

# Swindon Borough Council and NHS Swindon Diversity Impact Assessment for the Homelessness Strategy for Swindon 2015

## 1 What's it about?

Refer to equality duties

What's it there for? What's it set up to deliver? What's the proposed change? What do you want to achieve?

The Homelessness Strategy sets out our priorities for improving Homelessness Services in Swindon over the next five years.

The Homelessness Service in Swindon operates in line with statutory requirements set out in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002, and informed by case law. The service also operates in line best practice as set out by Government in their document *Making Every Contact Count; A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness* (DCLG August 2012).

The service is required to ensure that housing advice is freely available to people in the district. If in the course of giving that advice the Council has grounds to believe that a person is at risk of homelessness the Homelessness Team has authority to conduct investigations into that person's circumstances to see if they are in fact homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days, that they are eligible for assistance and they are in a priority group for assistance. If people meet this criteria emergency accommodation may be offered pending further investigations into the cause of the homelessness and whether the person has a local connection to the Borough.

The previous Homelessness Strategy successfully set out to shift the emphasis on our legal duty to respond to households who are homeless to a service geared to preventing homelessness. To achieve that the Council makes greater use of private rented housing to ensure that people do not become homeless.

What potential is there to meet the equality duties?

Homelessness services are important to meeting our equality duties because so many of the people the Council assists are vulnerable, and belong to groups prescribed in the equality legislation.

What equality benefits does it create? (for people, organisation etc...)

There are well proven links between housing and health so the provision of good quality housing has a major role in improving people's life outcomes.

What are the barriers to meeting this potential?

Lack of supply of housing is a particular difficulty, as well as the support services people need to live independently. People at risk of social exclusion often need to develop skills to ensure that they can successfully maintain a home.

## 2 Who's it for?

Refer to equality groups

Who is expected to benefit or use the service (internal/external)?

Beneficiaries of the service include people in housing need in Swindon.

Statutory and voluntary partners also benefit from good quality housing. The principal partners would be impacted upon by increased homelessness in the following areas:

Housing Costs  
Homelessness  
Health services costs  
Social services costs  
Crime costs  
Charitable costs

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What do you know about them (evidence)?

We have a reasonable amount of information on the household characteristics of people who use the homelessness service, however, due to the high volumes of applicants this is not always accurate and relies on applicants to inform us of their needs. The experience of the Housing Department, confirmed by other Housing agencies, is that vulnerable people are unlikely to give a full disclosure of the issues they face. For example, people experiencing mental health crises have little insight at the time that they are unwell.

As with the overall housing data there is a significant proportion of people whose ethnic origin is unknown. However, there is wider data available that identifies ethnic minority households as being more likely to live in inadequate housing, and therefore being more likely to qualify for assistance with their housing. This is complicated by eligibility for assistance on grounds of immigration status, where the Council is not permitted to offer homelessness assistance to households without recourse to public funds.

The overall picture is largely unchanged, with the majority of households being accommodated due to having dependent children.

The most common cause of homelessness is the termination of tenancies by private sector landlords. This has changed over the past few years, and is driven by welfare reform and an improving housing market.

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Who is missing or may find it difficult to use the service?

The people most likely to miss out are households in inadequate housing, who have no or limited recourse to public funds.

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Do you know why?

The Council is prevented in law from assisting those households. There is also a reluctance to approach the Council for assistance where the landlord is part of the same community. More work is planned to understand this, but it appears to be particularly the case in Central Ward that households do not want to cause conflict within tightknit community groups.

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### 3 Impact

Refer to dimensions of equality and equality groups  
Show consideration of: age, disability, sex, transgender, marriage/civil partnership,  
maternity/pregnancy, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation  
and if appropriate: financial economic status, homelessness, political view

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Is there any potential or real issue which will stop some groups or people getting involved?  
(adverse impact)

The service is freely available, and accessibility is not considered to be an issue. Some households are choosing not to access the service as outlined above.

Conversations with interested groups also raised the issue that the Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual and Transgender community are at heightened risk of violence or exclusion by family, particularly at the time that they inform their families of their sexuality. A lack of accommodation for homeless people could exacerbate issues that these individuals experience.

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Is that reasonable? Can it be justified or mitigated?

