

## Report for Resolution

**Report to** Cabinet  
**Report of** 13 July 2011  
Director - Regeneration and Development  
**Subject** Greater Norwich homelessness strategy and action plan  
2011-14

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### Purpose

The Homelessness Act 2002 granted new provisions and powers for local authorities' work on homelessness and prevention. The Act also carried a duty that local authorities had to periodically publish a strategy. This strategy is the second sub-regional homelessness strategy to be published since 2007. As required by the above Act a homelessness review will be carried out during the life of the strategy to make sure it remains relevant and informed.

### Recommendations

The cabinet approve the adoption of the strategy and action plan

### Financial Consequences

There are no financial implications in 2011/12 as all costs can be met within existing resources.

### Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priorities:

- "Safe and healthy neighbourhoods – working in partnership with residents to create neighbourhoods where people feel secure, where the streets are clean and well maintained, where there is good quality housing and local amenities and where there are active local communities"

**Cabinet Member: Cllr Bert Bremner**

**Ward: All wards**

### Contact Officers

Chris Hancock, Housing strategy officer	01603 212884
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### Background Documents

Consultation responses

## Report

### Greater Norwich homelessness strategy and action plan 2011-16.

1. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires Local Authorities to produce a homelessness strategy that applies to everyone at risk of homelessness, not just people who may fall within a priority need group for the purposes of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.
2. Work started on the formation of a strategy in January 2010 through the Greater Norwich Housing Partnership (GNHP) Homelessness project group, which is responsible for the delivery of the strategy. Its membership comprised of the following; Broadland District Council, Norwich City Council, South Norfolk District Council, Norfolk Housing Alliance, St Martin's Housing Trust, and Greater Norwich Housing Partnership.
3. The project group considered the following sources of information when planning for the strategy:
  - homelessness trends and issues, both quantitative and qualitative;
  - national and local policy, current and proposed;
  - feedback and suggestions from the Greater Norwich Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group;
  - feedback from a stakeholders consultation conference in July 2010;
  - analysis of the outcomes of the previous Homelessness Strategy Action Plan
  - analysis of customer feedback relating to the local authorities' services.
4. The Homelessness Strategy and action plan (Appendices A & B) aims were shaped through a stakeholders consultation event held in July 2010, and was subject to formal consultation from late October 2010 for 12 weeks.<sup>1</sup> An Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix C) has been carried out on the strategy and action plan and the actions identified will be monitored by the steering group of the strategy.<sup>2</sup>
5. The vision of the strategy is:

*"To ensure that services are in place to prevent and respond appropriately to homelessness, providing a range of suitable and targeted options that place the customer at the centre."*

To deliver the visions the following strategic aims have been established:

#### **1) Deliver early intervention to prevent homelessness**

Prevention is the primary focus of all housing options teams in Greater Norwich. We want to ensure that everyone can access the help they need, when they need it, to find sustainable solutions to their housing difficulties. We appreciate that the provision of housing is not the only solution and will offer signposting to support and training networks.

#### **2) Placing the customer at the centre of service delivery**

We recognise that our customers have a diverse range of needs and

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of the consultation responses can be made available on request from Chris Hancock, Housing Strategy Officer, tel 212884.

<sup>2</sup> A copy of the Equality Impact Assessment can be found in Appendix B of this report.

requirements. We will deliver our services so that they are responsive and designed around the varying needs of the people that use them.

**3) Maximising resources and effective partnership working**

We are aware that in order to provide cost-effective and responsive services our housing options teams cannot work in isolation. We will deliver our services in partnership with our voluntary and statutory sector partners in providing the best possible solutions.

**4) Provide a wide range of sustainable housing solutions to people at risk of being homeless**

We will work with partners to develop innovative housing solutions. We will ensure that customers are aware of their options and we will support them in making informed choices.

6. The strategy and its action plan will be monitored by the Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy Steering and Operational Groups. The GNHP Strategic lead officers of the three district councils will have key monitoring roles and will regularly update elected members and partners on the progress of the strategy.
7. The above groups and individuals will report back on the progress to a variety of forums that fall under the umbrella of the GNHP, most notably the Greater Norwich Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group and the GNHP policy group.
8. By effectively monitoring this strategy and action plan we will be best placed to adapt and respond to any challenges that take place during the life of the strategy.
9. The associated risks of failing to deliver this strategy are:
  - Reputational – increased homelessness could portray the Council as an organisation that does not provide sufficient appropriate homelessness advice and housing options. This could be seen as going against the Council's corporate objectives of "opportunities for all" and "strong and prosperous city."
  - Economic – preventing homelessness saves money when compared to the cost of providing temporary accommodation and re-housing into alternative accommodation. Public services that deal with health and crime are likely to see increased pressures on their services and budgets as a result of not preventing homelessness.
  - Social - There would be an increase in the number of people living on the streets or in insecure, temporary arrangements. The human cost of homelessness can include: "restricted access to essential facilities and amenities; exposure to dangers and risk; exploitation; criminality and contact with the criminal justice system; loss of employment; and detrimental mental and physical health impacts."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Page 46, The hidden truth about homelessness, CRISIS (2011).

- Legal - Local authorities have a duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to prevent homelessness. If we failed to deliver this strategy there could be an increased number of people having the right to temporary, or permanent, council accommodation.

GNHP Logo

# **Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy**

**2011 – 2014**

**DRAFT**

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17<sup>th</sup> June 2011 version

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## ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE THE LAST GREATER NORWICH HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2007-10<sup>1</sup>

Strategic Aim	Achievements
Deliver Early Intervention to Prevent Homelessness	<p>The Family Intervention Project (Families Unit) has helped 198 families<sup>2</sup> with multiple needs in the Greater stay in their homes. The project has been a very successful preventative measure in that none of the families have lost their accommodation to date.</p> <p>Two purpose-built domestic abuse refuges have been provided in the sub-region creating an additional 8 family units. The support this provides enables the victim to either return home safely or to secure alternative housing, minimising the risk of repeat homelessness.</p>
Improve Multi-agency Working to Prevent Homelessness	<p>Through its private sector leasing scheme Norwich City Council now manages 361 properties ranging from studio flats to family sized properties. The scheme provides housing for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Broadland and South Norfolk District Councils entered into an agreement in April 2010 with a housing charity to provide 175 properties over two years.</p> <p>The Greater Norwich Councils established the private rented sector website 'Property Info Point', providing advice to tenants and landlords to help households to access accommodation or remain in their homes. The Greater Norwich Councils developed private rented sector information guides for landlords and tenants to help households to access accommodation or remain in their homes.</p> <p>Norfolk Community Law Service (NCLS) is part-funded by the Councils to provide front line advice and guidance and Court representation for people facing possession proceedings. Court representation helps prevent households from immediately losing their homes, enabling NCLS and the Councils to work together to find longer term housing solutions.</p> <p>Norfolk Housing Alliance (formerly RSL Alliance) co-ordinator sits on GNHP Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, enabling a closer and positive commitment to prevent homelessness among social housing tenants.</p>
Addressing Single Homelessness	<p>The Greater Norwich Hostel Strategy and Action Plan has provided a more coordinated approach to placing customers in hostel accommodation and moving them on appropriately.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Please note this is not an exhaustive list

<sup>2</sup> Since the Families unit started in 2006 up to April 2011.

