

REPORT FOR DECISION



DECISION OF:	CABINET
DATE:	4 NOVEMBER 2015
SUBJECT:	HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2015-18
REPORT FROM:	COUNCILLOR RISHI SHORI DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND HOUSING
CONTACT OFFICER:	Harry Downie, Assistant Director
TYPE OF DECISION:	CABINET (KEY DECISION)
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/STATUS:	This paper is within the public domain.
SUMMARY:	<p>The Council has a statutory duty to produce a homeless strategy. The attached draft replaces the existing strategy and sets out a direction of travel for the next 3 years.</p> <p>Whilst pressures in the system are expected to persist due to the housing market situation, welfare reform and relationship breakdowns, the strategy seeks to manage these uncertainties and provide hope to people who find themselves without accommodation.</p> <p>Building on a better appreciation of people's needs and a focus on prevention, the desired outcome is to help as many people as possible to remain independent and avoid having to go down the homeless route. As well as being better for their well being, it will also allow available resources to be dedicated to delivering a quality service to those families and individuals that do require additional support to help them move on.</p>
OPTIONS & RECOMMENDED OPTION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To approve the strategy. This is the recommended option. It provides a clear direction of travel and sets priorities for the service going forward that are consistent with the Council's wider ambitions. 2. To not approve the strategy.
IMPLICATIONS:	
Corporate Aims/Policy Framework:	Do the proposals accord with the Policy Framework? Yes
Statement by the S151 Officer: Financial Implications and Risk Considerations:	The strategy has no direct financial implications on the service but provides guidance to managers and commissioners in

SK

	<p>respect of prioritising the use of resources.</p> <p>The Strategy helps to mitigate the risk (and cost) of having to provide temporary accommodation for homeless people.</p>	
Health and Safety	There are no health and safety issues arising directly from this strategy. Service delivery and operational decision making are subject to risk assessments which are implemented in line with existing policy.	
Statement by Executive Director of Resources:	This is a key strategy for the Council, supporting the delivery of the overall Housing Strategy	SK
Equality/Diversity implications:	The Equality Analysis indicates that the proposals are positive particularly for younger single people, disabled applicants and families (with caring responsibilities). The use of dispersed properties and sensitive lettings is also seen to support community cohesion although the extent to which these can be delivered will be influenced by legislation, case law and the availability of resources.	
Considered by Monitoring Officer:	<p>Yes</p> <p>In preparing this strategy the Council has, in accordance with s 7(A) of the Homelessness Act 2002, had regard to its current Housing Allocations Scheme under s 166A of the Housing Act 1996 and its Strategic Tenancy Policy under s 150 of the Localism Act 2011.</p> <p>This strategy will be kept under review to ensure it is up to date with key changes in legislation, government guidance, corporate priorities and local and national trends and issues.</p>	JH
Wards Affected:	All	
Scrutiny Interest:	Overview and Scrutiny	

TRACKING/PROCESS

DIRECTOR: Executive Director of Communities and Well Being

Chief Executive/ Strategic Leadership Team	Cabinet Member/Chair	Ward Members	Partners
28.9.15			
Scrutiny Committee	Committee	Council	
	4 November 2015		

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to produce strategies, keep homelessness (and the factors that influence homelessness) under review and take appropriate action. With the previous strategy having come to an end, the time is now right to review progress and set a clear direction of travel for the coming years.
- 1.2 With housing market conditions remaining difficult, further public service funding cuts on the way and welfare reform changes continuing, pressures in the system are expected to persist. This new Strategy will help maintain the focus on homelessness and ensure available resources are targeted to best effect within the legislative and national policy framework.
- 1.3 Our aspiration remains to end homelessness. Whilst many may see as unattainable, it is the level of ambition required to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness, increase preventative action and drive quality services.

2. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- 2.1 Each year, hundreds of households present themselves to the Council as homeless. The circumstances behind every case are unique although most instances can still be grouped under one of three main causes:
 - Arrangements with family or friends coming to an end
 - Relationship breakdowns (the majority of which involve violence)
 - Financial problems (generally resulting in arrears, eviction, etc)
- 2.2 Although homelessness only affects 1% of the local population each year, the impact on those individuals can be devastating – and costly to society. The previous strategy improved Bury’s response. It prompted a greater emphasis on prevention, eliminated the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and replaced South View hostel with a portfolio of self contained properties which enable people to maintain their independence and achieve a ‘normalised’ state of living at a time of great uncertainty.
- 2.3 However continued innovation is essential to keep ahead of demand. Traditional causes of homelessness have not gone away and the current state of the housing market, welfare reform changes and changes in case law which relaxed the eligibility criteria are adding to the pressure in the system. Younger single people who find their benefits capped together with people with disabilities are particularly affected by these changes.
- 2.4 There is also work to be done in other areas. Rough sleeping (particularly those ‘sofa surfers’ and other people who are not living on the streets) remains a largely unknown quantity. Support to complex individuals needs to be reviewed to ensure that access to information and support is effective and commissioning practice rationalised to deliver better value for money. In short, earlier interventions using approaches that meet individual need are required to offer quicker, more convenient housing options.

