

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING	Cabinet	
MEETING DATE:	04 December 2013	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2600
TITLE:	Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
<p>List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1: Draft Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018 Appendix 2: Equalities Impact Assessment Homelessness Strategy</p>		

1. THE ISSUE

- 1.1. 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, approved in 2009, is now due to expire and so in early 2013 Housing Services, working in partnership with a range of interested parties including those in the Homelessness Partnership, undertook a new homelessness review. The evidence of that review and analysis of the impacts of welfare reform on vulnerable people, have been considered in the attached draft Homelessness Strategy.
- 1.2. Whilst the current Homelessness Strategy has proved successful, the updated strategy proposes a number of enhancements to homelessness prevention and support to people who are homeless.
- 1.3. The Homelessness Strategy contributes to realisation of the vision set out in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet agrees:

- 2.1. To note the report
- 2.2. To approve the Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018 as contained in Appendix 1.

3. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

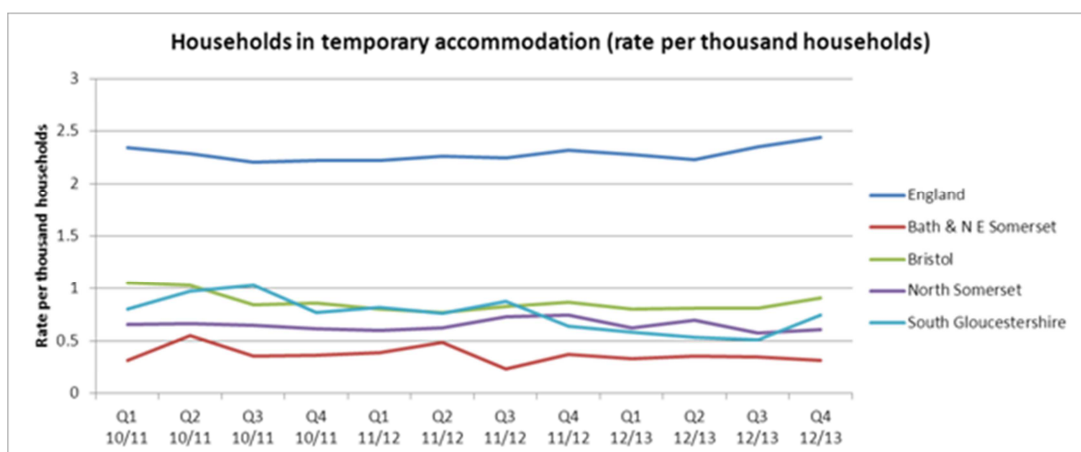
- 3.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the approval and publication of the Bath and North East Somerset Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018. However, it should be noted that the effective prevention of homelessness has a significant and positive direct financial impact on the Council. 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, with the assistance of social services, to carry out a homelessness review for their district and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review every five years. The homelessness strategy plans to prevent homelessness, have sufficient accommodation and support available for people who are or may become homeless and support to prevent them becoming homeless again.
- 4.2. In accordance with the Homelessness Act, the Homelessness Strategy must include specific actions which the authority expects to be taken by public authorities and which are offered by voluntary and community organisations whose activities are capable of contributing to the achievement of these aims.
- 4.3. The review of homelessness shows that homeless people are at particular risk of negative health outcomes. The strategy will contribute to:
 - Improving health and reducing health inequalities by preventing homelessness and improving outcomes for homeless people.
 - Tackling the effects of troubled childhoods and adolescence by promoting innovative approaches to youth homelessness.
 - Reducing involvement in crime by improving offender access to private rented sector accommodation.
 - Reducing inequalities within the community see 4.5
- 4.4. The 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).
- 4.5. The Equalities Impact Assessment demonstrates that the strategy will have a positive impact on women, disabled people, different age groups, socio-economically disadvantaged and rural communities.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1. The current Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 has been effective. Since 2008 Homefinder (our private rented sector access scheme) and our supported lodgings access scheme have prevented around 300 families, young people and care leavers from being homeless. The number of homeless applications from 2006 to 2011 decreased by 52% and 60% of homelessness enquiries were resolved with advice provision demonstrating the importance of early intervention.
- 5.2. 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. However, since 2008 two new pieces of legislation have been introduced that could have a significant negative impact on households at risk of homelessness. Since October 2012 the rate of households in temporary accommodation has been increasing nationally and in other West of England Authorities.