Making the Best Use of Existing Stock to Prevent Homelessness	Through the work of the GNHP Empty Homes Officer work this scheme has brought a large number of private sector homes back into use in the sub-region
Carry Out Service User Consultation	We have developed a coordinated approach to customer satisfaction surveys enabling the Councils to compare and improve our services.
Ensure Excellent Joint Working Arrangements Between the Three Councils	The Housing Training Programme set up in 2009 by South Norfolk Council provides multi-agency training and opportunities across the voluntary and statutory sectors. This leads to good relationships and joined-up working.
Implemented Choice Based Lettings	Implemented on target and was shortlisted for e-government awards and has helped 8,022 households <sup>3</sup> into accommodation since December 2007.
Map Services for Homeless People	Space East – Housing and Support Directory has been published and was part-funded by the Greater Norwich Councils. This resource has brought together the details of support and accommodation services allowing staff to access the most appropriate services for their customers. Norwich City Council's Learning Employment Accommodation Project (LEAP) has had the following outcomes for 09/10 for the 167 clients seen by the service: 14 have gained employment 36 have gained accommodation through NCC Let 58 referred to work placements 31 have undertook other forms of training
<b>Reduce Our Use of Temporary Accommodation</b>	We met the Governments target to halve the use of temporary accommodation two years earlier than the 2010 target and have maintained temporary accommodation use at below this level. We have ended the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.

<sup>3</sup> This figure is up to April 2011.



## VISION AND STRATEGIC AIMS

### Vision

Our vision is:

***To prevent and respond to homelessness by ensuring the provision of a range of effective, targeted services that are responsive to customer needs.***

### Strategic Aims

- **Deliver early intervention to prevent homelessness**

Prevention is the primary focus of all housing options teams in Greater Norwich. We aim to ensure that everyone can access the help they need, when they need it, to find sustainable solutions to their housing difficulties. The provision of housing is not the only solution and we will offer signposting and referrals to support and training networks.

- **Placing the customer at the centre of service delivery**

We recognise that our customers have a diverse range of needs and requirements. We will deliver our services so that they are responsive and designed around the varying needs of the people that use them.

- **Maximising resources and effective partnership working**

We are aware that in order to provide cost-effective and responsive services our housing options teams cannot work in isolation. We will deliver our services in partnership with our voluntary and statutory sector partners in providing the best possible solutions.

- **Provide a wide range of sustainable housing solutions to people at risk of being homeless**

We will work with partners to develop innovative housing solutions. We will ensure that customers are aware of their options and we will support them in making informed choices.

MAP OF NORFOLK SHOWING THE AREA COVERED BY GNHP

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1. The Homelessness Strategy**

#### **1.1**

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 local housing authorities are required to review homelessness in their areas and set out plans to prevent and address homelessness in a Homelessness Strategy.

#### **1.2**

This is the second Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy, continuing with a sub-regional approach that provides value through shared responses to common issues and also gives a consistent focus for our partners and customers to work with us. This strategy supports the three district Housing Strategies and provides further details on how we will work towards achieving its strategic aims. This strategy explains how we will provide appropriate services to our customers who find it difficult to access housing for themselves, with the aim of enabling them to achieve a settled housing solution.

#### **1.3**

At the time this strategy was written and consulted on, the coalition government has announced and began implementing large public funding cuts and policy changes. It is a time of uncertainty within local government and a major challenge is to remain focused on delivering key, preventative services with diminishing resources.

#### **1.4**

The coalition governments' plans involve major changes to the housing benefit and local housing allowance system as well as to welfare benefits. These changes will be introduced over a number of years and include revisions which will incorporate housing costs within a new 'Universal Credit' and the extension of the shared accommodation rate from the under 25 year olds to the under 35's. These changes are likely to have serious implications for many of our customers.

## **1.5**

Whilst remembering that those who suffer the most from experiencing homelessness are the customers, with the recognised detrimental psychological, emotional and physical health impact of the crisis being well documented, it is also crucial to keep in mind the financial cost benefits of preventing homelessness. The average cost to the public purse, nationally, of accommodating a homeless household and providing re-housing services, is £5,300<sup>4</sup>; the use of prevention initiatives is proven to be far more cost effective. The challenge for local government is to find the right balance of necessary budgetary cuts and investment which provides longer term savings.

## **1.6**

This Homelessness Strategy sets out our view of the challenges and issues that we are faced with and the Action Plan demonstrates how we aim to address them.

## **1.7**

As well as supporting the three district housing strategies, this strategy supports and links with other sub-regional and county strategies. These are detailed and referenced in this strategy and, in some instances; we have included the same action points where homelessness prevention and the allocation of affordable housing are key factors.

## **1.8**

The strategy covers the period 2011-14 but, as it is a dynamic document, we will regularly revisit and monitor it and the action plan, responding flexibly to reflect changing external and internal pressures and policies.

# **2. Methodology**

## **2.1**

To create this strategy, a working group of lead homelessness and housing advice officers from the three local authorities, a representative of the major housing associations and a representative of the voluntary sector was formed. The group considered the following sources of information:

- homelessness trends and issues, both quantitative and qualitative;
- national and local policy, current and proposed;
- feedback and suggestions from the Greater Norwich Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group;
- feedback from a consultation conference in July 2010;
- analysis of the outcomes of the previous Homelessness Strategy Action Plan;
- analysis of customer feedback relating to the local authorities' services.

## **2.2**

The Homelessness strategy and action plan were subject to formal consultation during Autumn 2010 for 12 weeks, during which comments were invited from stakeholders. The working group considered these responses and amended the strategy and action plan where appropriate. A response to the consultation was completed and is available in the appendix of this strategy.

