

Eastbourne Borough Council

Enhanced Housing Options – Kick Start Action Plan

Introduction and aims

Eastbourne Borough Council is one of five District and Borough local authorities within East Sussex. The Borough has a population of 95,598 in around 44,425 households. Since 1991, the population has grown by 6.4 per cent compared to the national average of 2.7 per cent. Over 26 per cent of the population are of pension age compared to a national average of 16 per cent but the number of younger households is increasing.

Employment is largely within the service and tourism sectors. Many jobs are low paid and the high proportion of low-income households and dependence on seasonal work means that many rely on housing benefits and other services to help with housing and housing costs. Average incomes are below both national and regional averages, with 28.8% of the population having an average income of below £10,000 and 73.5% of local people earning less than £25,000. This can lead to difficulties for many people accessing suitable housing they can afford.

8% of homes are rented from the council and 5% from Housing Associations. It is estimated that, of the 87% in the private sector, around 68% are owner occupied and 19% are rented. The proportion of privately rented housing has risen since the 2001 Census and there are strong indications that this increase has accelerated in the last year.

Housing Services provided personal housing advice to 1,739 households in 2007/8 and intervened successfully to prevent 319 households from becoming homeless. We assessed 383 homelessness applications and accepted a duty to 166 households. We arranged temporary accommodation for 300 homeless households and provided housing-related support for 68 vulnerable households. We also enabled 76 households to access a home in the private sector through a deposit bond or loan.

There are currently 4,209 households on the Council's Housing Register (29th January 2009), 9.5% of all households in Eastbourne. Of these, 2,700 have an identified housing need and a local connection with Eastbourne. This compares with just 434 council and other social homes let to households on the council's housing register in 2007/8. The number of properties becoming vacant is very low compared with the level of need and at the end of January 2009 146 households had been on the Register for more than 10 years; 444 others had been on the Register for more than 5 years; and 1,186 others for more than 2 years.

There has been a reduction in the number of social homes becoming vacant over the last few months. The Council urgently needs to explore alternative housing solutions for the majority of people in housing need whose needs cannot be met through our HomeChoice lettings scheme.

In common with many local authorities we have seen a reduction in the number of households making homeless applications in the years from 2003/4 when we dealt with 524 applications to 2007 when we dealt with just 383 applications. This has been largely the result of work done to prevent people becoming homeless. Our target for 2008/9 is to prevent 200 households from becoming homeless.

However, we have now begun to see the number of homeless applications rise again. Currently, the rate of accepted homeless households per 1000 population is the highest amongst the Council's benchmarking group and is higher even than in Brighton & Hove, the nearest city to Eastbourne on the south coast.

Similarly following some early successes reducing the number of people in temporary accommodation from 285 in December 2004 to 144 by December 2005, we have struggled to reduce this any further.

We are monitoring the impact of the credit crunch in Eastbourne. Early figures show that:

- In quarter 3 in 2008 compared to 2007, Eastbourne Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) enquiries increased by 14% with a total of 2,478 enquiries.
- The number of residents unemployed and claiming benefits increased significantly, and whilst the numbers of jobs available through Jobcentre Plus has increased, the number of people needing employment outweighs this increase
- The number of homes bought and sold has dropped by 40% (comparing January 2008 and January 2009)
- Repossession Actions are increasing

Links to other Strategies

High demand for housing is a major issue in East Sussex. Targets in the Local Area Agreement include NI 154 - net additional homes provided; NI 155 - number of affordable homes delivered; NI 156 - number of households in temporary accommodation; NI 159 - supply of ready to develop housing sites; and NI 142 - the number of people supported to maintain independent living.

Eastbourne developed a new Housing Strategy in 2008. One of the issues identified in consultation was the link between housing and the economy and the high proportion of social housing tenants dependent on benefits. This, along with our concern at the level of homelessness in Eastbourne, was our motivation in applying for funding from the Trailblazer programme.

Our initial bid was developed in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and with Lewes District Council and Wealden District Council, our nearest neighbours, and the East Sussex Supporting People Team.

