

- 1.6 To attain the Gold Standard status, the service needs to meet a number of key commitments, including:
- The adoption of a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness, which has buy in across all local authority services
 - To work with local agencies to provide employment, education and training opportunities
 - To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
 - To adopt a local No Second Night Out Scheme to help to prevent new rough sleepers from becoming entrenched into a street lifestyle
- 1.7 The Gold Standard assists Councils to deliver the best possible homelessness and housing advice services and ensures that those facing the threat of losing their home get the best support possible.
- 1.8 The Gold Standard programme is free to use and currently participation is entirely voluntary. At present 28 authorities have achieved either a gold, silver or bronze status and a total of 57 authorities had completed the peer assessment element in 2015.
- 1.9 Engagement in the Gold Standard programme will assist local authorities to continue to deliver more efficient and cost-effective homelessness prevention services for all clients, not just families and priority need cases who would be owed a statutory duty.
- 1.10 The cost benefit arguments for developing prevention services, rather than relying on expensive and reactive emergency provision are clear.
- 1.11 Application for the Gold Standard is in two consecutive stages:

a. A Diagnostic Peer Review

Local Authorities form small cluster groups to peer review each other's front line homelessness services against detailed list of criteria that has been compiled by the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS).

b. Gold Standard Challenges

Once a score of 60% or above has been achieved in the peer review, local authorities are now able to work towards the second phase of achieving the Gold Standard. This will require the submission of evidence in support of the way a service meets the requirements of the ten Gold Standard challenges. These are listed in the background papers and each challenge has a detailed assessment criteria. Completing these challenges will be a joint endeavour by the Council and Newcastle Housing Advice teams.

Submissions are made in stages (usually three challenges per submission) and each will be assessed by an external advisory panel appointed by the NPSS.

2. Issues

- 2.1 A new Homelessness Strategy has been developed for the borough and is currently out for its final phase of public consultation. The strategy will be presented to the June Cabinet for final approval. The strategy identifies the various challenges of the Gold Standard and aligns them to our own strategic priorities. A relevant and current Homelessness Strategy is an essential part of the Gold Standard process.

2.2 The mini review process has identified that it is essential for the Council's new Homelessness Strategy to be adopted prior to any participation. The new Strategy has been developed following a thorough review of the homelessness issues in Newcastle. The Strategy and its priorities focus upon responding to the emerging needs for the Borough.

2.3 The mini review has identified that areas within the current service have both strengths and weaknesses. Where possible, interventions have been made to the service to deliver some 'quick wins' after the mini review exercise.

3. **Options Considered**

3.1 The Council could consider if to take a full and active role in the Gold Standard process with the relevant officers and elected members making themselves available to discuss Newcastle's Housing Advice and Homelessness service in the future with those undertaking the review.

3.2 Alternatively the Council could consider to not actively participate in the process but when appropriate utilises the online resources made available by the NPSS.

4. **Proposal and Reasons for Preferred Solution**

4.1 Officers recommend that the Council should take a full and active role in the Gold Standard Peer Review process and that senior officers of the Council and relevant elected members make themselves available to discuss Newcastle's Housing Advice and Homelessness service in the future with those undertaking the review.

4.2 That Members authorise relevant officers in liaison with the relevant Portfolio Holder to consider the recommendations from the review and to report these back to Cabinet in the context of the Housing and Homelessness Strategies action plans. Where these recommendations have resource issues requiring additional investment these will be subject to Cabinet consideration.

4.3 The review process gives local authorities a very clear and methodical mechanism to establish how their service is performing against a nationally recognised framework.

4.4 Areas of good practice and areas for improvement are clearly identifiable through the process.

4.5 Nationally, the outcomes of the peer reviews are supporting local authorities to develop business cases to ensure that front line provision is adequately resourced.

5. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

5.1 The provision of a homelessness and housing advice service enables the Council to prevent homelessness which assists in meeting the Corporate Priorities to provide a Clean, Safe and Sustainable Borough, a Borough of Opportunity, a Healthy Active Community and Becoming a Co-operative Council by delivering high quality community driven services.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 Local Authority obligations to homeless people are set out in statute and are the subject of a Code of Guidance.

6.2 The Council has a statutory duty to assist all persons who are homeless or threatened with homelessness under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended 2002) part 7 Homelessness.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 There are no direct equalities issues arising from this report but it is anticipated that the diversity of client service needs will be best achieved by the Council engaging in this peer review process.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 It is anticipated that as is the case with all review and evaluation processes there will be additional resource implications for staff and members; it is anticipated that this will be achieved by the re-prioritisation of existing work programmes.

8.2 Depending upon the outcome of the peer assessment and the recommendations post-review process, there may be the requirement for additional resources to implement service improvements. Where this is the case additional investment will be subject to further Cabinet consideration.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1 There are no major risks associated with this report.

10. **Key Decision Information**

10.1 This is not a key decision.

11. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

11.1 None.

12. **Background Papers**

12.1 Further information about the ten Gold Standard Challenges is available from the Housing Strategy team on request.

13. **Appendices**

13.1 Appendix 1 – a summary of the ten Gold Standard Challenges.