

A new Homelessness Charter for Gateshead

1.0 Introduction

Campbell Tickell were asked to support the council with the development of a new Homelessness Charter for Gateshead.

Homelessness Charters are an increasingly popular method of capturing and galvanising the energy and interest of residents, businesses, landlords, charities, faith groups and other partners in working with the council on its aim to prevent and end homelessness. Unlike more detailed plans and strategies, a Charter can be more accessible, more interactive, and used as a 'call to action'. It can also provide a focal point for offers of help, and/or for people to find out more about local efforts to tackle homelessness. The launch of a Homelessness Charter in an area can often bring welcome attention to the issue, whilst also creating new partnerships and interest.

The work undertaken by Campbell Tickell involved:

- Reviewing existing Charters from across England (including Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Leicester, Exeter, Colchester, Southwark, and Bournemouth),
- Drafting the text and pledges and working with internal and external stakeholders to refine them,
- Testing the suggested pledges with homeless people from across various local homelessness services, and:
- Determining the best way of underpinning the Charter's promises so that anyone engaging with it can be sure of a response that matches their desire for more information or wish to be involved.

Homelessness Charters range in content and design from 8 page densely written statements of planned actions (essentially narrative plans) to very high level and very short statements of intent.

Almost all of them allow people engaging with the Charter to sign up to support it, usually by filling in a form (like an online petition) or sending an email and joining a mailing list.

More than half of those reviewed were web-based and occupy a landing page and, underneath that, a page of content and links if people want to offer support. The remainder were in the form of a downloadable pdf or Word document of between 1- 6 pages.

There are advantages to a shorter Homelessness Charter, as people might find it easy to engage with, but just stating a desire to end homelessness – without any further information about the council's aims and intentions – might leave people wondering what commitment the council and its partners were actually making to achieve the stated goal. On the other side, those consulted did not want a 6 page narrative which was inaccessible in language, not engaging to a wider audience who were not already well versed in the detail, and which would quickly go out of date as strategic priorities shifted or planned actions were superseded.

The suggested format set out below is reflective of stakeholder and service user feedback. Subject to the Board's feedback and approval, the Charter could be in place fairly quickly – it simply requires some web and design team input. An early launch event might draw attention in a helpful way to the wider work the council and its partners are doing to develop a new Homeless and Rough Sleeping

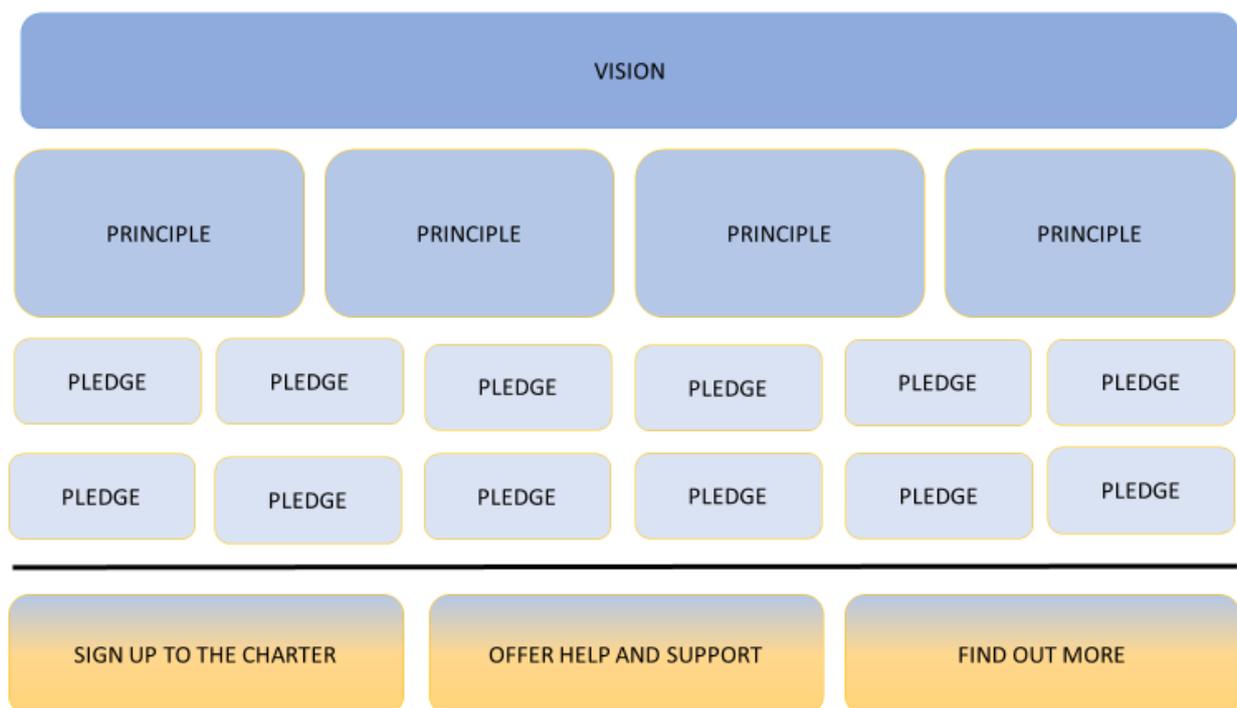
Strategy whilst also generating some useful partnerships and support for the intended goal of preventing and ending homelessness in all its forms.