- 5.3. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 gives people on benefit increased personal responsibility for money management and increased incentives to work. Changes include Universal Credit which is a new single payment for people who are looking for work or on a low income, and changes to benefits including removal of the spare bedroom subsidy.
- 5.4. The Localism Act 2011 provides that social housing is made available to people with greatest housing need. This allows the Council to have greater control over the social housing waiting list (Homesearch) and to use private sector housing as a solution for homeless people. It also allows social landlords to provide flexible tenancies for social housing. New tenants have less security in the first year of tenancies than previously and contraventions can lead to repeat homelessness.
- 5.5. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment provides an indication of the number of vulnerable or newly vulnerable individuals and families affected by welfare reform. (www.bathnes.gov.uk/jsna) It refers to possible associated risks for this group which include worsening health outcomes, particularly mental ill health, domestic abuse, family breakdown, fuel poverty, debt and homelessness.

- 5.6. Preventing homelessness contributes to the 3 main themes of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy; the Homelessness Strategy contributes to the realisation of the vision set out in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. (<http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/neighbourhoods-and-community-safety/working-partnership/health-and-wellbeing-board>)

Theme 1: by helping people to stay healthy,

Theme 2: improving the quality of their lives

Theme 3: creating fairer life chances.

- 5.7. It reduces the chances of people with associated risks becoming homeless; strengthens partnership working with other statutory agencies; and targets appropriate support to help rebuild lives.
- 5.8. The provisions for homelessness and how well they meet local need were reviewed in 2013. The review found that the two main reasons for becoming homeless in Bath and North East Somerset have stayed the same over time (leaving the home of parents, friends or relatives and loss of private rented accommodation). However, the third main reason for becoming homeless is now domestic violence and/or violence or harassment. Preventing domestic violence is an important element of preventing homelessness.
- 5.9. The new Homelessness Strategy identifies ten local priorities to meet these changes and prevent homelessness more effectively:
- 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
- 5.10. New government guidance produced in 2012 focuses on preventing all households, regardless of whether they are families, couples, or single people, from reaching a crisis point where they are faced with homelessness. It urges local authorities to focus on widening responsibility

for prevention activities to all services. It challenges local authorities to 'adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services' and sets five cross cutting themes:

- Agencies working together to target those at risk of homelessness
- Identifying and tackling the underlying causes of homelessness as part of housing needs assessments by referral to appropriate support
- Local authorities co-coordinating access to services for vulnerable people; multi agency action, case work, agencies responding flexibly
- Increasing access to the private sector; supporting people to remain in private sector tenancies
- A focus on youth homelessness.

5.11. On 18 September 2013 Housing Services presented a report on the Homelessness Strategy to the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Board resolved to endorse the statement contained in the strategy that 'The Health and Wellbeing Board will champion the homelessness agenda in Bath and North East Somerset'. Various comments were made on the strategy and these have been taken into consideration in the revised draft strategy.

5.12. The Homelessness Strategy is therefore a joint high level strategic plan for all services working with or coming in to contact with vulnerable people, troubled families and young people. Through the sponsorship of the Health and Wellbeing Board the intention is that these services will contribute to a delivery plan that is framed around the five cross cutting themes and local priorities and will ultimately lead to the council obtaining the national Gold Standard accreditation for homelessness.

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 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.

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 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 Homelessness Strategy.

- 8.2. 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. The consultation together with the draft strategy and evidence base was posted on the council website until 6 November 2013.
- 8.3. Everyone who attended the welfare reform event, homelessness service providers, key local authority service managers and all councillors on the exchange including all parish councillors 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.
- 8.4. 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 is presented to Cabinet.
- 8.5. The draft Homelessness Strategy was amended following these consultations and the amended version was presented to the Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel on 22 November 2013.

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.

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Background papers	None
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