

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING	Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING DATE:	22 November 2013	
TITLE:	Draft Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 Draft Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018v4 Appendix 2 Homelessness Strategy Equality Impact Assessment		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Adopting the Draft Homelessness Strategy (attached at Appendix 1), has been identified as a 'Key Decision' because of community impact and is scheduled for the Council Cabinet meeting on 4 December 2013.

2 RECOMMENDATION

That the Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel agrees that the revised approach contained in the Draft Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018 which not only continues a successful provision of early interventions to prevent homelessness but also focuses on achieving a nationally accredited Gold Standard and targeting ten new local priorities:

- 2.1 Complies with agreed Council policies and plans.
- 2.2 Will have a positive impact on vulnerable people and reduce inequalities.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the approval and publication of the Bath and North East Somerset Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018. However, it should be noted that the effective prevention of homelessness has a significant and positive direct financial impact on the Council. This is due to the reduction in the costs associated with preventing homelessness, investigating and assessing statutory homelessness applications and the very significant costs associated with the provision of temporary accommodation.
- 3.2 The priorities of the Strategy should also form a key consideration in the commissioning and allocation of health, social care and wellbeing resources.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 imposes a duty on local housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy every 5 years. The current Homelessness Strategy is due to expire on 25 February 2014.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Homelessness Act, a homelessness strategy must include specific actions to prevent homelessness and ensure that sufficient accommodation and support is available for people who are or may become homeless and support to prevent them becoming homeless again.
- 4.3 The actions set out in the strategy include those that the authority expects to be taken by public authorities (eg police and health services) and which are offered by voluntary and community organisations whose activities are capable of contributing to the achievement of these aims.
- 4.4 The draft Homelessness Strategy proposes a number of enhancements to homelessness prevention and support for the homeless in the light of current evidence and best practice. It follows extensive public and stakeholder engagement, analysis of the impacts of welfare reform on vulnerable people, a current homelessness review and an Equalities Impact Assessment (attached at Appendix 2).

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 The Draft Homelessness Strategy is the proposed joint high level strategic plan for all services working with or coming in to contact with vulnerable people, troubled families and young people. It is supported by the Health and Wellbeing Board who have agreed to champion the homelessness agenda in Bath and North East Somerset.
- 5.2 The Draft Homelessness Strategy builds on the successes of previous homelessness strategies. The number of households in temporary accommodation was halved in 2010 and the rate of homeless households in temporary accommodation is less in Bath and North East Somerset than in other West of England Authorities and nationally. 60% of homelessness enquires are resolved with advice provision demonstrating the effectiveness of our current homelessness prevention strategies.

5.3 However, since the current homelessness strategy was adopted (2009) two new pieces of legislation have been introduced that could have a significant negative impact on households at risk of homelessness. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 gives people on benefit increased personal responsibility for money management. The Localism Act 2011 provides that social housing is made available to people with greatest housing need and allowed the Council to have greater control of who is admitted onto the social housing waiting list (Homesearch). The Localism Act also allowed social landlords to provide flexible tenancies for social housing and required the Council to publish a Tenancy Strategy providing guidance on how these flexibilities should be implemented in Bath and North East Somerset.

5.4 The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identifies associated risks of the impacts of welfare reform on vulnerable people that include worsening health outcomes, particularly mental ill health, domestic abuse, family breakdown, fuel poverty, debt and homelessness. An Equalities Impact Assessment carried out for the draft Homelessness Strategy demonstrates that it has the potential to mitigate these risks and improve the health and wellbeing of vulnerable residents. In particular it is likely to have a positive impact on equalities groups such as women, disabled people, young people and older single homeless people, socio-economically disadvantaged and rural communities. See Equalities Impact Assessment as Appendix 2

5.5 The Welfare Reform Act and Localism Act are being implemented locally through changes to income benefits, changes to flexible tenancies in social housing and changes to the allocation of social housing. The Draft Homelessness Strategy takes account of these changes and potential risks for vulnerable people and the Delivery Plan is framed around ten local priorities to mitigate negative impacts and prevent homelessness more effectively in the current context:

