

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	Homelessness Strategy
Meeting/Date:	Cabinet – 12th October 2017
Executive Portfolio:	Cllr Ryan Fuller - Deputy Leader and Executive Councillor for Housing and Planning
Report by:	Head of Customer Services
Ward(s) affected:	All

Executive Summary:

The Huntingdonshire Homelessness Strategy is a key document setting out how the Council intends to address homelessness issues within the district. It is a sub-strategy to the wider Housing Strategy that was refreshed earlier this year and it is a statutory requirement that the Council has a homelessness strategy.

The Strategy has four main purposes:

- To address the causes of homelessness in the area;
- To introduce initiatives to prevent homelessness wherever possible;
- To ensure that the Council provides sufficient temporary accommodation for those households that are or may become homeless; and
- To ensure that appropriate support is available for people who have previously experienced homelessness in order to prevent it happening again.

The Strategy gives a national and local context to homelessness, explaining the main trends, in particular the growth of homelessness primarily as a result of evictions from private rented sector tenancies.

It also explains of the new legislative framework that will be introduced in 2018 when the Homelessness Reduction Act comes into forces together with the Trailblazer initiatives being piloted with other agencies. The Trailblazer initiatives aim to re-focus prevention measures in an attempt to stem the flow of homelessness by earlier interventions through a range of agencies working with families.

The Homelessness Strategy, together with the Housing Strategy, explains the options that the Council will follow to deliver an adequate supply of housing providing a range of affordable tenures, to help meet local needs – another key component in the prevention of homelessness by helping households into new homes.

Recommendation:

That Cabinet adopts the Homelessness Strategy 2017

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Homelessness Strategy is a major policy item for the Council. The Strategy sets out the key role that the Council plays in preventing homelessness, assisting households where homelessness cannot be prevented and how homelessness can be resolved, primarily by ensuring that there are sufficient options within the private or social rented sectors to provide new homes. The Strategy includes a plan of the actions that the Council will deliver on to help achieve these aims.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY

- 2.1 There is a statutory requirement for all housing authorities to publish a Homelessness Strategy every 5 years. The refresh of this Strategy was due in 2016 but was held over pending the implementation of the new homelessness statutory framework, contained within the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The new legislation is due to come into force in April 2018 and much of the action plan focuses on what is required to prepare for the new Act.

3. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 3.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

4. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 4.1 Homelessness has a devastating effect on households and delivering on the actions contained within the Strategy will help to prevent homelessness and mitigate against its causes. The potential risks are that prevention measures are not successful and that the Council delivers insufficient numbers of affordable housing solutions for households requiring new homes. The Housing Strategy focuses on the delivery of affordable housing, amongst other things, and ensuring that the objectives of that Strategy together with the new Homelessness Strategy are met, will help contribute to the health and wellbeing of our residents, especially those faced with the threat of homelessness.
- 4.2 As highlighted within the Strategy, the welfare reform programme has been attributed to having an impact on rates of homelessness, particularly where households have been evicted from the private rented sector. With further welfare reforms due, in particular the roll out of Universal Credit, there is a risk that this will further impact homelessness. The full impact of future welfare reforms will need to be assessed as they emerge so that appropriate prevention measures can be investigated and implemented.

5. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 Should the Homelessness Strategy be adopted by Cabinet, it will be effective immediately. A great deal of work has already begun as part of the Homelessness Trailblazer project to pilot new ways of working preventatively, and this work will continue to ensure that the Council is prepared for the implementation of the new legislative framework in 2018. The Action Plan will remain a 'live' document with further areas of work evolving from the pilot initiatives contained within the Trailblazer programme, ensuring that the Council focuses on delivering the most successful prevention activities and initiatives.

5.2 Providing appropriate levels of affordable housing, another key component to the prevention of homelessness, will be monitored through the actions contained within the Housing Strategy Action Plan.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND / OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 6.1 The Homelessness Strategy links to specific actions within the Corporate Plan:
- Prevent homelessness where possible by helping households to remain in their current home or find alternative housing (within the Enabling Communities Strategic priority); and
 - Ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet objectively assessed needs (within the Delivering Sustainable Growth Strategic Priority)

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Preparation of the Homelessness Strategy involves staffing resource that is met within existing budgets. However the Action Plan commits the Council to exploring various activities that will have resource implications, should the Council decide to pursue any of these options. These resource implications will be explored as part of the delivery against the Action Plan.

7.2 The cost of providing temporary accommodation for households that become homeless is a significant one. As homelessness has risen the Council has incurred increasing costs as more households have been accommodated in temporary housing. However the most significant resource implications are likely to be associated with the delivery of adequate numbers of affordable housing solutions through the Council's Housing Strategy Action Plan. The cost of providing successful prevention measures, together with these affordable housing solutions will need to be considered as proposals are brought forwards.

8. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

8.1 The Council is required to publish a Homelessness Strategy every 5 years to review homelessness in the area and produce a strategy to say how it will prevent homelessness and fulfil its wider duties under the homelessness legislation.

9. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Homelessness Review & Strategy – September 2017

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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