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

**Date:** 2 March 2010

**Subject:** Draft Homelessness Strategy for 2010-2015

**Report of:** Cllr Mrs Rita Drinkwater, Portfolio Holder for Housing

**Summary:** The report provides Members with an overview of the draft Homelessness Strategy for 2010-2015. This strategy has been developed in response to the findings of the Homelessness Review 2009 which provided a detailed analysis of homelessness in Central Bedfordshire and in conjunction with partner agencies and service users.

The Homelessness Act requires every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness in their area every five years, to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on this review and to consult with other local statutory and voluntary organisations.

The draft strategy sets out 10 strategic priorities for homelessness in Central Bedfordshire. Key actions from the strategy will be monitored and reviewed by the Strategic Housing Delivery Partnership and through Central Bedfordshire performance reporting framework.

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Contact Officer: Hamid Khan – Head of Housing Needs

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: n/a

Key Decision Yes

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**CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS****Council Priorities:**

This Strategy will contribute to the managing growth effectively priority.

**Financial:**

There are no financial implications for the Council's General Fund or Housing Revenue Account arising directly from this report

**Legal:**

The contents of the Strategy conform to the statutory requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002

**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:**

Central Bedfordshire Council has a duty to promote the equality of race, gender and disability, and to tackle discrimination experienced by other vulnerable groups.

Vulnerable groups could include older people, disabled people, people with low levels of literacy, people from poorer socio economic groups, people experiencing domestic violence, some people from ethnic minority communities including migrant workers and Gypsies and Travellers, and people from lesbian, gay, bisexual and Transgender communities.

The Homelessness Strategy has the potential to tackle inequality by focusing on ensuring that the diverse housing needs of customers can be met across Central Bedfordshire, whilst increasing customer choice and control, and promoting high quality Sustainable homes.

The Policy is undergone a rigorous Equalities Impact Assessment

**Community Development/Safety:**

This Strategy will contribute to creating more settled and safer neighbourhoods where good quality housing will contribute to the improvement in the health and well being of households

**Sustainability:**

This Strategy contributes to help deliver the ambitions for the place and its people, set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

**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 consider the content of the new draft strategy and provide suggestions for amendment and improvement before final approval and publication in April 2010.

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

**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. This Strategy presents a real opportunity for the new Unitary Council to address the needs of homeless people and ensure that these needs are taken into account in our emerging Housing and Sustainable Communities Strategies. The new Homelessness Strategy seeks to bring together through partnership working 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. It also seeks to highlight areas of homelessness demand that will require further development to improve outcomes for households.
3. In considering homelessness, as well as the wider housing need, the economic context and the outcomes from the consultation process, the Strategy outlines 6 Strategic priorities for homelessness and 4 cross cutting priorities. These strategic priorities are discussed in chapter 8 of the Strategy. This will enable the Strategy to be aligned to national, regional and local Strategies, with the benefits of assisting other Strategic outcomes.

**Carrying out the Homelessness Review**

4. As part of the development of the new strategy, local authorities are required to carry out a review of homelessness looking at existing and projected homelessness and housing supply.

Local authorities are also expected to identify the achievements from the last strategy and to carry forward any outstanding actions to the next five years. This strategy takes into account the priorities identified in legacy homelessness strategies. The review process is further explained in Chapter 4 of the Homelessness Strategy.

5. Another important aspect of reviewing homelessness is to consult with the local community, partners and stakeholders about service delivery, and to ask how best the Council can provide effective support and advice to homeless people. During 2009, the Council conducted three separate consultation exercises for Members, stakeholders and service users. Chapter 7 of the Homelessness Strategy explains this consultation process in more detail.

### **The Homelessness Strategy 2010-2015**

6. Aside from the homelessness review process and an understanding of the picture of homelessness and housing supply in Central Bedfordshire, the new strategy outlines key housing outcomes that need to be achieved in the next five years. There is also a detailed Strategy Action Plan that explains the method and outcome for each individual action.
7. Partnership working and greater consultation are two significant themes in the new strategy, both of which are strongly supported and encouraged by Central Government. Working more coherently with other agencies and services will provide a more seamless service to the customer and will minimise the risk of vulnerable adults and children being 'misaid' through the system process. Producing shared outcomes amongst agencies also reduces duplication of work and can contribute to financial or resource savings across the area as a whole.
8. Better engagement with stakeholders and service users would ensure a greater understanding of the type of services that will be useful and effective for homeless people, and that will complement the work of other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, (including Supporting People), who also provide help and support to this vulnerable group.
9. Preventing Homelessness remains a focal point for the council in reducing homelessness. The Housing Options programme has been an extremely effective way of tackling homelessness, as the demand figures show since 2008. Prevention of homelessness not only reduces the number of acceptances per quarter, it is also an effective way of providing help to customers in housing need as it tackles the root problem before a crisis occurs.
10. Preventing Homelessness also ensures that vulnerable people with health and social care needs are assisted to continue living in better conditions, helping them stay independent as long as possible and avoiding more costly hospital admission and residential care.

11. The new strategy contains a number of actions to take this prevention work forward over the next five years, including greater measures to tackle mortgage repossession through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme, actions around worklessness and debt, youth homelessness, assisting all vulnerable households, better business intelligence about homelessness demand, and the launch of Let's Rent, which will incorporate landlord accreditation and proper tenancy support packages.
12. Another key area of work for the Council will be to complete the harmonisation of the legacy councils Housing Needs teams, which continue to operate from two separate offices at Dunstable and Sandy. It is critical that both teams operate under the same performance management structure with common objectives, targets and outcomes. The Strategy will assist by providing a platform and framework for a seamless service across Central Bedfordshire.
13. This process of harmonisation will also be assisted by the Audit Commission 'review' of strategic housing services between April and June 2010, which will also aid Central Bedfordshire in deciding how to provide a holistic and seamless housing needs service to its residents.
14. This Homelessness Strategy takes account of the Health Needs Assessment for Homeless people. Implementation of this Strategy will be in conjunction with our health partners through the Strategic Housing Delivery Partnership to provide a seamless and whole systems approach to service delivery.

### **Conclusion**

15. This is Central Bedfordshire's first Homelessness strategy. It presents a real opportunity to address the needs of homeless people and ensure that these needs are taken into account in our emerging Housing and Sustainable Communities Strategies.
16. The new Homelessness Strategy emphasises the importance of partnership working with both statutory and voluntary agencies, to deliver a seamless approach for all client groups within the community, especially those who are vulnerable.
17. Feedback from members is welcomed will be incorporated in the final draft which will then be shared with stakeholders and the Delivery Partnership. The final strategy will be sent to Executive Cabinet for approval in April 2010.
18. The new Central Bedfordshire Homelessness Strategy 2010-2015 will be published in April 2010, and will run from April 2010 to March 2015.

**Appendices:**

Appendix A – Homelessness Strategy

Appendix B – Data used to inform the homelessness review.

Appendix C – Assessing priority need homelessness

Appendix D – Strategy action plan

**Background Papers:** (open to public inspection)

Homelessness Act 2002

Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002

Mid Bedfordshire District Council Homelessness Strategy

South Bedfordshire District Council Homelessness Strategy

**Location of papers:** Priory House, Chicksands