own, please get in touch.

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¹ Tenancy strategy guidance and examples can be found here <http://www.gilleng.co.uk/free-stuff.php>



4. What is Making Every Contact Count?

Billed as the government's homelessness prevention strategy, Every Contact says there is 'no place for homelessness in the 21st century' and describes what the government is doing to ensure that 'everyone who is at risk of homelessness gets help at the earliest possible stage to prevent them from losing their home'.

It follows an earlier publication which described how the government's vision to end rough sleeping would be achieved. This can be found here <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/visionendroughsleeping>.

In addition to government commitments, Every Contact presents ten challenges to local authorities which it believes are necessary to secure its vision. We've highlighted these with a gold medal in the following text.



5. Does it introduce any new targets or statutory duties?

Whilst not introducing any new targets or statutory duties, the government reminds local authorities that:

- There is duty to provide advice and assistance to all those threatened with homelessness, regardless of whether they are likely to be statutorily homeless. The theme of responding to all forms of homelessness is found in more than one place in the document.
- Duties in relation to health, care and support (recent and proposed) mean that local authorities should be engaging and co-operating with others, and promoting service integration to achieve improved outcomes for households vulnerable to homelessness eg, health



- They should not place 16/17 year olds in bed and breakfast, or families in bed and breakfast for longer than six weeks.

6. Do we need to change our approach?

It is highly likely, if you've not already. There is no new funding. Every Contact describes a multitude of cross-government departmental policies, reforms, initiatives and budgets that the government believes must be brought together locally to successfully prevent homelessness.

- Does your current approach bring these strands together, at a level where decisions can be taken about the direction of travel? It's not unusual for there to be an effective local homelessness group, attended by agencies working directly with homeless households, but does this group make decisions about funding for things like health, education, Troubled Families, new housing supply?
- Does your local response to homelessness go beyond simply providing a house to improving health and wellbeing, reducing re-offending, enabling people to access training and employment opportunities? You're expected to make the most of existing funding to achieve these outcomes on the basis that actions will also contribute to homeless prevention.

We provide ideas for a revised approach after the outcomes table.

7. What can we do to prevent homelessness whilst achieving wider local outcomes?

Outcome	Action you may want to consider
Young people have the best start in life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that housing is involved in the development and implementation of the Troubled Families initiative, in such a way as to prevent homelessness (for the family and/or young person) in the short and longer term • Adopt the government's youth accommodation pathway (presented in Every Contact); this may require changes to your existing pathway • Review your approach to youth homelessness in light of government published evidence on what works (due) • Work with schools involved in the exclusion trial to improve education of permanently excluded pupils (more information can be found here http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/exclusion/b00200074/exclusion-trial) • See health and education actions later
Improved health outcomes and reduced health inequalities	<p>Ensure the health needs of people who are vulnerable to homelessness, or are homeless, are met through local health and care commissioning;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect and maintain local evidence of health needs (physical and mental health) and include this in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (have a look at Homeless Link's work in this area http://homeless.org.uk/health-needs-audit) • Ensure the health and wellbeing strategy reflects what needs to be done to achieve improved health outcomes for vulnerable/homeless households (Consultation on guidance for JSNAs and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy can be found here http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/07/consultation-jsna/. This report might also be useful http://www.gilleng.co.uk/downloads/Published_Work/Housing%20and%20public%20health%20report%20DHWM%202011.pdf) • With commissioners, particularly drugs and alcohol, mental health, and Clinical Commissioning Groups, commission integrated service models that will achieve the desired, shared, outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learn from the findings from Homeless Link's work with five local authorities to improve outcomes for homeless people with dual drugs / alcohol and mental health needs ○ Refer to sector-led guidance on joint working between housing, drug and alcohol sectors (initial material due to be published) ○ Have a look at the Northern Housing Consortium's A Foot in the Door guidance http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/Page/QualityOfLife/Afootinthedoorpublication.aspx • Explore how to make every contact with a health professional count to reduce health inequalities and prevent homelessness for the vulnerable and excluded in society. You could explore the role of health visitors, for example. • Implement any necessary changes in response to the recent publication on hospital discharge and other guidance on developing protocols. This can be found here http://homeless.org.uk/hospitals • This Department of Health link should also be useful http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/08/homelessness/
Safer communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable access to housing and housing services for offenders by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Working with Probation, Youth Offending Teams, and Prisons to ensure housing is contributory to reduced re-offending, for