Immigration legislation is clear on our duties in this area.

The Homelessness Service is working to increase availability of accommodation, and the Housing Strategy seeks to increase supply of housing in the wider market.

The Homelessness Service has undertaken mystery shopping exercises carried out by service user groups to ensure that the service is appropriately customer focussed.

There are specific sections of the homelessness legislation that cover people fleeing violence (in its widest sense), and while there is no proposal to have different thresholds for different applicants homelessness officers are aware of the equalities duties when carrying out their function.

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How will this service be successfully delivered to a diverse group of people? (positive impact)

The Homelessness Strategy aims in particular to improve outcomes for individuals with complex needs, as well as victims of domestic abuse.

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Is there any innovative thinking, working or technology that could improve delivery?

The Strategy contains a commitment to developing an innovative approach to partnership working to improve outcomes for people with complex needs.

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What consultation has taken place? How has the consultation influenced the service?

We have consulted with existing residents of Sussex Square (including the adjacent sheltered housing scheme) and the whole of the local community consisting of over 2000 households. The scheme design has been updated to reflect comments received.

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#### **4 So what?**

[Link to business planning process](#)

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What changes have you identified?

We have identified that the partnership arrangements for vulnerable people need to improve, and in particular for people with dual diagnoses for mental health problems combined with substance misuse issues. This has been a longstanding issue, but it is intended for the Homelessness Strategy to deliver improvements in this area.

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What will you do now and what will be included in future planning?

The Council intends to re-establish the Homelessness Forum to ensure delivery of the Strategy and promote improvements in services for homeless people in Swindon.

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When will this be reviewed?

Ongoing by the Homelessness Forum.

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How will success be measured?

Success will be the delivery of the action plan contained within the Strategy.

<b>For the record</b>	
Name of person leading this DIA: James Graham	Date completed: 25/11/15
Names of people involved in consideration of impact	
Name of director signing DIA: Michael Ash	Date signed

# Strategic Planning Framework - Diversity Impact Assessments

## 1 What's it about?

refer to equality duties

- What is it there for? What is it set up to deliver? What is the proposed change? What do you want to achieve?
- What potential is there to meet the equality duties?
- What equality benefits does it create?
- What are the barriers to meeting this potential?

## 2 Who's it for?

refer to equality groups

- Who is expected to benefit or use the service (internal/external)?
- What do you know about them (evidence)?
- Who is missing or may find it difficult to use the service?
- Do you know why?

## 3 Impact

refer to dimensions and equality groups

- Is there any potential or real issue which will stop some groups or people getting involved? (adverse impact)
- Is that reasonable? Can it be justified or mitigated?
- How will this service be successfully delivered to a diverse group of people? (positive impact)
- Is there any innovative thinking, working or technology that could improve delivery?
- What consultation has taken place? How has the consultation influenced the service?

## 4 So what?

- What changes have you identified?
- What will you do now and what will be included in future planning?
- When will this be reviewed?
- How will success be measured?
- Who is signing this off/taking responsibility?

## Considerations

### Our equality duties

1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
2. Advance equality of opportunity
3. Foster good relations

In the areas of age, disability, sex, transgender, marriage/civil partnership, maternity/pregnancy, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation.

Extended by SBC policy to include: financial or economic status, homelessness, political view.

### Dimensions of equality

How will the service affect the life chances of different groups?  
Consider how the service will impact

1. **Life expectancy**
2. **Physical security:** e.g. freedom from violence and physical and sexual abuse.
3. **Health and well-being:** e.g. access to high quality healthcare.
4. **Education:** e.g. being able to be creative, to acquire skills and qualifications, and having access to training and life-long learning.
5. **Standard of living:** e.g. being able to live with independence and security; and covering nutrition, clothing, housing, warmth, utilities, social services and transport.
6. **Productive and valued activities:** e.g. access to employment, a positive experience in the workplace, work/life balance, being able to care for others.
7. **Individual, family and social life:** e.g. self-development, having independence and equality in relationships and marriage.
8. **Participation, influence and voice:** e.g. participation in decision-making and democratic life.
9. **Identity, expression and self-respect:** e.g. freedom of belief and religion.
10. **Legal security:** e.g. equality and non-discrimination before the law and equal treatment within the criminal justice system.