

**REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE MEETING**

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**Meeting:** Executive  
**Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013  
**Subject:** Preventing Homelessness Strategy Review  
**Report of:** Jim Wheeler Housing Officer and Ann Ball, Housing Services Manager  
**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Ackerley  
**Status:** Decision

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1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update members of the executive about progress on development of a new Preventing Homelessness Strategy for Harborough District.

2 Recommendations:

- 2.1 That the draft review document shown in Appendix (B) be approved for further consultation with a range of statutory and voluntary sector partners to ensure that the new Preventing Homelessness Strategy reflects the views of key stakeholders.
- 2.2 Following further consultation the final draft of the new Preventing Homelessness Strategy will be considered by Scrutiny Commission in May and by the Executive prior to Council approval and publication in September 2013.

3 Summary of Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 The review of the Homelessness Strategy for Harborough District has been undertaken to ensure that the Council continues to meet its legal duty to have an up to date preventing homelessness strategy that sets out its plans to prevent and tackle homelessness, as required by the Homelessness Act 2002.

4 Impact on Communities

- 4.1 The overall state of the local housing market makes it increasingly difficult to meet the housing needs of households on lower incomes, vulnerable people and homeless households.
- 4.2 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 will lead to fundamental changes in the welfare system intended to reduce dependency on welfare, improve incentives to seek

work, make work pay and reduce overall government spending. However, the changes introduced by the Welfare Reform Act combined with other pressures on the budgets of people on low incomes may lead to an increased risk of homelessness for vulnerable households.

- 4.2 Prevention of homelessness depends on making effective use of the existing housing stock in the district, including private rented accommodation, as well as increasing the availability of social and affordable housing provision.
- 4.2 The recent report by the Ministerial Working Group referred to below in paragraph 5.3 says that that investment in local homelessness prevention services saves significant amounts of public money, across statutory agencies including housing, health, criminal justice and community safety.

## 5 Key Facts

- 5.1 The current five year preventing homelessness strategy was approved by the Council on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008 (Minute 295/2008-09 refers).
- 5.2 The review is particularly important because of recent changes in the law including the Localism Act 2011, the (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 and Supplementary Guidance regarding changes in the legal duties of the Council introduced by the Localism Act and the Homelessness and the Welfare Reform Act 2012.
- 5.3 The review will be carried out in partnership with a range of statutory and voluntary sector partners and reflect the views of private sector landlords, service users and elected members. It has focused on early intervention to prevent homelessness and seeks to respond to the “10 Local Authority Challenges” set by government in a recent report by the Ministerial Working Group report on homelessness, “Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness.”
- 5.4 The ten local authority challenges are listed below:
  - Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
  - Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
  - Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
  - Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
  - Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
  - Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
  - Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme

- Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
- Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

5.5 Appendix (A) describes how current service provision meets the requirements of the ten challenges and the actions the Council proposes to take to improve its response to homelessness prevention.

5.6 Appendix (B) is the draft review document which if approved by the Executive will be the subject of further consultation with key stakeholders such as private sector landlords, service users and elected members.

## 6 Legal Issues

6.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to review their preventing homelessness strategy every five years.

6.2 Recent changes in homelessness law made in the Localism Act 2011 include:

- Power for Local authorities to use private sector accommodation to discharge their legal duties towards homeless people. Their duty can be ended through an offer of suitable private sector accommodation with a minimum of twelve months in an assured shorthold tenancy (However, the duty to secure accommodation will restart if a person who has been rehoused in private sector accommodation becomes unintentionally homeless within two years of the start of the private sector tenancy).
- The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) sets out the criteria for assessing the suitability of private sector accommodation including fit for purpose requirements.
- Supplementary Guidance to the Homelessness Code of Guidance which includes the changes in the localism Act has been published in 2012.

## 7 Resource Issues

7.1 Spending on homelessness prevention has been given priority in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, with homelessness grants maintained at 2010/11 levels (£400 million over four years) until 2015.

7.2 The Homelessness Grant allocation for Harborough District is £92,000 for 2013-14 to assist with the costs of dealing with homelessness and homelessness prevention.

7.3 In addition the department of Communities and Local Government has made a short term allocation of £355,000 to a cross authority partnership consisting of

Leicester City Council and the seven Leicestershire districts (including Harborough District) Specifically to develop an action plan to prevent single person homelessness.

7.4 The funding will enable the partner authorities to cover the costs of employing two officers to develop and deliver a number of practical, innovative schemes which together will help to improve access to and affordability of private rented housing in Leicestershire, with the specific aim of reducing rough sleeping and hidden homelessness amongst single non-priority people and the use of temporary accommodation through greater access to affordable housing.

7.5 The project will be set up to ensure it can continue beyond 2014 when central government funding comes to an end with low-level support from partner authorities.

## 8 Equality Impact Assessment Implications/Outcomes

8.1 A draft Equality Impact Assessment is as Appendix. The Equality Impact Assessment will take into account the outcomes of further consultation and contribute to development of the final draft of the Preventing Homelessness Strategy.

## 9 Impact on the Organisation

9.1 Plans for improvements to services are subject to further review of existing funding, resources and developing opportunities for partnership working.

## 10 Community Safety Implications

10.1 Homelessness prevention linked to opportunities for access to employment, training, health care and support services assists with crime prevention and management of offenders.

## 11. Carbon Management Implications

11.1 None arising from this report

## 12. Risk Management Implications

12.1 Risk factors which may lead to increases in the number households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness include the potential impacts of welfare reform and adverse changes in the economy such as higher rates of unemployment or mortgage default.

12.2 The review of the of the preventing homelessness strategy will also consider actions to mitigate the impact of potential increases in the number of households who are homeless or threatened *with homelessness*.

## 13 Consultation

- 13.1 The process of consulting with key stakeholders to review the existing Homeless Strategy and identify key issues likely to affect the service in the future began in November with a meeting of the Harborough District Housing Forum, which was hosted by the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning and Housing. One of three workshops at the Forum focussed on three key issues relating to the Homelessness Strategy:
- What more do we need to do to respond to the impact of Welfare Reform?
  - How can we engage Private Landlord's interest in our 'Local Pad' product
  - How can we improve services to homeless people beyond bricks and mortar – e.g. food banks, money advice, support
- 13.2 The feedback from this workshop is being taken forward as we currently work on raising awareness and responding to the impact of Welfare Reform, as well as developing a Leicestershire web based property shop for affordable private rented accommodation for single households and developing self help material regarding financial wellbeing.
- 13.3 A survey of people who have recently received advice or assistance because they were homeless or threatened with homelessness has been undertaken to assess their satisfaction with the service they received.

#### 14 Options Considered

- 14.1 Options for service improvements will be considered as part of the review of the Preventing Homelessness Strategy which has been undertaken according to the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002.

#### 15 Background Papers

- 15.1 Homelessness Strategy 2008-13

<http://www.harborough.gov.uk/downloads/100007/housing>

- 15.2 Developing Homelessness Strategies; Specialist Advisors' Toolkit

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**Previous report(s):** *NONE*

**Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure:** /N

**Ward Members Notified:** /N

**Appendices:** *list any appendices here including title and filename in brackets (e.g. Performance Data 2010 (perfdata.doc)).*

- A. Preventing Homelessness - Achieving the Gold Standard**
- B. Preventing Homelessness Strategy Review**
- C. Equality Impact Assessment**