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<sup>4</sup> Page 5, Demonstrating the Cost- Effectiveness of Preventing Homelessness, CLG, July 2010.

### **3. The Housing Options Approach**

#### **3.1**

The Homelessness Act 2002 signalled a change in approach by local authorities towards homelessness, as it placed a duty on them to prevent homelessness and address the main causes, rather than simply react to it. This was in response to spiralling numbers of homelessness acceptances and people housed in temporary accommodation nationally and locally. The duty to provide advice and assistance applies to all customers, regardless of whether they would be owed a statutory homeless duty by the local authority.

#### **3.2**

The law places a duty on local authorities to investigate cases of homelessness where homelessness and priority need is apparent and to make a decision on whether it has a statutory duty to rehouse the applicant and their household. The statistics that relate to these applications have, historically, been used to measure homelessness. The focus on addressing the main causes of homelessness has been guided by these and has led to homelessness prevention schemes such as:

- Rent deposit and guarantee loans/grants;
- Physical security works to homes;
- Mediation;
- Negotiation with landlords;
- Debt and money advice;
- Nightstop and other short term accommodation for young people.

We also provide a range of other measures to ensure that homes remain suitable, for example, Disabled Facilities Grants.

#### **3.3**

This is supported by the wide advertising of housing advice services, encouraging early approaches and interventions. The local authorities also recognise that they are not always best placed to respond to some customers' needs and work closely with the voluntary sector as well as jointly commissioning services, where they can be most effective.

#### **3.4**

The success of this approach can be seen in the following table, with the numbers of statutory homelessness acceptances reducing from a high of 1,173 in 2003/04 to 244 in 2009/10:

Homelessness Acceptances in Greater Norwich (source P1E returns)

<b>2003/04</b>	1,173
<b>2006/07</b>	439
<b>2007/08</b>	308
<b>2008/09</b>	268
<b>2009/10</b>	244

### 3.5

The impact of the wider homelessness prevention duty has been captured only since 2008/09, when local authorities started recording where they have prevented homelessness (for example, found alternative accommodation before someone becomes homeless or enabled them to stay in their homes) or relieved homelessness (found suitable, alternative accommodation, where a statutory homelessness duty is not owed). The table below shows the successes of this so far:

Homelessness Prevention and Relief in Greater Norwich (source P1E returns)

	<b>Prevention</b>	<b>Relief</b>
<b>2008/09</b>	902	217
<b>2009/10</b>	804	468

### 3.6

The Housing Options approach aims to provide a service to customers that enables them to explore the different housing solutions that may be available to them and to help them make choices that will be sustainable. This can range from basic advice, signposting and referrals to other agencies to full 'case work' which can involve taking an advocacy role, mediating, and other interventions, often related to the cause of the potential homelessness. Sometimes a customer's background and personal issues can be a factor in the problems that they have with their housing. We aim to help customers address these and remove barriers, where possible.

This is where the links to other strategies are strongest. The personal and inter-personal factors are broken down into 'client groups', with the majority of them having their own county-wide strategy. These strategies recognise the difficulties that the client groups can face in accessing and retaining appropriate housing and the strategies are referred to in section 4.

### 3.7

The focus is on finding solutions; one of the challenges to this can be that customer's initial expectation is that local authorities will simply providing them with a new home; this is not possible for the majority of households on the housing registers. Therefore, housing advisors have a role in managing expectations and encouraging customers to think creatively and realistically.

