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**Meeting:** Executive  
**Date:** 6 April 2010  
**Subject:** Homelessness Strategy  
**Report of:** Cllr Rita Drinkwater, Portfolio Holder for Housing  
**Summary:** The report proposes that the Executive adopt a Homelessness Strategy for Central Bedfordshire that will run from April 2010 to March 2015

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**Advising Officer:** Julie Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing  
**Contact Officer:** Hamid Khan, Head of Housing Needs  
**Public/Exempt:** Public  
**Wards Affected:** All  
**Function of:** Executive  
**Key Decision** Yes  
**Reason for urgency/  
exemption from call-in  
(if appropriate)** N/A

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

This Strategy will contribute to managing growth effectively.

It will also contribute to other Council priorities. Through early intervention; promoting choice and control; homelessness prevention; and good quality housing advice the Strategy will contribute to supporting and caring for an ageing population.

Through a Partnership approach, the Strategy will increase the supply of good standard accommodation in the private sector and prevent homelessness through early intervention. This will create stability for children and young adults, thus assisting in educational opportunities for children and young people.

### **Financial:**

There are no financial implications for the Council's General Fund or Housing Revenue Account arising directly from this report. The actions arising from the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan are budgeted for in 2010-11. The Review of Strategic Housing Services, and in particular the assessment of Value for Money, will assist in determining an appropriate level of resources to achieve the outcomes set out for the period 2011-15.

**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 through actions which are designed to meet the diverse housing needs of customers across Central Bedfordshire, whilst increasing customer choice and control, and promoting high quality Sustainable homes.

The Policy has undergone a rigorous Equalities Impact Assessment and has been presented to the Equalities Forum who strongly supported the proposals in the Strategy.

**Community 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.

**Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Comments:**

The Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation on the 2 March 2010. Appendix B to the report, sets out a range of comments from the Committee which were subsequently reflected in the Homelessness Strategy.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Executive adopt the Homelessness Strategy for Central Bedfordshire.**

*Reason for*

*Recommendation(s): So that the Council can meet the statutory requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002.*

**Executive Summary**

This is Central Bedfordshire Council's first Homelessness Strategy following local government review. The Strategy is a statutory requirement under the Homelessness Act 2002. This strategy will continue to build upon the significant achievements made by the previous districts to tackle homelessness, and will enhance existing services and develop new initiatives. It has been developed in consultation with service users and partner agencies, in particular Aragon Housing Association, and will run from 2010-2015.

**Introduction**

1. The Homelessness Act 2002 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 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 7 of the Strategy. This will align the Strategy to national, regional and local Strategies, and will support a range of Strategic outcomes for the council, for example the Think Family approach.

## **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 and appendix 2 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. Earlier this year, the Council conducted three separate consultation exercises for Members, stakeholders and service users. Chapter 6 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 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 will ensure a greater understanding of the type of services that will be useful and effective for homeless people, and that will compliment the work of other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, (including Supporting People funded services), who also provide help and support to people who are vulnerable.
9. Preventing Homelessness remains a focal point for the council in reducing homelessness and avoiding crisis situations. 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 measures to tackle mortgage repossession through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme; actions around worklessness; debt and money management advice; 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 appropriate tenancy support packages.
12. A key area of work for the Council will be to complete the harmonisation of the legacy councils Housing Needs teams, which operate from 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 create a platform and framework for a coherent, seamless service across Central Bedfordshire.
13. This process of harmonisation will also be assisted by the Audit Commission Review of strategic housing services, which is scheduled to take place between June and September 2010. This Review will determine the shape and direction of strategic housing services in Central Bedfordshire.
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 strengthen a 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 Central Bedfordshire Homelessness Strategy aims to be consistent with other Council Strategies and plans and relevant sub regional and regional strategies. The Strategy will be reviewed regularly as set out in the Homelessness Act 2002 and this enables the Strategy to be flexible as circumstances change

**Appendices:**

Appendix A to Report – Homelessness Strategy including:

Appendix 1- Review and Statistics

Appendix 2 – Action Plan

Appendix 3 – Legislative description of priority need

Appendix B to Report – a summary of comments made by the Council's Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**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 and Council Offices, Dunstable