Our aims

Our key aim was to demonstrate what could be done by a fairly typical Borough authority within the South East within a two-tier structure and with limited resources. Our initial bid for Enhanced Housing Options funding through the Trailblazer programme was for £212,000 towards the cost of an expanded options service. We have been awarded Kickstart funding of £80,000 to be spent over 2 years from April 2009 and will use this to appoint a Housing Options Development Manager.

We will use the funding to expand the range of housing options services we are able to offer customers and to develop links with Jobcentre Plus and other partners to help housing customers engage with training and employment.

Current housing options

We currently offer

- A Housing Options advice service based in our Customer Contact Centre
- Deposit loans or Bonds to people who are in priority need who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
- Access to mediation services
- Access to housing support
- Presentations to schools in Eastbourne and Wealden on the realities of finding a home and homelessness

Making the Housing Options toolkit work harder

We have focused particularly on training and information resources, expanding the range of ways in which customers can access services, and using partnerships to improve awareness of housing options and services.

With the new funding we will:

- Establish a more streamlined Housing Options advice service linked with the Youth Accommodation Advice Service and Eastbourne Advice agency
- Develop training and information on housing options for our own staff, those in Benefit Services and the Customer Contact Centre, Jobcentre staff, housing support providers and other front-line staff, such as social services and training providers
- Improve resources and access to services for customers including directories of services, on-line enquiry services and outreach services
- Establish effective working links with Jobcentre Plus and their partners and service providers and develop sign-posting services to encourage and assist

housing customers to access job opportunities and pre-employment training and support

- Contribute to Eastbourne's Credit Crunch Task Group and to the Devonshire multi-agency working group focusing on reducing the proportion of people on out of work benefits in Eastbourne's most deprived ward
- Establish close working relationships with the new Eastbourne, Lewes and Wealden housing support service providers to ensure effective links are developed with employment and training providers.

Our targets and action plan

Our targets are focused primarily on improving the experience of housing customers, reducing the need for people to make appointments for advice services or visit the Customer Contact Centre where this could be avoided. Preventing and relieving homelessness remains critical. Currently this is focused specifically on people with a priority need. However, we are looking at opportunities in the future to extend a fuller range of housing options to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness who do not have a priority need. Improvements to information and advice services and web-based services are designed to benefit all potential customers. We will also be developing a home-visiting service aimed at people with housing needs on our Housing Waiting List who are unlikely to be re-housed through our HomeChoice lettings schemes for a number of years but whose needs could be met through the private market.

The Housing Options Plus service

We have also included targets to help us monitor the impact of our services and links with Jobcentre Plus and their partners on employment and training outcomes. Current economic conditions make these targets particularly challenging but we have included them to help us focus on ways of improving the employment opportunities of our customers, maximising their incomes and therefore increasing their chances of staying in their current housing for as long as this suits them or moving onto suitable housing as their needs change in the future.

Working in partnership

Eastbourne has a well-established Housing Partnership which reports to the Eastbourne Strategic Partnership.

The Housing Partnership draws its members from a Housing Forum (primarily agencies working with homeless people); the Eastbourne Housing Development Partnership; the Housing Management Forum (social landlords); the Eastbourne branch of the National Landlords Association; the Supporting People team and the East Sussex Supported Housing Providers Forum; and Eastbourne Borough Council.

Our key partners in this particular project are:

- Eastbourne Borough Council Benefits Service, Customer Contact Centre, and Private Housing team
- Devonshire multi-agency group
- Eastbourne Credit Crunch task group
- Eastbourne Jobcentre Plus and partner contractors and service providers
- Housing support commissioners and providers and, specifically, Lewes District Council and Wealden District Council

Managing the project

The project will be overseen by the Council's Housing Services Manager within the Council's Housing, Health and Community Services Department. We will establish quarterly meetings with key partners to plan work and review progress. We plan to establish a 'virtual steering group' to oversee the project and monitor progress.

Exit Strategy

In the longer term our aim is to identify what a relatively small local authority in a two-tier structure can achieve through effective partnerships and with limited resources. It is our intention to mainstream the work begun with the Kickstart funding.