NOTE

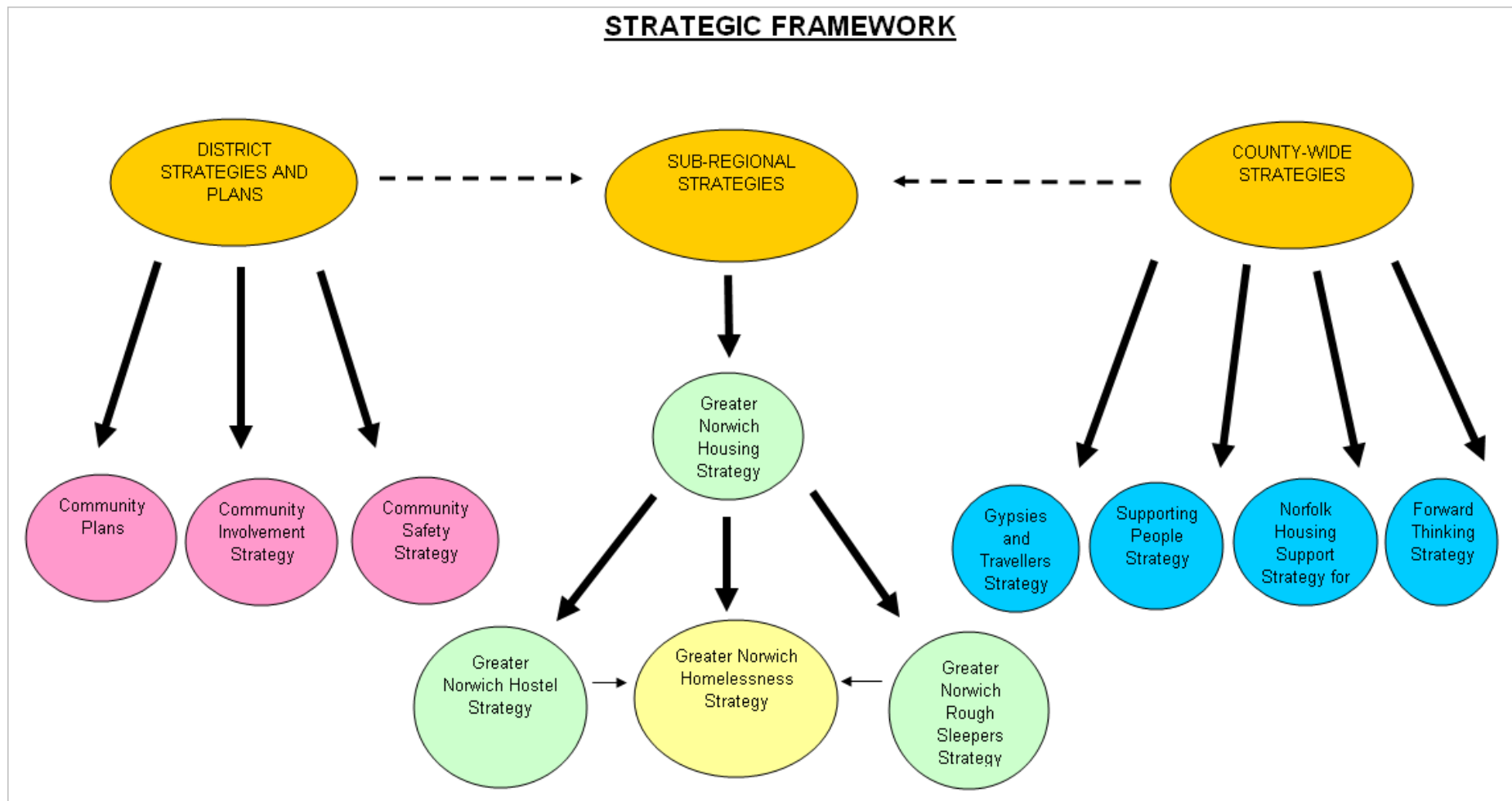


DIAGRAM WITH ROBIN AT BDC FOR REDESIGN

## **4. Strategic framework for this strategy**

### **4.1**

At all tiers of government there exists a commitment to tackling and preventing homelessness. The key to success continues to be partnerships between local councils, specialist agencies, charities, and housing associations. The East of England Regional Housing Statement 2010-14 makes the point that early intervention and preventing homelessness has benefits for saving public expenditure, particularly to health, social care and criminal justice budgets.

### **4.2**

At the local level, working with colleagues from the health, social care, and criminal justice sectors has enabled the GNHP to respond to the underlying reasons why people become homeless. The GNHP is involved in many specialist client group strategies for Norfolk that relate to homelessness. Many documents are at varying stages of development, implementation, or review. Examples of housing-related strategies include offenders, substance misuse, refugees, Gypsies and Travellers, mental health, and young people. Implementing many of the client-group strategies are working groups on which it is important for the GNHP to be represented.

### **4.3**

The GNHP recognises the importance of being open to new approaches to dealing with homelessness. A whole series of good practice guides are available to shape ideas. Many other research reports, published by both statutory and voluntary sector organisations, provide evidence on what works best in reducing homelessness. Consultation, service user involvement, and self assessment play a part in finding ways to improve services as well.

### **4.4**

This homelessness strategy fits within the individual Housing Strategies, alongside companion documents on hostels and rough sleeping. The integrated approach recognises how building more affordable homes, bringing empty properties back in to use, improving the availability of private rented sector accommodation, making the best use of existing stock and access to hostels all effect homelessness levels.

### **4.5**

#### **Individual Housing Strategies of Greater Norwich local authorities**

These strategies are currently being prepared for consultation and will set out the key challenges and priorities for the individual local authorities and subsequent strategies that flow from it. The strategic aims will cover areas such as:

- Balancing the housing market
- Building sustainable and thriving communities
- Maximising opportunities for delivering more affordable housing
- Achieving decent, healthy and environmentally sustainable homes across all tenures
- Providing choice and fair access to services

- Delivering outcomes through effective partnership working

#### 4.6

##### **Greater Norwich Hostel Strategy, 2010-13**

The aim of the hostel strategy is to sustain, develop and improve the hostel accommodation within Greater Norwich.

This strategy is currently being refreshed for adoption in 2012.

#### 4.7

##### **Greater Norwich Rough Sleeper Strategy 2010-13**

This strategy has been put together with the help of the voluntary and statutory agencies who deliver key services to rough sleepers in Greater Norwich. It recognises and builds on the work that the voluntary and statutory sector is already doing to prevent and tackle rough sleeping.

#### 4.8

##### **A Strategy for Gypsies and Travellers in Norfolk 2010-12**

The aim of this strategy is to highlight issues concerning gypsies and travellers and identify pathways to accessing services and service providers that are available in the Norfolk area. The first gypsies and travellers strategy was published in 2005. A consultation is currently being undertaken to update and refresh this strategy.

#### 4.9

##### **Norfolk Supporting People Strategy 2011-15**

The strategy reflects a change in emphasis set against a background of a reduction of funding for public services, the vision for the new strategy is:

“To commission and ensure good quality housing support services. Housing support services should focus particularly on the prevention of loss of independence through helping people who are vulnerable to access suitable housing, retain their accommodation, live as independently as possible, and participate fully in the social and economic life of the community.”<sup>5</sup>

The specific priorities of the strategy are:

##### **People living independently who need lower level, preventative support**

- Older people
- Floating support

##### **Services for marginalised and disadvantaged adults**

- Single Homeless
- Offenders and people at risk of offending
- Substance misuse
- Young people
- Teenage parents
- Domestic abuse
- Diverse community needs including Gypsy and travellers

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<sup>5</sup> Page 5, Norfolk Housing Support Strategy Summary.



## **Housing support for people with long term care needs**

- People with mental health problems
- People with physical and sensory disabilities including long term conditions
- Frail older people

### **4.10**

#### **Norfolk Housing Support Strategy for Offenders 2010-13**

The strategy takes into account developments in national and local priorities, strategies and guidance, considers recent research findings and sets out the work being done across the county by a wide range of agencies and partnerships to secure appropriate housing and support for offenders, often one of the most challenging and unpopular client groups.

### **4.11**

#### **Routes to Independence 2010-12**

This is a Norfolk-wide interagency strategy designed to improve the way young people between the ages of 14 and 25 achieve independence and, where possible, avoid homelessness and crisis. It is designed to provide clear pathways to independence for young people. One of the more important means of doing so will be through the joint planning, development and commissioning of services.

### **4.12**

#### **Local Strategic Partnerships**

There are three Local Strategic Partnerships in the sub region each with their own respective strategy:

- **City of Norwich Partnership – Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-20**
- **Broadland Community Partnership – Community Plan 08-11**
- **South Norfolk Alliance – Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-18**

### **4.13**

#### **Local targets and measures**

There are no national performance indicators anymore. However local authorities recognise the need to measure performance and benchmark. Therefore a series of local performance indicators have been established. Those in common are:-

- % of homelessness applications which the authority makes a decision and issues a written notification to the applicant within 33 working days.
- The average time taken (in working days) to make a decision on a homelessness application.

In addition the government collects data quarterly from each local authority which enables local authorities to compare their performance on measures such as:-

- The number of households accepted as homeless

- The number and type of households in temporary housing
- The average length of stay in temporary accommodation for those moving on
- The numbers of those whose homelessness was prevented or relieved.

