

shelter

N O R T H E R N I R E L A N D

Response to the NIHE consultation on
Homeless Strategy 2011-2016
Summary

Wednesday, 17 August 2011

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Introduction

1. Shelter Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Homeless Strategy 2011-2016 incorporating a review of the 2002 strategy.
2. To meet the NIHE deadline, the following is a summary of a more detailed response which will take longer to complete and which will be submitted when ready.

Key points

3. Shelter NI recognises that the NIHE is required by law to produce a homelessness strategy.
4. We agree the strategy would be improved by a multi-agency response to homelessness. We request a comprehensive action plan agreed by all statutory agencies to assist the NIHE to achieve a fully socially inclusive homelessness strategy is produced as a consequence of this consultation.

Context

5. The strategic analysis would be improved by commentary on
 - The growth of homelessness in NI. compared with other parts of the UK.
 - Why in NI, has statutory homelessness more than doubled to 10,443 in 2010/11 compared with 5,192 in 1999/2000 and with few exceptions has been clearly rising year after year.
 - Scotland is removing priority need as a requirement for statutory homeless. Has this been looked at in the NI context?
 - the societal/political/economic/environmental/other drivers which underpin the recorded causes of homelessness and whether the extent and intensity of those causal factors have changed over time, how they are affected by geography and crucially how they might be projected into the future.
 - Are the categories of reasons used by the NIHE to record households presenting as homelessness and being determined as statutory homeless still appropriate as do not match the detailed needs of homeless people identified in the PSI Strategy.
 - Within the categories in current use, we believe there are particular households who need specific assistance such as older people who do not fit the standard system response of first making an offer of temporary accommodation, then an offer of permanent housing. We recognise these numbers are growing.
 - Are there other groups of particular needs within the categories?
 - Is there information on the number of homeless people who have been in statutory care or in other state institutions or other institutions (research elsewhere suggests that up to 1/3rd of homeless households have been in care), will that continue into the future?

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- What is the projected future need for temporary and permanent accommodation to meet the needs of long term homeless for the strategic period- how much might this cost? Can we afford this?
- What qualitative research has been gathered on the vies of homeless people
- We believe that the investment by Government in housing related support services is fundamental to tackling both the causes of and the incidents of rough sleeping and homelessness and that this programme should be maintained and increased in line with identified need.

Temporary and Permanent Housing Supply

- Shelter NI has no objection to a “Housing First” option for temporary accommodation, placing households into private lets, providing that their support needs have been identified (if any) and are being met.
- Since 2002 almost 10k new social homes were built, but over the same period nearly double that number were sold.
- Shelter NI shares the concern that the level of social housing stock is so diminished that it can no longer meet the permanent housing needs of homeless households and households in housing stress within a 12 month period.
- The DsD needs to carry out a comprehensive housing strategy review and to indicate how it intends to meet the deepening levels of housing need.
- The private rented sector happens to be a readily available supply at present; however it cannot be assured to match all the qualities and benefits of the social rented sector. Private landlords are not obliged to meet housing need. With the changes in Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and other welfare reforms, households will find it harder to find affordable accommodation in the Private Rented Sector.
- We need sufficient public investment to kick start the housing market but we also need new social housing. Rents need to be affordable.

Strategic Objective 1

- Early intervention and prevention seems to focus on tenant related services and there appears to be no reference to support for owner/ occupiers despite the possibility of promoting a Mortgage Rescue option and the work already being done to help reduce repossessions by mortgage default. Furthermore Home Improvement Services for older people help to reduce this type of homelessness.

Strategic Objective 2

- It would be helpful to have an agreed definition of what is a “reasonable” length of stay in temporary accommodation. The success of this strategic aim will depend of a suitable supply of affordable, quality accommodation with good security off tenure in the right locations.

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Strategic Objective 3

- The number of people sleeping rough may not be as low as suggested in the Strategy unless the definition is confined to sleeping on the streets. There are many people who sleep in vacant property, in cars or in other unsatisfactory shelters, not only migrant peoples but indigenous homeless people.

Strategic Objective 4

- It is not clear how success would be measured/ achieved in this strategic objective..

6. A more detailed comment on these issues is being prepared and will be submitted in due course. Hopefully this summary can be of some assistance. Please contact me for clarification of any of these points.

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