3. PROPOSALS

- 3.1 To address the factors influencing the future, the strategy is based on five priorities:
 - **Understanding needs.** Listening to individual experiences to improve services and develop new ways of working. Whilst formal assessments have their place, we need to have more of a conversation with individuals to understand what is happening in their lives, change behaviours and break the cycle of homelessness which is costly to statutory agencies.

- **Focus on prevention.** Avoiding more people having to go down the statutory homelessness route by seeking to increase the supply of affordable housing (in the public and private sector) as well as developing innovative solutions to meet specific needs.
- **Good quality.** Giving a quality experience from first point of contact until people leave the service and regain their independence.
- **Strong leadership and management.** There are challenges ahead which will require the balancing of quality, cost and diversity in order to maintain provision which is valued and fully utilised by local people.
- **Sustainable communities.** Supporting the development of stronger, safer communities by encouraging homeless households and vulnerable people (such as rough sleepers) to engage and integrate with local communities. This priority is also about keeping homeless people within their local areas where possible to maintain family networks, avoid disruption to schooling, minimise isolation, etc.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The strategy has no direct financial implications on the service but provides guidance to managers and commissioners in respect of prioritising the use of resources.
- 4.2 It is known that Government funding will fall in the coming years. Options for dealing with this scenario are being evaluated to ensure that resources are being targeted to greatest effect. This includes identifying external funding opportunities, improved cross-agency working and maximising the collection of income (rent, service charges, etc) payable by households.
- 4.3 Although homelessness is a statutory function with many prescribed steps, efforts will be made to cut the cost of administration. Legislation specifically prohibits the Council from shifting the burden of information gathering onto homeless applicants but this does not stop the Council from keeping processes and procedures under review to increase efficiency, reduce duplication and speed up decision making whilst managing risks and safeguarding vulnerable people.

5. RISKS

- 5.1 The primary risk to the service relates to funding – and the cost of temporary accommodation for a growing number of applicants. This risk is mitigated by increasing the number of households prevented from becoming homelessness. The strategy has focused on these components to reduce the impact of demand on statutory services and keep costs under control.
- 5.2 Breaking the cycle of homelessness requires better engagement with applicants – to understand their specific circumstances and provide support that will help them to live independently. Building on schemes that link the offer of property to tenant commitments to look for work, develop skills, etc, have been shown to increase the resilience of individuals and reduce the risk of repeat homelessness. Better tracking of households will provide further reassurance on the quality and value of this provision.
- 5.3 Not implementing the strategy also carries major risks. It is a statutory requirement and the lack of a strategy could lead to the Council being challenged. Perhaps more importantly, without a focus, the functions risks being driven by funding decisions rather than policy – an approach that will lead to lower quality and service decline at a time when it needs to be identifying ways to improve the resilience and life

chances of individuals as a means of reducing inequalities and tackling a serious social issue.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 6.1 The Equality Analysis indicates that the overall effect of the strategy will be positive.
- 6.2 By using evidence to address the factors which cause homelessness, the strategy will improve services to younger single homeless, strengthen responses to victims of domestic violence (who are mainly female) and people with disabilities who present as homeless.
- 6.3 From a community cohesion perspective, utilising mainstream properties (rather than placement in hostels or bed and breakfast accommodation) enables homeless households to remain their locality close to family, friends and amenities. It also allows people a 'normalised' way of living which is beneficial when the time comes to move on.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Homelessness provision in Bury has taken significant steps forward in recent years. By focusing on needs, improving the range and quality of provision and streamlining processes to drive efficiency, the service is making a difference to people's lives.
- 7.2 Responsibility for reducing disadvantage is well understood. This has shifted the emphasis from simply meeting statutory requirements to building the resilience of individuals and preparing them for independent living. Encouraging households to take ownership of their situation and accountability for the outcome is central to this approach.
- 7.3 The future strategy builds on this by reinforcing areas of strength, using evidence to highlight areas for improvement and clarifying the future direction of travel. This is expressed through five key priorities:
 - Understanding needs
 - Focusing on prevention
 - Good quality
 - Strong leadership and management
 - Building an effective and sustainable approach to provision
- 7.4 Accordingly it is recommended that the strategy is approved.

List of Background Papers:-

Homelessness Strategy 2015-18
Equality Analysis

Contact Details:-

Harry Downie, Assistant Director

Tel: 0161 253 7570

Email: h.downie@bury.gov.uk