## **5. Homelessness challenges in Greater Norwich**

### **5.1**

The primary purpose of housing options services is to prevent people suffering the crisis of homelessness, the visible and extreme end of which is rough sleeping. Within the lifespan of the existing homelessness strategy, great strides have been made, with homeless acceptances dropping considerably and the number of cases where homelessness was prevented or relieved at higher levels than ever before.

### **5.2**

The focus of the new strategy will be not just to build on our successes but how to meet new challenges. The overriding challenge will be how to address a harsher external economic environment, which has the potential not only to increase demand on our services but also to limit the resources available to us to address the issues.

### **5.3 Deliver early intervention to prevent homelessness**

Where funding is likely to be limited, the delivery of an enhanced housing options approach becomes more difficult. While 2007-2010 saw development and investment in new schemes such as private sector leasing schemes and worklessness projects, new financial constraints mean that our approach may need to be more inventive, less reliant on external funding and involve making better use of existing resources.

### **5.4**

While the causes of homelessness are complex, P1E statistics show that eviction from the family home, through relationship breakdown or parental eviction is the major cause of homelessness in the sub-region. Across the majority of homeless groups, the 'personal' factors that cause homelessness are relatively unrecorded and unanalysed and as such, development of preventative measures relatively limited. The upward trend in the number of single person or one parent family households will potentially increase the number of households who apply for local authority assistance.

### **5.5 Placing the customer at the centre of service delivery**

Given the potential pressure on services with the current economic downturn, it is increasingly important to ensure that relevant information is well publicised and more widely available. In order to ensure that early advice and prevention succeeds residents and partner organisations need to be made aware of the services available. Moreover, it is important that we ensure that all literature and information is accessible, targeted and tailored to meet a range of identified needs and that we constantly seek to improve communication with customers, monitoring customer

satisfaction with the services provided and providing regular updates on any changes made as a result of customer feedback.

## **5.6 Maximising resources and effective partnership working.**

Effective partnership working in Greater Norwich contributed significantly to the delivery of the 2007-2010 homelessness strategy. A continued priority for this strategy will therefore be to build upon the successes and to continue to work in partnership to co-ordinate and develop services to best meet the needs of homeless and potentially homeless households.

### **5.7**

In such a difficult economic environment it will become increasingly important to identify opportunities for joint working through joint commissioning of projects and services. Equally, the challenge of further improving knowledge and working relationships between agencies remains strong, as does ensuring an inclusive approach to developing and delivering strategy.

### **5.8**

In respect of the move to greater sub-regional working and with a shift to area based homeless grants, it is more important that local authorities and partners encourage an open dialogue and take a broad view of homelessness and related issues.

## **6. Provide a wide range of sustainable housing solutions to people at risk of being homeless.**

We recognise that demand for affordable housing continues to increase at a faster rate than supply and that this trend is likely to continue. Given this, it is crucial that all steps possible are taken to make the best use of existing stock and to maintain tenants in their properties wherever possible. This may call for innovative approaches to issues such as under-occupation and tenant mobility.

### **6.1**

Previous successes in engaging with the private rented sector have already shown the potential for this sector to address housing need in Greater Norwich and steps need to be taken to ensure that this momentum is not lost. This will be particularly difficult given proposed changes to local housing allowance and a degree of thought will need to be given over to ensuring that private renting remains a viable option. An additional challenge in rural areas is the generally higher rents coupled with Local Housing Allowance being at the same level as urban areas.

### **6.2**

The Department for Communities and Local Government has continued to encourage a holistic approach to resolving an individual's housing issues. While Greater Norwich has experienced some success in this area, the challenge is how to retain and expand on this without the reliance on external funding. We therefore need to explore ways that other areas of advice can be included in existing housing advice provision through the involvement of partner agencies. It is harder to provide holistic solutions in rural areas where many support services do not exist.

## **STRATEGIC AIM 1**

### **Deliver early intervention to prevent homelessness**

<b>Action Points</b>	
<b>We will:</b>	
1A	Enable those who are not in education, training or employment (NEET) to engage in meaningful activity, who have become or are threatened with homelessness.
1B	Carry out a review of existing early intervention tools against the main causes of homelessness and review our use of them to learn from successes.
1C	Build on and expand our means of communicating with our customers.

## **7. Context**

Homeless people have seen many changes in the breadth and depth of the services provided to homeless applicants since the Homelessness Act 2002 was passed. Since then the focus has changed from reaction to proactive prevention of homelessness. The most effective way to prevent homelessness is to intervene at the earliest possible stage.

### **7.1**

Much work has been undertaken over the lifetime of the last homelessness strategy to prevent homelessness. Some of this work, such as homelessness education programmes helps to deliver curriculum based information into schools with a view to delivering the aim of early intervention to a young age group. Other initiatives such as the Norwich LEAP project have been designed to help people into work as this is widely recognised as one of the most effective ways to prevent homelessness in the long term.

### **7.2**

More can be done and it is our aim to explore other ways we can intervene at an earlier stage through targeting organisations such as Relate, Primary Care Trusts/GP clusters, education, drug and alcohol services and offender management services who are the first point of contact for many of those threatened with homelessness.

### **7.3**

Providing accommodation is not always the only solution to helping and preventing future homelessness. Some people who have become homeless and are not in employment sometimes need help to build skills. We will explore ways, through partnership working, in which we can help people engage in activities as a first step to employment by providing links in to voluntary work, education or training. The loss of employment is one of the key factors leading to homelessness and helping people move back into employment directly or via other routes such as education and training helps to prevent homelessness.

#### **7.4**

In order to look for continuous improvement within our services we need to measure the effectiveness of the preventative tools we use. Some of these may be less effective than others. They may need to be amended, dispensed with or replaced. Others which are more successful can be strengthened. Addressing weaknesses and building on strengths will improve our preventative services.

#### **7.5**

Effective and timely communication will greatly improve our ability to deliver early intervention and prevent homelessness. One of the key tasks in this area is to ask those who use our services, and our partners, where our strengths and weaknesses lie. Again, this will help us to improve our service and make it more effective in preventing homelessness.