2.0 The Gateshead Homelessness Charter

The Gateshead Charter is accessible, and easy to engage with, but it also contains a clear statement of intent, values and commitments ('pledges') of sufficient detail that people reading it would be clear on what the council and its partners understood to be the most important factors in preventing and ending homelessness.

2.1 Basic Architecture

As the diagram below shows, the architecture of the Charter is simple and logical. A statement of vision and values will be underpinned by 12 detailed pledges. Sited on both the landing page and the page detailing the pledges, will be an opportunity for anyone viewing the Charter to click through to sign up to supporting the Charter, find out more about the issue and/or offer help or support. The signing up process will enable supporters to be identified as individuals, agencies or businesses.



2.2 Landing page

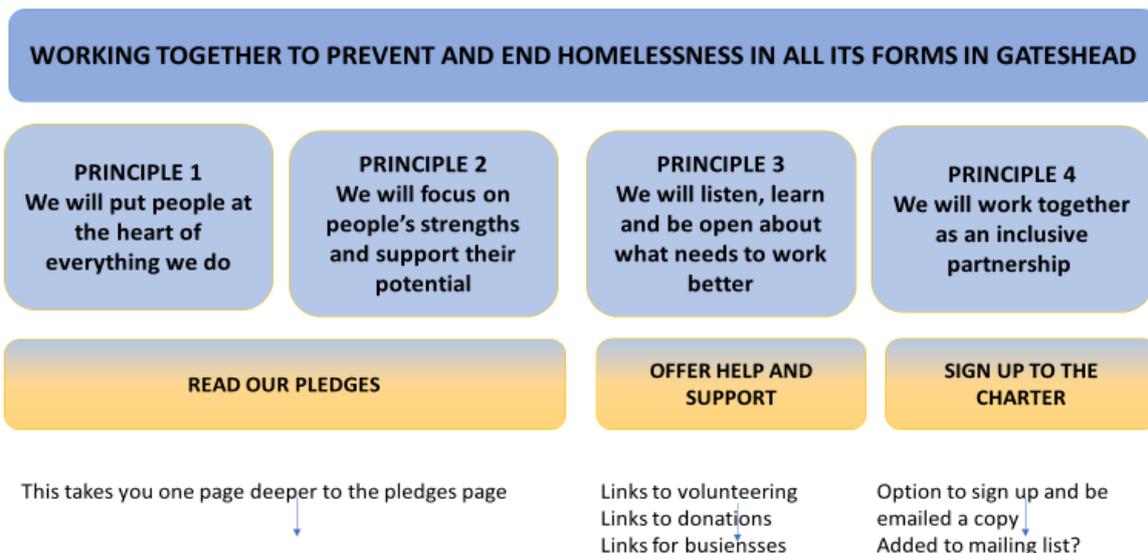
This page would contain a short narrative introduction:

Gateshead council is committed to preventing and ending homelessness in all its forms. We know that to achieve this, we need to be ambitious, collaborative and focused.

The Gateshead Homelessness Charter has been developed to support the delivery of our plans to prevent and end homelessness. It has been co-produced with homeless people, service providers, and a wide range of stakeholders from within and outside the council, including health partners and landlords. It sets out our vision, principles and commitments.

We invite you to sign up to the charter, and to show your support for our ambition of preventing and ending homelessness in Gateshead.

And a visual representation of Gateshead’s vision and core principles as per the slide below:



2.3 The pledges

The pledges were developed with input from internal and external stakeholders (including local homelessness providers, and the Collective Impact Agency) and current users of Gateshead homelessness services (including the refuge). Feedback was gathered through a mixture of meetings and survey responses. Most of the feedback received, and changes made as a result of the consultation, related to ensuring the language was as inclusive, clear and strengths-based as possible.

There was strong support for the number of pledges and the topics covered. The pledges relate to homelessness, because they are included within the Homelessness Charter, and many of them are specific to housing or the offer of appropriate, preventative support. But many of the pledges and

commitments – to listen, to work collaboratively, to focus on people’s strengths, to help people feel safe and to enable people to thrive – could apply in a much wider range of situations.

EVERYONE HAS A RIGHT TO A SECURE AND AFFORDABLE HOME, WHERE THEY FEEL SAFE	EVERYONE WILL BE TREATED WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT AND BE SUPPORTED TO LIVE FREE FROM ABUSE	THE VIEWS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE WILL BE AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING WE DO	PEOPLE SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN DECIDING THEIR OWN NEEDS AND SOLUTIONS
EVERYONE HAS A RIGHT TO GOOD QUALITY ADVICE AND SUPPORT	PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS MEANS MAKING IT EASY FOR PEOPLE TO GET THE HELP THEY NEED WHEN THEY NEED IT	WORKING TOGETHER TO END HOMELESSNESS MEANS BEING WILLING TO LISTEN TO EACH OTHER’S POINT OF VIEW	ENDING HOMELESSNESS NEEDS A FOCUS ON MORE THAN JUST HOUSING.
WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO TACKLE THE CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS, NOT JUST THE SYMPTOMS	ENDING HOMELESSNESS NEEDS SERVICES TO FOCUS ON PEOPLE’S STRENGTHS, NOT JUST THEIR NEEDS	PEOPLE SHOULD BE OFFERED THE SUPPORT THEY NEED TO THRIVE, NOT JUST SURVIVE	TACKLING INEQUALITY AND UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCE IS VERY IMPORTANT IN ENDING HOMELESSNESS

