

Central Bedfordshire Council

Executive - 31 March 2015

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Report of Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care Health and Housing (carole.hegley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Advising Officers: Julie Ogley, Director of Social Care Health and Housing (julie.ogley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk) and Nick Costin, Head of Service, (nick.costin@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

This report relates to a Key Issue

Purpose of this report

1. The report introduces the draft Homelessness Strategy for Central Bedfordshire and proposes that it is adopted by Executive for implementation. The Homelessness Strategy is based on a comprehensive review of homelessness carried out between June and September 2014 and has been subject to significant stakeholder and service user engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to:

1. **adopt the draft Central Bedfordshire Homelessness Strategy (Appendix A).**
2. **approve the action plan which will drive improvements to services over the next 5 years.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. The item was presented to the Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 16th March 2015. The Committee agreed the following recommendations for Executive:
 - That reference be made in the Homelessness report with regard to the Armed Forces Covenant and the work undertaken to help homeless ex-military personnel.
 - That Planning colleagues be urged to use Section 106 monies/negotiations to increase the number of properties available to rent, and to move away from shared ownership schemes which are more expensive.

Introduction

3. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a legal duty on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and to produce a Strategy based on the results of that review, setting out how the council intends to tackle homelessness issues. The Strategy must cover the prevention of homelessness, ensuring there is sufficient accommodation for people that are homeless in Central Bedfordshire and that there is sufficient support for people who are homeless or who may be homeless. The Act requires local authorities to do this at least every 5 years. The Council's current homelessness strategy was produced in 2010.
4. During the summer of 2014 a Homelessness Review was carried out. This review considered homelessness trends and issues, national and local policy, feedback and suggestions from a number of consultation and engagement events (October 2014), analysis of outcomes from the previous strategy, and analysis of service user feedback.
5. The Homelessness Strategy has been drawn up based on this comprehensive review of homelessness locally. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires that the Council consults with both service users and key partners, in drawing up the strategy and any associated action plan. The Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan have been shaped by stakeholders through a number of consultation events and via an online survey. The feedback from this consultation is attached at Appendix B.
6. The Homelessness Strategy reflects the Council's strong commitment to early intervention and prevention, by continuing to invest in and improve the effectiveness of the options and advice offered to people through its Housing Solutions Service.. The Council seeks to enable people to make their own informed choices about housing that is affordable and sustainable. Reducing homelessness is a key priority for Central Bedfordshire.

Issues

7. The proposed Homelessness Strategy is forward looking, where all of the interventions for homeless people lead to the offer of accommodation being made as a springboard into work and financial stability. The strategy vision is simple – “A new start with our help – helping you to help yourself”.
8. To deliver this vision, the following strategic objectives have been established. These are to:
 - Effectively prevent homelessness by offering good realistic advice and support together with practical help;

- Understand and tackle the root causes of homelessness at a local level;
 - Where people do become homeless, help them to find and sustain suitable homes as soon as possible;
 - Involve people affected by homelessness in planning services to meet their individual needs;
 - Improve how we work together so services are easier to use and make the best of available resources;
 - Work in partnership with Children's Services to develop bespoke and sustainable housing solutions for young people and care leavers, including the provision of supported housing;
 - Ensure our responses to homelessness promote customer choice, equality of opportunity, reduce social exclusion and contribute to community cohesion;
 - Deliver high quality front line services, which consistently achieves great results whilst making the best use of resources.
9. The proposed Strategy covers the period 2015 to 2020 and seeks to further strengthen partnerships across Central Bedfordshire and to continue to make significant improvements across homelessness services. This will be achieved through the adoption of 5 key priorities. The action plan is structured around these priorities, identifying tasks required to ensure they are delivered. The key priorities are to:
- Improve the provision of a range of housing options and services to effectively prevent and reduce homelessness.
 - Increase housing supply to meet the accommodation and support needs of homeless people.
 - Reduce the use of temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast.
 - Minimise the impact of welfare reform while assisting homeless people to access opportunities for employment, education and training and support them to raise and meet their aspirations.
 - Develop an integrated partnership approach to tackling homelessness.
10. The Strategy and its action plan will be monitored by the multi-agency Homelessness Forum. By effectively monitoring the Strategy and action plan, the Council will be well placed to adapt and respond to any challenges that take place during the life of the strategy

Options for consideration

11. The Council is required to adopt a Homelessness Strategy. Executive is asked to consider feedback from consultation and recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Reason/s for decision

12. The Council is required to adopt a Homelessness Strategy to comply with the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002.
13. The draft Homelessness Strategy has been developed according to government requirements and following a comprehensive Homelessness Review.
14. The Homelessness Review and the Homelessness Strategy have been subject to significant stakeholder and service user involvement, and this has driven the detailed action plan. Partner agencies have indicated a desire to be involved in its ongoing development and impact monitoring.