## STRATEGIC AIM 2

### Placing the customer at the centre of service delivery

<b>Action Points</b> <b>We will:</b>	
2A	Increase customer involvement in shaping our services
2B	Improve service delivery based on feedback
2C	Improve communication through the development and delivery of a communication plan

## 8. Context

Homeless people or those at risk of homelessness have a wide range of needs. Our homeless services in Greater Norwich need to be designed and delivered with this in mind. A 'one size fits all approach' is not the way a modern proactive homelessness service should deliver its services

### 8.1

People become homeless for a number of reasons; by understanding these reasons, we are then best placed to provide a service that suits our customers. The P1E returns to government show us that there is already a strong awareness of the reasons for homelessness in the Greater Norwich sub-region which are:

- Parents no longer willing to accommodate;
- Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner;
- Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner;
- Other friends or family no longer willing to accommodate;
- Financial hardship that leads to evictions for rent arrears or repossessions for mortgage arrears;
- Termination of assured short hold tenancies.

### 8.2

In order to engage with our customers we need to be able to provide a range of ways in which they can communicate with our services. These need to be sensitive to the cultural, language needs and capacities of the people that use the services offered. Our services need to be delivered so that they are inclusive and give the opportunity for the customer to make considered choices on the information we provide them. We will support people in making informed decisions and recognise that sometimes people need support to help themselves.

### **8.3**

It is a statutory duty for local authorities to promote equality and eliminate discrimination from its services. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken to ensure that this strategy does not impact adversely on any of the equality strands and highlights positively where this strategy helps address the needs of particular groups.

### **8.4**

In Greater Norwich we have been developing the use of questionnaires to report back customers' experiences of using our homelessness services. We will develop the use of these so that they cover all aspects of our service and demonstrate where we have used customer feedback to improve services.

### **8.5**

We recognise that a strength of good customer service is delivering a consistent message to our customers in the services we deliver. We will work to ensure that all our policies are delivered consistently across Greater Norwich, providing the customer with responses that are clear, timely, accessible, transparent and relevant, providing a positive customer experience.

### **8.6**

There are now, within the GNHP area, an increasing number of service user and established voluntary organisation forums (that advocate for service users). The development of these groups is a valuable resource for Greater Norwich Home Options teams to tap into and provides an opportunity for direct or indirect customer feedback on the services we provide. We will build on our engagement with these groups in ensuring that the people who use our services help shape them for the future.

### **8.7**

As previously mentioned in the introduction to this strategy the housing options approach has transformed the way in which we deliver our services. Part of this approach is giving people information to help them make informed decisions. Recently there have been changes to housing benefit and local housing allowance made by central government. These changes have the potential to particularly affect low income households who are more likely to be at risk of homelessness. It will also make it far more challenging for those threatened with homelessness to access private sector housing. This is a tenure which has provided many customers with solutions to their housing problems. It is by no means certain that customers will be able to continue to access the private rented sector in the same numbers as they have in the past. We will work proactively to engage with our customers to advise them of how these and other changes may affect them and provide them with routes of where they can go to seek further help and advice.

## STRATEGIC AIM 3

### Maximising resources and effective partnership working

<b>Action Points</b> <b>We will:</b>	
3A	Continue ongoing development of front-line staff of all agencies working with homeless and vulnerably housed people
3B	Actively seek engagement with key services and partners who could assist with homelessness prevention
3C	Share resources and learning from good practice
3D	Review Greater Norwich Sub-regional homelessness protocol

## 9. Context

The successes of the last strategy would not have been possible without the strength of partnership working that exists between the three local authorities and other public sector organisations in the Greater Norwich Housing Partnership. We need to build on this and look to share further our expertise and resources. By having this strong partnership we are able to deliver more focussed and cost effective services at the frontline.

### 9.1

Preventing homelessness can remove the need for other costly interventions. The housing options teams in Greater Norwich have this aim at the forefront of their service delivery. We need to ensure that the strategic aims and objectives of the Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy 2011 -14 are included in the Community Plan's of the three districts in the sub-region.

### 9.2

In a time when resources are likely to be scarcer it is imperative that we use what resources we have effectively. We need to explore ways in which we can support our partners within the GNHP. This does not always necessarily mean financial support paid directly but can be about more effective use of resources such as office space, training and the time given by staff.

### 9.3

A current five year lottery funded scheme (NCAN - Norfolk Community Advice Network) is designed to strengthen and revive the existing network of 40 social welfare legal advice providers from the voluntary, statutory and private sector in Norfolk. The aims of the project are to:

- Build a strong, effective and inclusive network of advice agencies in Norfolk



- Improve the planning and resourcing of social welfare advice, information, advocacy and representation to meet the needs of Norfolk residents, particularly those who would otherwise face real disadvantage.
- Improve and maintain the quality of the social welfare advice, information, advocacy and representation delivered in Norfolk.
- Enhance the contribution made by advice agencies to strategic objectives both locally and nationally in the areas of social inclusion, tackling poverty and other disadvantage.

Often the people who are accessing these advice services have housing problems. The GNHP supports the work of the project and currently provides financial support to some of these agencies who support the objectives of preventing homelessness in the sub-region.

#### **9.4**

In order to widen our influence and the prevention agenda further we need to develop closer working relationships with those agencies that come into contact with people who are at risk or are homeless. By developing these links we will be able to provide referral points within these services so that people needing housing advice get the help they need in a timely manner.

#### **9.5**

The GNHP will be contributing to the county-wide exercise of benchmarking our homelessness services with other local authorities in Norfolk. This exercise will evaluate whether we are providing excellent, cost effective services that are customer focussed and areas where we can improve further. Good practice and learning can be identified as a result of this exercise and will mean that we have services that are not inward looking but look further than our existing partnerships.

#### **9.6**

The housing options teams agreed an operational protocol in 2007. Customers who require housing advice, homelessness prevention services and homelessness services, approach one or more of the local authorities' teams and should receive the same level of service from each. Sometimes the customers are shared or, occasionally, they don't have a local connection with the local authority they present to.

The operational protocol aims to guide staff actions and interactions with customers, where they have more than one, or a different, connection. This should enhance the customer experience, reduce customer travel and repetition and promote good working relationships.

This protocol is due to be evaluated and refreshed,

#### **9.7**

If the Localism Bill gives local authorities the legal ability to discharge the homelessness duty into the private rented sector, we will need to consider how best

to achieve this, ensuring that tenancies are affordable, good quality and suitable. We will aim to be consistent across the sub-region.

