

**HOMELESSNESS REVIEW & STRATEGY 2004/07
(Report by the Head of Housing Services)**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consult members on and seek approval for the adoption of the Homelessness Strategy.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced a statutory requirement on all local housing authorities to carry out a review of homelessness within their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review. The strategy must be published by 31 July 2003.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The legislation in relation to homelessness reviews, the development of a strategy, and the guidance received from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has been prescriptive. The homelessness review must consider:

- the levels and likely future levels of homelessness in the district
- the activities and services provided which help prevent homelessness and help to find accommodation for homeless and potentially homeless people
- the support services provided for homeless people, including support to prevent them from becoming homeless again
- the resources available to the authority and to social services, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other agencies for providing these services.

The Homelessness Strategy must then include plans for:

- the prevention of homelessness
- ensuring that there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are or who may become homeless
- ensuring that there is satisfactory support for people who are or who may become homeless or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

- 3.2 A key objective of the Homelessness Strategy is to bring local agencies together, so that their work can be better co-ordinated and more effective in dealing with homelessness wherever it may arise. The Council already has a number of examples of co-ordinated multi-agency working to assist households threatened with homelessness. The homelessness review helped formalise these arrangements and highlighted gaps where other arrangements need to be negotiated.

These gaps and the proposed improvements in multi-agency working form the basis of the strategy's action plan.

- 3.3 The homelessness review was completed in parallel with a County Council led Best Value Review of Social Inclusion. This Best Value Review focussed on families with dependent children placed in temporary accommodation in Huntingdonshire. As the objectives of the Best Value Review and homelessness review were very similar and the agencies involved in both were the same, it was agreed that we would combine both pieces of work, as far as was possible. This proved invaluable in engaging with all the agencies involved with homeless households. It also allowed member involvement, as both District and County Council members were represented on the Best Value Review Group.
- 3.4 The review highlighted a lack of co-ordination in the needs analysis of the different client groups that may be faced with homelessness. The strategy, therefore, aims to introduce more robust systems between all agencies to quantify levels of need, so that this may inform the future development of services. This will then allow a detailed analysis of gaps in service provision compared to levels of identified need.
- 3.5 Evidence collected on the levels of homelessness, or support services needed to prevent homelessness, particularly within different household types, will inform the future development of this strategy as well as other strategies such as the Council's own Housing Strategy and the County's Supporting People Strategy. As evidence emerges from the systems that the Homelessness Strategy will introduce, it will be important to continually review its objectives to ensure that services are developed to meet the needs of local people.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Whilst the Homelessness Strategy in itself is not anticipated to result in any increased direct revenue costs to this Council, the volume of homeless applicants, should it increase further, might. The underlying trend of increased homelessness presentations has resulted in an approved MTP bid for an additional Housing Advice and Homelessness Officer, should the need arise. Additionally, however, this Council along with partner agencies may bid for improved services via the county-wide Supporting People strategy.
- 4.2 With regard to capital expenditure there are no imminent proposals for the funding of supported schemes. However, the requirement to determine need for additional supported housing schemes, for particular client groups, forms part of the Strategy's Action Plan. Supported schemes cannot be progressed unless revenue funding, through Supporting People, has also been made available.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The Homelessness Strategy is a supporting strategy to the Housing Strategy and forms part of the policy framework. Under the Council's constitutional arrangements, the Homelessness Strategy requires approval by the Council.

- 5.2 The Homelessness Strategy must be published by 31 July 2003 and requires prompt consideration in order that the deadline may be achieved. Members are, therefore, invited to consider the Strategy at Scrutiny Panel on 1 July 2003 and Cabinet on 10 July 2003, prior to its consideration at Council on 23 July 2003.
- 5.3 Council is asked **to approve** the Homelessness Strategy 2004/07.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002)
Homelessness Strategies – A Good Practice Handbook (ODPM, Feb 2002)**

**Contact Officers: Mr J Collen, Housing Needs & Resources Manager
☎ 01480 388220**

**Mr S Plant, Head of Housing Services
☎ 01480 388240**