- Priority 1 Identify people most at risk of domestic violence and prevent homelessness
- Priority 2 Improve housing advice and support for people living in rural areas
- Priority 3 Target mortgage rescue advice and assistance at low income households
- Priority 4 Target welfare advice at low income households living in social housing
- Priority 5 Prevent evictions of social housing tenants in the first year of new tenancies
- Priority 6 Review the distribution and tenant profile of family sized social housing
- Priority 7 Protect housing standards and conditions in low cost private rented housing
- Priority 8 Develop access to shared rented housing for single people aged under 35
- Priority 9 Provide suitable temporary accommodation and stop using Bed & Breakfast
- Priority 10 Review rough sleeper services and adapt to meet changes in diversity

5.6 The Delivery Plan also measures the Council's performance against ten improvement challenges devised to help local authorities deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention and implement the government report 'Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness' published in 2012. Rising to the challenge will mean that local provision for homelessness will be peer reviewed and could be acknowledged nationally by achieving the Gold Standard. The ten challenges are:

1. To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs

3. To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice
4. To adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
5. To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support
6. To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
7. To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness, reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs
9. To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks

5.7 Throughout the process of developing the revised Draft Homelessness Strategy a programme of broad consultation has been in place see section 8 below.

6 RATIONALE

- 6.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility to produce and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on a homelessness review every five years.
- 6.2 The draft Homelessness Strategy takes account of national guidance, local priorities arising from a homelessness review and consultation responses received over the course of several months as the strategy developed.
- 6.3 A corporate commitment to preventing homelessness is fundamental to achieving the main objectives of the Homelessness Strategy and the intention is for this to be endorsed by Cabinet decision.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 It is a statutory duty to produce and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on a homelessness review every five years, and as such, no other options were considered.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 A programme of extensive consultation has been implemented throughout the development of the Draft Homelessness Strategy. It commenced with initial planning meetings with a wide range of organisations that form the local Homelessness Partnership in early 2013. A Welfare Reform conference was subsequently facilitated by Housing Services and the Homelessness Partnership in March 2013. The conference enabled key stakeholders to consider local challenges and contribute to forming a draft Homelessness Strategy.
- 8.2 The Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel has received two reports relating to the Draft Homelessness Strategy this year. At the meeting on 22 March it received the report 'Homelessness and the Use of Temporary

Accommodation' and on 5 July 'Rough Sleepers'. It resolved to receive draft Homelessness Strategy at one of the future Panel meetings.

- 8.3 The draft Homelessness Strategy was approved by the Homelessness Partnership and presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board in September 2013. A formal open public consultation on the draft Homelessness Strategy was endorsed by the Board and launched on 28 September running until 6 November 2013. The consultation together with the draft strategy and evidence base was posted on the council website and summarised as follows:

'We review our Homelessness Strategy every five years. We would like you to tell us if you think we've got the new draft strategy right or what you think we need to do to improve it. We started the review with a Welfare Reform Conference in March and we've also reviewed national guidance and local data. This draft strategy continues to focus on ways of preventing homelessness. It places even greater emphasis on practical and joined up responses from the many excellent services and agencies that provide help and support for the homeless and it includes the government's ten Gold Standard Challenges. If you know someone who has been homeless or you have been homeless yourself or if you represent an organisation that provides services for people who've been homeless or can contribute to preventing homelessness we would like to hear from you.'

- 8.4 Everyone who attended the welfare reform event, homelessness service providers, key local authority service managers and all councillors on the exchange were invited to contribute to the consultation. Comments from the Board and other respondents led to amendments and improvements in the strategy, for example a greater emphasis on the health impacts of homelessness.
- 8.5 A strategic core group of the Homelessness Partnership met on 7 November to review the amended strategy and their comments have been taken into account in the final version of the strategy that will be presented to Cabinet.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

Contact person	Sue Wordsworth Planning and Partnership Manager tel 01225 396050 sue_wordsworth@bathnes.gov.uk
Background papers	None
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	