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## **STRATEGIC AIM 4**

**Provide a wide range of sustainable housing solutions to people at risk of being homeless**

<b>Action Points</b> <b>We will:</b>	
4A	Review Home Options policy to maximise use of existing stock through innovative solutions
4B	Improve pathways into housing for customers with accessibility needs.
4C	Improve access to the Private rented sector

### **10. Context**

The current limited supply of affordable, good quality housing places pressure on the housing authorities to find sustainable solutions to households in housing need. The demand is likely to continue and we, therefore, need to ensure that we use existing stock in the private and social rented sector in the most effective way, enabling people to access all types of tenure. Changes to benefit regulations are likely to make finding suitable long-term solutions for people even more challenging.

#### **10.1**

Since the introduction of Home Options in November 2007 a sub-regional allocations policy has been in existence. The GNHP has constantly kept the policy under review in making sure that it creates an environment where applicants can benefit in finding the right housing solutions. Further work has been identified in trying to tackle the issue of downsizing and under occupation within social rented housing and the role the allocations policy may have in helping free up under occupied housing. A comparative analysis of other successful schemes will be carried out to make sure that we utilise this tool in helping make best use of stock and helping address housing need. We will also continue to explore further ways we can promote existing schemes such as the Housing Exchange website that helps find housing for people that already have homes in the social rented sector.

#### **10.2**

We recognise that in order for people to remain in their homes the properties need to be suitable for their individual long term needs. We will work with the Home Options Operational and Accessing Home Options Group in looking at ways in which we can make matches between adapted properties and those who are in need. We will explore innovative solutions across our local authority boundaries so that we use the limited resources we have at our disposal the most effectively.

#### **10.3**

In Greater Norwich we have increased the use of the private rented sector in a number of ways through:

- Providing those at risk or those threatened with homelessness with rent deposits

- Private rented sector leasing schemes available across the sub-region
- A Landlord Accreditation Scheme, which sets a minimum standard of accommodation management for landlords to adhere to.
- Norwich City Council's LEAP scheme, successfully links training and employment to private sector tenancies in Norwich
- Managing a website that provides support and information for landlords and prospective private rented sector tenants ([www.propertyinfopoint.co.uk](http://www.propertyinfopoint.co.uk)).

Developing access to the private rented sector is still a recognised area for growth and provides people at risk of homelessness with an alternative option than renting in the social sector. We need to make sure that those in need of housing have the ability to access this valuable resource by a variety of means. Further work also needs to be carried out with landlords to encourage them to take people who are homeless and may have support needs.

#### **10.4**

Within the GNHP we have a limited supply of temporary accommodation that provides housing for people who have applied as homeless to the local authority. We need to be able to use this resource as effectively as possible and we will map our properties and look at ways in which we can share these across our boundaries.

## **11. Taking the Homelessness Strategy forward**

### **11.1 Monitoring**

This strategy and its action plan will be monitored by the Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy Steering and Operational Groups. The GNHP Strategic lead officers of the three district councils will have key monitoring roles and will regularly update elected members and partners on the progress of the strategy.

The above groups and individuals will report back on the progress to a variety of forums that fall under the umbrella of the GNHP, most notably the Greater Norwich Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group and the GNHP policy group.

By effectively monitoring this strategy and action plan we will be best placed to adapt and respond to any challenges that take during the life of the strategy.

### **11.2 Equality and Diversity**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this strategy to evaluate whether it has any adverse impact on any group of people within the six equality strands.

### **11.3 Scrutiny and Accountability**

The sub-regional GNHP strategic lead officers will be ultimately responsible for the work that is carried out by this strategy and its action plan.

### **11.4 Endorsement**

This strategy has been endorsed by the following groups and organisations:

GNHP policy group  
Broadland District Council  
Norwich City Council  
South Norfolk Council

# The Greater Norwich Housing Partnership

## Who We Are

The Greater Norwich Housing Partnership (GNHP) formed in order to both recognise and formalise the close working arrangement between Broadland District Council, Norwich City Council, South Norfolk District Council and the supporting agencies that carry out essential work within their boundaries.

The Councils who make up the GNHP provide a number of frameworks against which partners can develop initiatives, this helps to provide a consistent service across the three authorities.

The willingness to work collaboratively has been essential to the success of the Partnership. Our supporting organisations include:

- Anchor Trust
- Broadland District Council
- Broadland Housing Group
- Circle Anglia Housing Group
- Cotman Housing Association
- Eastern Landlords Association
- Emmaus
- Flagship Housing Group
- Genesis Housing
- The Guinness Trust
- Habinteg Housing Association
- Hanover Housing Group
- Hastoe Housing Association
- Home Group
- Julian Housing
- Lovell Homes
- Move On East
- Norfolk Housing Alliance
- Norfolk Offender Accommodation Forum
- Shelter
- Solo Housing
- South Norfolk Council
- St Edmunds Society
- St. Martins Housing Trust
- Genesis
- Stonham Homestay
- Victory Housing Trust
- Norfolk County Council
- Norfolk County Council Children Services
- Norfolk County Council Community Services
- Norfolk Drug and Alcohol Partnership
- Norfolk Probation Service
- Norfolk YMCA
- Norfolk Youth Offending Team
- Orbit Housing Group
- Orwell Housing Association
- Places For People Group
- Saffron Housing Trust
- Salvation Army
- Space East
- Wherry Housing Association



## **How to complete an EqlA Screening Form**

**Step 1:** Please provide the name of the policy alongside the name of the person completing the assessment and the date. This provides an essential audit trail for the Corporate Equalities Group.

**Step 2: The equality strands.** There are six protected equality strands that you must consider when filling out a screening form:

- Women/Men
- Transgender people
- Black and minority ethnic people (including gypsies and travelers)
- Young people and children
- Older people
- People with disabilities (including learning disabilities and mental health problems)
- Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals
- People from different faith groups

These groups are all protected under Broadland District Council's Single Equality Scheme. In addition, the form also asks you to consider people living within very rural communities as this can be a major factor that contributes to inequality of access to transport or services for many residents in the District.

### **Checklist for each equality strand – is your EqlA initial assessment FAIR?**

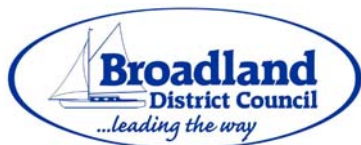
- What groups is the policy directly benefiting and how?
- What groups is the policy potentially excluding and how?
- Is there a way to extend the positive benefit to excluded groups?
- Or, is the negative benefit unintentional and unavoidable – if so the positives may well outweigh the negatives?