SIGN UP TO THE CHARTER	OFFER HELP AND SUPPORT	FIND OUT MORE
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The intended set of pledges is as follows:

2.4 Supporting further engagement

Most of the Charters reviewed in the course of this work included an option for further engagement, even if this was fairly limited, and it is clearly beneficial for the council to use the Gateshead Homelessness Charter to do more than simply communicate a set of intentions or commitments.

As stated already, the Charter is an opportunity to promote a better understanding of homelessness, raise the profile of existing work and services put in place to end homelessness, make it more likely that homeless people get the support they need, promote volunteering, raise funds, and get help from businesses that may range from sponsorship to employment or training opportunities.

It is therefore recommended that individuals, charities, faith groups, businesses, or anyone else sufficiently interested to read and sign up to the Charter, should be given an opportunity to engage further. The recommended methods and options are set out below:

SIGN UP TO THE CHARTER

The engagement offered:

- An online form which can be signed to show support for the Charter. The signatory would get something returned to them by email thanking them for their support.
- The online form should capture details of who is signing, where they live, what agency they are from (if relevant), whether they are a business, and give the option to click through to offer support or donate.
- Businesses should be invited to leave their details for a follow up conversation.

OFFER HELP AND SUPPORT

The engagement offered:

- Links included to a list of local services that have volunteering options.
- A link to Streetlink app/website where people can report seeing a rough sleeper who needs help: <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/>
- A link to the fundraising page of various local charities (Option 1)
- A link to a Go Fund Me or Just Giving page for donations for a named purpose (Option 2)
- A link for businesses if they want to do more

FIND OUT MORE

The engagement offered:

- Link to the main strategy
- Link to the Council's homelessness pages on website
- Links to new gateway/portal/marketplace
- Links to national charities (Crisis/Shelter/Homeless Link)
- Links to local charities, especially where they have suitable content highlighting the experiences of homeless people
- Links to Homelessness Forum pages/details (once established)

For the council, most of the suggested forms of engagement are easy to facilitate and automated. Where they are a little more labour-intensive (ie: following up with interested businesses), there are existing plans to engage someone to do this. Management of the web pages and a mailing list will require some input/management (especially around GDPR compliance), but this is not onerous.

The issue that requires further thought (and a decision) relates to fundraising and the options that exist regarding this. Across the eight Charters reviewed, the methods used varied, but they can be grouped as follows:

- Provide no option or opportunity to raise funds or donate. (Southwark)
- Link people to homelessness charities in the area who are already set up to accept donations. (Leeds, Colchester and Bournemouth). This is the simplest approach as it requires no additional resourcing, but the council doesn't get any say over what the money is used for, and the processes for donating to the individual charities may not be straightforward.
- Choose a partner to receive and disburse funds generated as a result of people interacting with the Charter. This can also be used for any other funds raised, eg, via an alternative giving campaign. This is the approach taken by Leicester, who have a specific Give Leicester site to manage donations and offers of help. It is funded by the local Business Improvement District and the council. Manchester have an established charity managing donations and giving out grants (activity funded by them) and Exeter have a Homelessness Foundation undertaking the same role, along with a range of other activities. This is funded by the Big Lottery Fund.
- The council collects the money for a designated purpose, but has to administer this. It could be as simple as setting up a Just Giving page with a designated stated intention for the funds or it could be allied to a grant making function. The latter has the potential to be resource-intensive, especially given that the scale of donations may not be large. None of the examples looked at took this approach.

It is fair to say that options i -ii seem more targeted on individual donors, presumably because they are simpler and councils know they are unlikely to collect large sums of money. There is usually a different approach taken to working with businesses and websites/charters tend to signpost them to a council officer. Interestingly, the Liverpool Homelessness Charter is exclusively focused on engaging businesses. Given that the offers that businesses can make may be more complicated and long-standing – ie: sponsorships, ETE opportunities, strategic partnerships – it makes sense that these are handled by the council and not be charitable partners, where these exist.

Given the simplicity associated with setting up and administering a Just Giving (or equivalent) donations page, there is no reason why the council could not consider this, Choosing a charitable aim that is likely to attract wide support, and which adds value rather than being seen to be a core or existing council responsibility, may cover off any concerns that charities might express about the council competing with them for donations.

3.0 Next steps

After signing off the contents of the Charter, some work will be needed to:

- i) Decide where to locate it within the council’s existing website (or agree to set up a mini-site outside of the council’s main website)
- ii) Design the pages as per the agreed architecture and layout so as to look attractive and promote ease of use
- iii) Agree on the donations option
- iv) Test with stakeholders
- v) Launch the Charter