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**Meeting:** Social Care Health and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 10 September 2009

**Subject:** Consultation Feedback: Homelessness Event

**Report of:** Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

**Summary:** The report provides Members with information and issues arising from the Council's initial Homelessness Strategy Consultation Event for Stakeholders, held on 27 July 2009.

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Contact Officer: Tony Keaveney, Assistant Director Housing Services

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: n/a

Key Decision n/a

Reason for urgency/  
Exemption from call-  
in (if appropriate) n/a

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That the Social Care Health and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the contents of this report for information.**
- 2. That the Social Care Health and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee considers the feedback from its stakeholder partners and provides initial views on the proposed development of the strategy at this consultation stage.**

*Reason for Recommendation: So that Members of Joint Health & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee can contribute to the development of the Homelessness Strategy throughout each stage of the process.*

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## **Introduction**

1. Government legislation requires all local authorities (except those who are rated 3 or 4 star) to produce a new homelessness strategy every five years. In doing so, authorities must carry out a review of existing and projected homelessness demand and should consult with a wide range of stakeholders and service users in order to ensure that the new strategy is fit for purpose and will be effective in reducing homelessness and maximising housing opportunities for all its residents.
2. There are two homelessness strategies currently in place, the (former) Mid Bedfordshire strategy from 20xx to 20xx and the (former) South Bedfordshire strategy from 2004 to 2008. This is a critical and well-timed opportunity for the newly formed Central Bedfordshire Council to examine the main issues and actions from both strategies, and to provide a clear and challenging strategy for 2009 - 2013 which encompasses the needs of the area as a whole. The new Homelessness Strategy will also seek to bring together both statutory and voluntary agencies who contribute to the provision of homelessness services in order to deliver a seamless approach for all client groups within the community, especially those who are vulnerable.

## **Ensuring Effective Consultation**

3. Following research into other council's methods of seeking stakeholder and service user views, it was agreed that it would be most effective to hold three separate events or sessions to ensure that participants felt able to speak openly and honestly about their experience of homelessness provision within Central Bedfordshire. The first event would be for statutory and voluntary workers such as CAB representatives, health and social workers, housing staff and charitable organisations. The next event would be for service users only, and it was agreed that an independent body named Understanding Us would be best placed to conduct this event and would ensure open discussion about the Council's strengths and weaknesses. The third aspect of consultation would involve members of the Council, through this Overview and Scrutiny process.

This report is based on the initial findings from the Stakeholder Consultation Event. Information will shortly be available from the Service User event as a separate document.

4. As part of the Stakeholder Event the Council invited those who provide, either directly or indirectly, a frontline service for those in housing need. The event was devised to include a presentation about the current homelessness picture and the visions of the Council to address local demand, a question and answer section using a panel of housing managers, and a series of workshop sessions exploring different aspects of the strategy.

## **The Homelessness Strategy Consultation Event for Stakeholders**

5. The main presentation focused on the key objectives and aims of the new strategy such as strengthening partnerships, maximising housing assets and avoiding homelessness crisis situations. It discussed the achievements of the council in relation to reducing the use of temporary accommodation and an overall reduction in homeless acceptances, but also examined the challenges faced in maximising the supply of housing such as Right to Buy and the effect of the recent recession on house building and development.
6. The Question and Answer session (Appendix A) raised some interesting enquiries about how the new strategy would support vulnerable client groups like those leaving the armed forces, young people and provision of care for rough sleepers. There were also questions about the type and flexibility of support that could be offered to those in housing need. Issues about tenancy sustainment in the private sector were aired by a landlord, and the new Lets Rent scheme was examined in closer detail including the processes that had been drawn up to reduce tenancy failure through behaviour issues or rent arrears.
7. The afternoon workshop sessions (Appendix B) proved to be a very popular part of the day, and there were some common emerging themes from the groups such as;
  - effective inter-agency working
  - greater education and awareness about homelessness for service users and providers alike
  - better consultation with service users
  - provision of floating support services and drop-in outreach sessions
  - training on mental health
  - increasing methods of access to the Council's homelessness service
  - introduction of a housing forum
  - developing a range of quality standards
  - provision of crash-pads for emergency homeless use
  - consulting with diverse client groups
  - providing advice in a variety of formats and languages
  - staff training on equalities
  - tailoring the service to the individual's needs

8. The Council collected feedback evaluation sheets from the event (Appendix C), and found that the attendees had provided very high scores for the day;

**Overall rating of the event:** 63.6% good, 36.4% very good, 0% fair, 0% poor, 0% very poor

**Speakers at the event:** 54.5% good, 40.9% very good, 4.5% fair, 0% poor, 0% very poor

**Workshop sessions:** 54.5% good, 36.4% very good, 9.1% fair, 0% poor, 0% very poor

The comments section was also very positive, with many noting the benefits of meeting other partners involved in housing and homelessness. Other comments included how useful the event was, well-pitched, a valued opportunity, well-planned, excellent and with clear speakers.

### Summary and Next Steps

9. Housing staff need to complete their review of the existing homelessness strategies, homelessness demand and existing provision, initial consultation feedback from the stakeholder and service user events, and views from members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This covers the initial stage of the process, and will enable officers to draft a first version of the new Homelessness Strategy incorporating all these essential elements. Members of OSC will be asked to consider the first draft of the Homelessness Strategy.
10. It is important that members own the new strategy and support the actions that will be created from it. It is hoped that members will provide their own views, experience and visions of homelessness demand and service provision within Central Bedfordshire, which will contribute towards the core framework of the new strategy.
11. It is envisaged that a much larger, formal event will take place at the launch of the new Homelessness Strategy in April 2010 and that members, council staff and statutory and voluntary stakeholders will be able to attend the event together to celebrate its publication.

### CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

#### Council Priorities:

#### Financial:

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report

#### Legal:

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

#### Risk Management:

There are no risk management issues arising directly from this report

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

There are no direct staffing implications.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

There are no Human rights or equality implications arising directly from this report.

**Community Development/Safety:**

There are no issues to consider in this report.

**Sustainability:**

There are no direct implications arising from this report.