

**Homelessness Strategy
(Report by the Head of Housing Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council has to produce a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years and it is now due for a renewal.
- 1.2 Cabinet approved a consultation draft in November 2010. Following a full consultation process, which included elected members, and having updated the strategy it is now ready for formal adoption.
- 1.3 Four responses to the consultation were received from partners and stakeholders with all saying that they agreed with the priorities and the actions required to achieve these priorities. Other suggestions made by the respondents form part of the action plan and will be investigated further as this is progressed. These include: the review of mediation as a means of helping prevention and whether this can be used more widely; and the provision of suitable services for homeless young people in the St Ives area of the district.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Statutory homelessness nationally and locally has been reducing over the last few years up until the beginning of this year. The homelessness prevention measures and initiatives introduced have led to significant increases in the number of households that have managed to avoid the homelessness route through positive interventions by the Council. This in turn had led to a reduction in the number of households placed in temporary accommodation by the Council.
- 2.2 2010/11 saw the previous downward trend of homelessness reverse with an increase in the number of households helped through the statutory homelessness route. This in turn led to an increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation. Prevention measures still remain effective and 2010/11 also saw an increase in the number of successful prevention cases. Without these the number of actual homeless households would have been higher.
- 2.3 A further complication is that the availability of the private rented sector (the most successful prevention tenure utilised by the Council) is likely to reduce through a series of changes to the Housing Benefit system by central government that began in April of this year. The full impact of these changes is likely to be realised over the coming year. This is likely to reduce the Council's prevention options, potentially leading to higher rates of statutory homelessness and an increase in the number of households placed into temporary accommodation.

3. RESOURCING THE STRATEGY

- 3.1 Details of the financial resources to meet the action plan are included in the Action Plan at Appendix A of the strategy.
- 3.2 The main resource is that of the staffing establishment. There are seven FTE staff, two temporary workers and an Activity Manager, who also has responsibility for a separate but connected work area of choice based lettings.
- 3.3 Revenue funding is used to fund a range of homelessness prevention initiatives. Revenue funding comes in the main from a government homelessness grant. For 2011/12 the Council's MTP provision is £61k (which matched the previous government grant). The government has increased the homelessness grant for the current year (2011/12) and 2012/13 to £85k for each year. This grant forms part of the area based grant and it is a 'named grant' for the purpose of homelessness but the grant is not ring fenced. Each year an MTP bid is made to the Council for a homelessness grant and for year five of the Plan in case the government reduces or stops its grant. The government has said that local authorities may assume the same allocation for the remainder of the current comprehensive spending review period 2013/14 and 2014/15 but this is likely to be subject to local authorities demonstrating that the current grant is being used for its intended purpose of homelessness.
- 3.4 Loans and bonds are issued to enable access to the private rented sector for those at threat of homelessness as an alternative to scarce social housing. These are means tested loans. This is a net zero budget but the council does incur bad debt from individuals helped and calls on bonds from landlords. The bad debt allowance for the current year is £81k. This allowance is reviewed regularly and is part of the base revenue budget.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Homelessness prevention remains a priority so that the affects of homelessness, together with the use of temporary accommodation, are minimised. The outcomes achieved through the previous strategy show that prevention works. The revised strategy focuses on maintaining and increasing these services in light of higher levels of demand.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 That Cabinet approves the Homelessness Strategy prior to formal adoption at full Council.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.

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