Key Contacts:

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Performance Indicators:

NI = National Indicator

EHO = Enhanced Housing Options service (led by Housing Options Development Coordinator)

P1E = Homelessness data submitted to CLG

| Service outcomes | Measure | Target (2 year) | Quarterly data | | | |
|-------------------|--|---|---|--|--|--|
| NI 14 | Reduction in avoidable housing options contacts at CCC / by phone (NI14) <i>Source: annual EBC sample</i> | Baseline: 17.7% 4 week sample Jan 09 Target: 13.7% Jan 11 | Annual sampling Jan 2010: Jan 2011: | | | |
| NI 153 | % of working age people on out of work benefits in Devonshire <i>Source: NOMIS key out of work benefits*</i> | Baseline: Jan 09 – 18.5% Target: 2% reduction | | | | |
| EHO1 | Contribute to reduction in percentage of people presenting to Housing Options service who need an appointment to resolve housing queries | Baseline: 38.8% Oct - Dec 08 38.8% Target: 10% | | | | |
| P1E | Increase in number of people prevented from becoming homeless | Baseline: 64 Oct - Dec 08 Target: + 10% | | | | |
| P1E | Increase in number of people where homelessness was relieved | Baseline: 4 Oct - Dec 08 Target: + 10% | | | | |
| EHO2 | Increase in number of people accessing housing options information through website (all users of Find a Home) | Baseline: 1693 Oct – Dec 08 Target: + 10% | | | | |
| EHO3 | % of customers responding to website feedback survey who said web information was helpful to them | Baseline: nil Target: 80% | | | | |
| EHO4 / JCP | # of customers whose housing needs were met* through outreach events and home visits | Baseline: nil Target: 40 | | | | |

| Service targets | | Annual target | Quarterly data | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|----------------|--|--|--|
| EHO5 / JCP | # of housing options customers who took up Pathways to Work and other pre-employment programmes or support | Baseline: nil Target: 20 | | | | |
| EHO6 | Deliver standard housing options and homelessness prevention training to all newly recruited housing options staff within 1 month | Baseline: nil Target: 100% | | | | |
| EHO7 | Deliver desk top procedure manuals to all housing needs and options staff | Baseline: nil Target: 100% | | | | |
| EHO8 | Deliver basic housing options awareness training sessions to Jobcentre and Pathways to Work staff | Baseline: nil Target: 2 p.a. | | | | |
| EHO9 | Deliver basic housing options awareness training sessions to Customer Contact Centre staff | Baseline: nil Target: 2 p.a. | | | | |
| EHO10 | Deliver basic housing options awareness training sessions to social services staff | Baseline: nil Target: 2 p.a. | | | | |
| EHO11/JCP | Deliver updates on Benefits and services to claimants to all Housing Needs Staff | Baseline: nil Target: 2 p.a. | | | | |
| EHO12 | # home visits to Housing Register applicants offering additional housing options advice and assistance | Baseline: nil Target: 10 p.a. from October '10 | | | | |
| EHO13/JCP | # people given housing options advice and assistance through mobile unit and outreach events | Baseline: nil Target: 20 p.a. from March '10 | | | | |
| EHO14 | # people using on-line Housing Options service | Baseline: nil Target: 20 p.a. from June '10 | | | | |

Sources and definitions:

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|-----------|---|
| NI14 | Eastbourne Borough Council annual 4 week sample |
| NI153 | Key out of work benefits: NOMIS report from DWP for Devonshire ward – consists of the groups: job seekers, incapacity benefits, lone parents and others on income related benefits. Note: The percentage figures show the number of benefit claimants as a proportion of resident working-age people. Note: this measure will be affected by broader economic and employment climate and will not be a direct reflection of work done through this project. |
| EH01 | percentage of people presenting to Housing Options service who need an appointment to resolve housing queries – % of customers listed on Allocations Preventions spreadsheet shown as requiring Options appointment |
| P1E | # households prevented/ relieved from homelessness as P1E return |
| EH02 | # users (new and repeat) from Site Analyze report (via web support team) recorded using pages under Find a Home |
| EH03 – 14 | Recording to be established by Housing Options Development Manager |
| EH04 | 'housing needs met' = assisted to stay in their current housing if suitable or assisted to secure housing suitable to their needs through outreach activities and new information and advice services. Note this is different from EH013 which measures the number of people given advice and assistance. EH04 measures outcomes and will require follow-up contact to establish these. |