Council Priorities

15. The draft strategy and priorities contained within supports the Council's priorities *enhancing your local community* through initiating projects that look to influence housing growth. It highlights the need to support housing development, so the Council can meet its obligation to provide sufficient accommodation for those that find themselves homeless.
16. The strategy also helps *promote health and well being and protect the vulnerable*, in particular through actions that prioritise services for vulnerable groups, such as care leavers and single young people. The vision of the strategy is to effectively promote well being for those who find themselves homeless.

Corporate Implications

17. Sustainability – the Council has adopted a Policy for the Discharge of Homelessness Duty to a Suitable Home. This includes suitable criteria for homes to be deemed reasonable and is aimed at sustaining tenancies for households placed in such homes. In addition, the prevention approach also looks at options to sustain existing tenancies. Preventing homelessness minimises these risks.
18. Public Health - evidence indicates that homeless people, in particular rough sleepers are more susceptible to ill health of various types and substance misuse. Preventing homelessness minimises these risks.
19. Community Safety - – there would be a positive impact in terms of community safety as the strategy covers all homeless people, not just those owed a rehousing duty. Implementation of the delivery plan will result in fewer street homeless in the area (street homeless are often perceived as a safety issue).

20. Risks - risks of failing to deliver this strategy are:

- **Reputational** – increased homelessness could portray the Council as an organisation that does not provide sufficient appropriate homelessness advice and housing options.
- **Economic** – preventing homelessness saves money when compared to the cost of providing temporary accommodation and re-housing into alternative accommodation. Public services that deal with health and crime are likely to see increased pressures on their services and budgets as a result of not preventing homelessness.
- **Social** - There could be an increase in the number of people living on the streets or in insecure, temporary arrangements. The human cost of homelessness can include restricted access to essential facilities and amenities; exposure to dangers and risk; exploitation; criminality and contact with the criminal justice system and loss of employment.

Legal Implications

21. Local Authorities have a duty to produce a Homelessness Strategy, which has been based on the results of a review of homelessness locally. The production of this strategy ensures that the Council complies with the above mentioned duty. Failure to agree this strategy leaves the Council open to legal challenge. .
22. A Homelessness Strategy itself also has to meet certain criteria under housing legislation e.g. considering to what extent involving other bodies could achieve the strategy aims and in having regard to the Council's current allocation scheme and tenancy strategy. With this Homelessness Strategy, the Council has also complied with its duties in respect of compiling this document.
23. The Homelessness Strategy must be taken into account by the Council's Children's Services and Adult Social Care Directorates as well as the Housing Directorate when any of these are exercising their statutory functions. Failing to do so risks legal challenge. This Homelessness Strategy is a plan for the future of what the Council wishes to do over the next 5 years and the majority of it goes above and beyond what the Council needs to do under legislation. For example it sets out aims and objectives the Council would wish to meet over the next 5 years. It proposes several reviews of processes, developments and provision so that services can be better targeted.

Financial Implications

24. There are no direct financial implications arising from the Homelessness Strategy as all activity will be carried out within the agreed budgets.

Equalities Implications

25. An equalities impact assessment has been completed as part of the strategy development process, and it is available as a background document.
26. The key findings of the equalities impact assessment are:
 - The strategy will ensure that more residents are prevented from becoming homeless and those that do become homeless will receive more person-centred support to relieve their homelessness and retain their independence.
 - The focus of the strategy is to deliver person-centred services that meet the needs of individual and people that share protected characteristics. Rather than commission universal services, the Council is proposing to encourage the supported housing market to provide accommodation based support for individual vulnerable groups such as young people so that their specific needs can be better met by specialist services.
 - Mental health problems and drug and alcohol misuse were identified as characteristic that increases the likelihood of homelessness in the strategy.
 - Single homeless which are more likely to be men are identified as a priority group in the strategy and people fleeing domestic violence (of which women are most likely to be affected) is identified as a characteristic that increases the likelihood of homelessness.
 - Offenders and ex-offenders are identified as a characteristic that increases the likelihood of homelessness

Implications for Work Programming

27. There are no known implications that might impact on the work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or further reports which might be considered by Members.

Conclusion and next Steps

28. The draft Homelessness Strategy has been prepared to comply with the relevant legislation and statutory guidance. Both the homelessness review and the draft strategy have been subject to rigorous consultation, and stakeholders have indicated a desire to be involved in its delivery and impact monitoring.
29. Executive is asked to approve the draft Homelessness Strategy to enable implementation of the proposed action plan.

Appendices

Appendix A is the draft Central Bedfordshire Homelessness Strategy

Appendix B is the response to consultation

Appendix C is the Homelessness Review, which sets out the findings from the comprehensive review carried out during the summer of 2014

Background Papers

The following background papers, not previously available to the public, were taken into account and are available on the Council's website:

Equalities Impact Assessment

Draft action plan