**Step 3: The equalities table.** The main objective of the table is to ensure you consider all the potential positive and negative impacts of your policy on each of the equality strands.

Working through each of the boxes on the electronic template, consider the potential impacts of your work beginning with the positives. Outline who will be the main beneficiaries of the strategy/policy/projects and in what way; for example does it meet the needs of a particular group? Will it positively benefit an equality target group, or improve relations between groups, or promote equal opportunities generally? You must also use the table provided to indicate where you think that the strategy, policy/project could have a negative impact on any of the equality target groups and write brief reason for your decision.

### ***A working example...***

A planning policy to restrict the number of car spaces in new housing developments in order to increase the use of public transport, would have a negative impact on disabled people with mobility problems who may find public transport inaccessible or who are reliant on cars. The impact can be improved by providing dedicated parking spaces for disabled people in the development.



An Anti-social Behaviour Policy may intentionally negatively impact on children if their family is evicted due to their own or their parent's anti-social behaviour. Ensuring that eviction is only used as a last resort and that communication is managed well through out the process will help to minimise the impact.

**Step 4: Rating impacts.** Three factors should be considered in assessing the level of negative impact:

- The likely impact on individuals and the extent of that impact (How likely is it in practice? How many people - or what proportion of a group - will be affected? Will the impact be lasting? Will it have a significant impact on people's lives, or is the impact minor and short-lived?)
- The risk to the Council if the impact occurs (consider political significance, media interest, integration and integrity of the Vision, strategies and policies, previous risk assessment results)
- The ease with which the impact could be minimised or removed and the expense and resources required to do so.

The overall impact should be considered 'high' if just one of these factors is a strong likelihood. If any negative impact is rated as 'high' you must proceed to full assessment.

**Step 5: Legal** –If you are unsure of whether the strategy, policy or project is within the law, you should contact Legal Services to check before continuing.

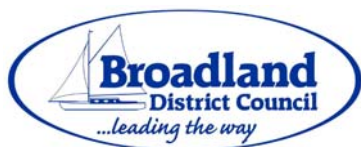
**Step 6: The outcome.** When you have completed the form one of three results will have been reached:

1. The project team will have clarified that the strategy, policy or project does not discriminate or have a negative impact on any of the equality target groups, it may, in fact, promote equality. No further action is needed at present.
2. You will have clarified that there could potentially be a negative impact but that the impact is intended and legal and of low impact. The strategy, policy or project may be adapted to minimise the impact, or actions may be outlined that could promote equality.
3. You have clarified that there is possible negative impact on one or more equality target groups and that impact may be illegal, not intentional, or likely to have a high impact on individuals or groups (a negative rating weighted as high). Under these circumstances, the project lead should complete Section 2 of the EQIA form.

**If you have identified that you do not need to carry out Section 2 of the EQIA please forward your completed Screening Form onto the Policy Department at [policy@broadland.gov.uk](mailto:policy@broadland.gov.uk).**

**If any you have identified that your policy/project needs to be fully assessed please proceed by completing the full assessment using the following guidance.**





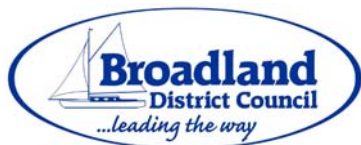
## **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA): Screening Template**

Please refer to guidance document when filling out this form

Policy being evaluated: Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy      Date: 13 June 2011

Name of evaluator: John Dell

Equality Strand	Positive Impact please provide evidence of each point	Negative Impact please provide evidence of each point	Rating of negative impact (low, medium or high)
<b>Age</b> – Older people Children & young people	The policy promotes a linked strategy for housing specifically for 'Routes to Independence' for 14-25 year olds. Although the scheme would exclude older people, the overall strategy provides information for all ages. The strategy makes reference to a range of ways that will be used to ensure accessibility.	None	N/A
<b>Disability</b> – Physical, sensory, learning or mental health.	The strategy makes reference to ensuring the housing service is accessible to everyone, including those with mental health and wellbeing needs. The strategy makes reference to a range of ways that will be used to ensure accessibility.	None	N/A
<b>Religion</b> – any religion represented in Broadland or people with no stated belief	None	None	N/A
<b>Race</b> – BME groups or gypsies and travelers etc	The strategy makes reference to a range of ways that will be used to ensure accessibility including alternative language literature.	None	N/A
<b>Sexual Orientation</b> - gay, lesbian and bi- sexual residents of Broadland	None	None	N/A
<b>Gender</b> – males, females and transgender residents	None	None	N/A
<b>Rural communities</b> – consider transport and economic barriers for people in rural areas	The strategy makes reference to a range of ways that will be used to ensure accessibility.	None	N/A



There may be some negative impacts of your policy which are unavoidable and unintentional and are outweighed by the positive impacts; in this case you may weight them 'low'. If the answer to any of the above is 'negative' and scored as high in terms of impact then a full assessment needs to be completed to avoid or mitigate the potential adverse impact.

**Comments:** e.g. How have you accommodated the points raised above in the development of your policy? How have you changed your policy to mitigate against the negative impacts?

We have stated at the very beginning of the strategy in our vision that the Partners of GNHP aim to prevent and respond to homelessness by ensuring the provision of a range of effective, targeted services that are responsive to the needs of vulnerable people. Vulnerability and need are defined within the Housing Act 1996 Part VII (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). The strategy has been couched in general terms both to ensure the inclusiveness of all the equality strands and to avoid an emphasis on one group or strand. Reference is made to the strategic framework within which the strategy sits and the linkages to this strategy. The strategy was widely consulted on both publicly and within the Greater Norwich Housing Partnership (a list of these organisation is on page 28). The process is ongoing and will be used to feed in to the 'live' document - the Action Plan. One of the key tasks in the strategy is to consult partners and service users on our strengths and weaknesses to improve our services.

The delivery of the strategy and action plan will be monitored by the GN Homelessness Strategy Steering and Operational Groups. These will report back to a variety of GN Forums including the GN Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group and the GNHP Policy Group.

Does this policy need to be referred for a full assessment?

YES ☐

NO ☐

**Signed by evaluator:**

**Signed by responsible head of department:**

Please send your completed forms to Policy Unit ([policy@broadland.gov.uk](mailto:policy@broadland.gov.uk)) to be reviewed and stored in accordance with our legal duty. You may also wish to contact the Policy Unit if at any time you need assistance filling in your initial or full assessment.