Eastbourne Borough Council

Enhanced Housing Options – Kick Start Action Plan

(Note: the lead officer for this Action Plan is the Housing Options Development Manager)

| Priority | Objective | Specific tasks | Time Frame | Outcomes |
|----------|--|--|-----------------------|--|
| High | Establish triage system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review pilot Restructure service Develop procedures Evaluate impact | June 09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer Contact Staff scripts Team received training in procedures Monitoring established |
| High | Deliver Enhanced Housing Options training programme | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop awareness training for partner agencies Set up shadowing with JCP and Benefits staff Define roles and responsibilities in Housing Needs team Develop standard training and information pack for housing options staff | Oct 09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentations to JCP, Pathways to Work and social care staff All housing options staff spent a day each shadowing JCP staff and Benefits staff Referral, recording and monitoring procedures established Training Pack produced |
| High | Develop policies and protocols with Benefits Service to prevent homelessness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess training needs of Benefits and Options staff Develop training programme Establish process for targeting Discretionary Housing Benefit | Dec 09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verification training to all staff 6-monthly updates on Benefits and Housing Options issues to all front line staff Weekly meetings to assess DHP applications |
| High | Develop mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify recording and monitoring procedures Establish reporting cycle Publicise impact of service | June 09 Dec 09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports to staff, Members and stakeholders Publicity to customers about successes |

| | of service | | | |
|----------|---|--|------------|--|
| Priority | Objective | Specific tasks | Time Frame | Outcomes |
| Medium | Develop Enhanced Housing Options information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collate options information • Consult with service users • Draft information materials • Develop and promote website | Dec 09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing options customer packs • Directory of services • Poster and leaflets for CCC • Improved web pages on options |
| Medium | Identify potential match funding for EHO work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess impact on customers • Assess impact on wider staffing requirements • Evaluate potential for mainstreaming • Identify sources of income | June 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Plan for ongoing development of Housing Options resources and services • Budget and funding secured for any staff required |
| Medium | Expand self-service options through website | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research good practice • Identify improvements • Develop on-line services | June 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web-based solutions • FAQs on website • Accredited private landlords vacancy advertising service |
| Medium | Develop outreach services for people unable to access Customer Contact Centre | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan staffing, resources and venues for mobile sessions • Plan staffing, resources and venue for annual event • Promote events • Evaluate impact | Mar 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile advice sessions with JCP • Annual event for residents • Monitoring information on use of services and outcomes |
| Medium | Develop Home Visiting service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop information and options pack for visits • Identify priority customers with Special Needs HO, Support services and Independent Living Adviser • Establish procedures for appointments, recording, and monitoring • Identify Health and Safety issues | Oct 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on outcomes of choice based lettings bids • Information on alternative options • Procedures for visiting staff and referrals from other staff • Health and Safety risk assessment • Training on lone-working delivered to all visiting staff • Links established with other staff visiting housing customers (support |

| | | | | and Independent Living) |
|----------|--|---|-----------------------|--|
| Priority | Objective | Specific tasks | Time Frame | Outcomes |
| Low | Promote training, courses, pre-employment schemes; and job opportunities to housing options customers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish links with college; Pathways to Work contractors; and local pre-employment training providers and employers Develop sign-posting and information on moving into employment | Dec 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> College prospectuses given out Information leaflets for housing customers on pre-employment options Monitoring information on sign-posting, referrals and outcomes |
| Low | Work in multi-agency group to encourage 'hard to engage' residents in Devonshire to take up training or employment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify contribution Enhanced Housing Options service can make to aims Identify ways of targeting services to people in Devonshire ward | Ongoing from April 09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outreach session in Devonshire Options information aimed at Devonshire residents Home visits to Devonshire residents with urgent housing needs |
| Low | Engage with Credit Crunch Task Group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify potential contribution of Enhanced Housing Options service to reducing impact of economic downturn Promote use of Credit Union | Ongoing from April 09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media coverage on managing financial problems Poster for individuals and businesses Strategy to attract East Sussex savers to Credit Union |