Outcome	Action you may want to consider
and reduced reoffending	<p>example it plays a part in Integrated Offender Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Informing and participating in service commissioning to be undertaken by the new Police and Crime Commissioners, when in place later in 2012 (the Home Office website provides some information on progress in this area http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/police/police-crime-commissioners/) ● Learn from the (possible) publication of a best practice toolkit to ensure young offenders are able to access accommodation on release by the Youth Justice Board ● Refer to Crisis guidance for prison and probation practitioners on improving offender access to private rented sector accommodation (due for publication later in the year). Existing work by, and support from, Crisis in relation to the private rented sector can be found here http://www.privaterentedsector.org.uk/
Economic resilience, growth and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop a plan with partners to manage the impact of welfare reforms on households and communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With partners carry out work to understand the possible impacts of reforms, and the existence of services that can contribute to managing these ● Develop a co-ordinated response, making use of all available resources across local partners eg, transition funding, local discretions such as the discretionary housing payment, and local skills and experience for example financial inclusion work by registered providers ● Consider the impact of decisions on localised council tax support on working age households, and how these can be managed ● Work with the Jobcentre Plus, and other local partners (particularly the voluntary and community sector) to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Raise awareness amongst Jobcentre Plus staff of homelessness, and what effect this can have on people, and their ability to work, and how Jobcentre Plus services can be improved ● Understand what additional support is needed for pre-Work Programme claimants, and to inform local decisions such as on the use of the Flexible Support Fund – FSF - to help overcome barriers to employment. More information about the FSF can be found here http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN06079 ● Inform the Jobcentre’s approach to all claimants, with a particular focus on ensuring quality advice, enabling access to services that can prevent homelessness, and enabling claimants to access work that will genuinely improve their housing options ● Improve pathways to education and employment for households who are at risk of homelessness or are homeless: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with people who have or are experiencing homelessness to understand what barriers exist to accessing education and employment, and take action to address these ● Ensure that local further education and skills work is accessible to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, for example projects funded through Community Learning budgets (for more information have a look at http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/programmes/asl/) ● Work with local businesses to understand what action can be taken to match their workforce demand with available skills ● Make it easier for service providers working with households to identify and access skills and training opportunities in the area

Outcome	Action you may want to consider
	<p>You will also want to look out for publications on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outputs from government work to ensure the Work Capability Assessment process recognises better the impact homelessness can have on an individual's capability for work (no date given). • The outcomes of pilot Community Learning Trust models in 2012/13 which aim to enable learning providers to deliver an offer that meets needs • Findings from an analysis commissioned by the Ministerial Working Group on the issues faced by homeless people in accessing skills training • Government work to understand how payment by results could enable people, for example rough sleepers, to move towards achieving economic outcomes • Findings from a Homeless Link pilot to bring local voluntary homelessness sector and the local authority together with Jobcentre Plus, Work Programme and Work Choice providers.
<p>Enable people to effectively manage their financial circumstances</p>	<p>Understand how local information, advice and support services enable people to manage their finances, and take action to improve outcomes from this area of provision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the level of demand for information and advice in the area, by types and tenure. You'll want to look at demand experienced by everyone, including the council's customer access points (usually the first port of call before the housing options service) • Map provision in the local area against the needs that exist and are likely to exist, for example resulting from welfare reforms. This should include the work that Registered Providers are undertaking with their tenants, and plans for national advice provision eg, that from the Money Advice Service • Audit the quality and outcomes of advice provision commissioned by the local authority, and if necessary take action to improve this • Work with voluntary and community sector organisations to understand how they can be supported to better respond to demand (likely to be rising) • Enable all partners working in this area to share and access good practice, and access advice and training provided by organisations such as the National Homelessness Advice Service http://www.nhas.org.uk/ • Consider jointly commissioning services that will support households to manage their finances (see also recommendations for working with Jobcentre Plus and linking into education/skills projects) <p>Look out for the published findings from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government's Housing Demonstration Projects which will run to June 2013 which will test the support required to help claimants budget and manage their rent payments effectively, and the type of budgeting support needed for Universal Credit claimants in the longer term. For information on the pilots look here http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/housing-support/social-sector/ • A review of the support needed by the not-for-profit advice sector to adapt to changes in the way that it is funded, and government plans to provide this (report due shortly)

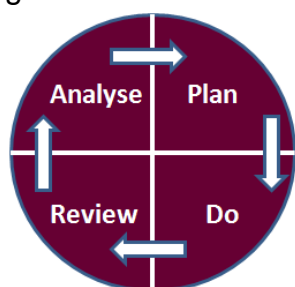


8. How can you improve your role in leading and enabling prevention activity?

Every Contact suggests that there's room for improvement in the framework provided by the local authority to prevent homelessness. More specifically local authorities are challenged to:

- Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
- Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs (not every five years as most authorities do now – this is new)
- Work differently with partners within the public sector, but also in the private and voluntary and community sectors to achieve outcomes (more detail is provided later)

There is a clear expectation that homelessness will be best prevented if it is understood, planned for and directed from 'the top table', and that the authority will take an outcome focused commissioning approach. This iterative approach (ongoing appraisal and redirection) should enable you to target the difference you need to make to prevent homelessness, and can be usefully shown in this diagram:



A Commissioning Approach

8.1 How to develop a commissioning approach

You may want to consider:

- Reviewing, and revising if necessary, the framework you provide to direct, enable and deliver all types of activity across the public sector (not just housing) to prevent homelessness and achieve other locally desired outcomes eg, improved health and wellbeing. Your framework will include local leadership, partnerships, strategies, plans, policies and practice – anything that helps makes things happen. Do this as part of your homeless review and strategy process.
- Ensuring the right people come together in appropriate forums to 'analyse, plan, do and review' on a regular basis. This may need new partnerships or revisions to existing partnerships, and should reflect that homelessness should be discussed 'at the top table' by decision makers, as well as by those who are working on the front line. People who have experienced homelessness and service users should also have a voice – this has always been important but its critical now as we need new ideas.

Ideas for action are presented on the next pages against the headings of 'analyse, plan, do and review'.



Analyse

Develop a common understanding of homelessness in the local area, updating this on a regular basis (an annual review is suggested by the government). In practice this is likely to mean that the local authority, working with others, will need to:

- Monitor levels and types of homelessness on a more regular basis, including non-statutory homelessness. This should include collecting intelligence from front-line services (and not just those procured by the local authority)
- Work with partners and those with experience of homelessness to understand what's happening on the ground, including the under-lying causes of homelessness
- Report findings to people who can take action to address any concerns that these more regular reviews raise – it's important that intelligence is used to revise direction more regularly, to enable you to be more responsive to change

Suggestions for action in this section, and in 'review' (later) could be included in your homelessness review process.

Plan

Actions here could form part of your homelessness strategy development process:

- Understand how preventing and responding to homelessness can contribute to other local outcomes such as improved health and wellbeing, reduced reoffending, recovery from drug use, reductions in unemployment and increased participation in the community etc, You could use the earlier table as the basis for discussion with partners working in these outcome areas, adding your own actions
- Bring together commissioners from across all sectors and agencies to agree what changes need to be made to achieve outcomes, bearing in mind all available resources (not just homeless prevention funding)
- Use intelligence from the 'analyse' and 'review' tasks to understand where resources should be targeted. You'll want to strike a balance between 'universal' services such as housing advice (available to everyone) and services that are 'targeted' towards particular households eg, families, or issues eg, rough sleeping, that may require many different inputs to prevent homelessness
- Work with partners in the voluntary and community sector to understand what they can contribute to outcomes, and what they need from the local authority (or others) to enable this contribution to be effective. This could include supporting organisations to bid for funding such as that provided by Crisis to enable access into the private rented sector, or providing Social Impact Bonds (you can access 'light touch' government support to develop Social Impact Bond propositions, if this is a route you decide to take)
- Consider whether there are other opportunities to attract social investment for other initiatives, and institutional investment in the longer term, for example to develop long term private rented sector accommodation for homeless families



Do

- Clearly communicate to providers - across public, private, voluntary and community sectors - what the desired outcomes are, what changes need to happen to achieve these, and commission as appropriate. Co-ordinating access to services for vulnerable people is suggested as one way in which commissioners can make a difference. A different approach to procurement is another way, and could include a payment by results approach.
- Develop housing pathways with commissioners, considering different household groups, and identify the barriers to these being achieved
- Ensure that there is a housing options prevention service that is available to all clients and provides written advice
- Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord

Review

With 'analyse' tasks, these should form part of your homeless review process, and will inform what you 'plan' and 'do' in the future:

- Monitor and evaluate the services/initiatives which have been put in place to prevent and respond to homelessness – these may include non-housing specific services. It's likely that you'll need to consider new measures of success, bearing in mind that partners may be interested in wider outcomes from services such as improved health. Service user feedback will be very important to consider too.
- Regularly review innovations and emerging practice elsewhere in the country and consider whether this could be usefully developed and/or adopted in your area
- Take action to revise activity if outcomes are not being achieved – being responsive in the current climate of limited resources is critical to success

Other support to develop your approach

Finally, in shaping your overall approach you will also want to look at the following publications:

- Findings from the Community Budget pilots (due to report to the government in October). More information can be found here <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/2056442>
- Lessons from ten Local Inclusion Labs (small local projects to trial new approaches to delivering for adults facing multiple disadvantages including mental health conditions, drug and alcohol dependence, homelessness and learning disabilities). For more information <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/becoming-resolving-multiple-disadvantage-local-inclusion-lab-area>
- An evaluation of ten Payment by Result models in relation to housing related support services
- The findings from the government's first homelessness Social Impact Bond in London, which will use a Payment by Results model
- Examples of innovation highlighted by the government and others eg, Homeless Link
- An evaluation of three pilot services to better coordinate local services for people facing multiple needs and exclusions.