

COMMITTEE:	Cabinet
DATE:	13th February 2003
SUBJECT:	Homelessness Review and Strategy
REPORT OF:	Head of Housing Needs & Strategy
Ward(s):	All
Purpose:	To advise of the new statutory duty in relation to Homelessness Strategies and seek endorsement of our proposed response. To update Cabinet in relation to proposed HomeChoice changes in response to changes in legislation.
Contact:	Adrian Alderton, Head of Housing Needs and Strategy Tel ext: 5323
Recommendations:	<p>1. That Cabinet note the nature of the new statutory duty, and</p> <p>a) confirm the scope and structure for the Homelessness review, and</p> <p>b) nature of Councillor involvement and representation on the Local Homeless Review Group.</p> <p>2. That Cabinet also note the changes proposed to our existing HomeChoice scheme in line with changes to legislation, in line with authority currently delegated to Cabinet Spokesperson and Director of Housing, Health & Community Finance.</p>
1.0	<u>Introduction</u>

1.1	The Homelessness Act 2002 has amended Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 with regard to Homelessness and Part 6 of the Act with regard to Allocation of Accommodation.
1.2	<p>The main policy objectives for allocations are to :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Facilitate the introduction of allocation schemes that offer applicants and tenants an active role in choosing their accommodation. · Ensure the widest possible access to social housing for applicants by removing blanket exclusions and enable cross-boundary applications. · Rationalise the categories of applicants to whom reasonable preference must be given. · Ensure tenants seeking to transfer are considered on the same basis as applicants. <p>This has implications for the Council when reviewing the continuation of our choice-based lettings system (HomeChoice) currently being piloted with ODPM funding.</p>
1.3	<p>The main homeless legislative changes are ;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Strengthening the duty to provide advice and assistance. · Extending the priority need categories whereby the Council has a duty to accommodate, particularly relating to young people. · Requirement for Housing and Social Services to co-operate. · Interim housing duties to intentionally homeless households and pending review of decisions (appeals). · Discretionary duty to house non-priority households. · Duty to carry out a Homeless Review and Strategy.

1.4	This report focuses primarily upon our duty to carry out a Homeless Review and Strategy. A Homelessness Strategy, which will be based upon a Review, must be completed and submitted to the ODPM by 31 July 2003. The ODPM has been very prescriptive in its requirements, which are outlined in Homelessness Strategies : A Good Practice Handbook. A new Homelessness Strategy has to be produced at least every 5 years.
2.0	<u>Homeless Review and Strategy</u>
2.1	<p>The aim of this new approach to homelessness is to enable a shift :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Away from managing homelessness as a crisis event · Towards preventing homelessness, and · To provide more support services to homeless people.
2.2	<p>A Homeless Review has to cover the :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Current and future predicted levels of homelessness · Activities to prevent homelessness, secure accommodation and provide support, and · Resources available to the Council and other agencies.
2.3	<p>A Homelessness Strategy has to be formulated after extensive consultation and must incorporate planned targets / activity in relation to the following :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Homelessness prevention services · Securing sufficient accommodation, and · Securing satisfactory support services.

2.4	<p>The four main elements of the Review are :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collecting and analysing housing needs information on homelessness - mapping and auditing existing homeless services (accommodation, advice, prevention and support) - identifying gaps and overlaps in provision - consultation with stakeholders. <p>The Council is then required to publish the results of the review.</p>
3.0	<p><u>Scope and Structure</u></p>
3.1	<p>A scoping paper has been produced to outline the extent of the review, which is shown in Appendix 1. It is also intended to provide an East Sussex County overview of homelessness in addition to the local reviews produced by Eastbourne B.C. and the other E Sussex Housing Authorities.</p> <p>A Countywide overview will enable engagement with County stakeholders through a strategic steering group and is intended to identify common issues and promote a County strategic response. This is compatible with the requirement for the Review and Strategy to link to wider Corporate Strategies.</p>
3.2	<p>Locally the Council through the establishment of a Local Homeless Review group will lead the review. This group has emerged from the Temporary Accommodation working group, which was set up to review the opportunities to access accommodation for homeless households. A key concern for this group has been to minimise the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation. In this respect it should also be noted that the ODPM's Bed & Breakfast unit have established a target of nil families in Bed & Breakfast by April 2004. The membership and terms of reference for this group is shown in Appendix 2. It is intended to have 3 meetings of the group up to March 2003 with the intention of completing the Review in April 2003.</p>
4.0	<p><u>Councillor Involvement</u></p>

4.1	Member representation is proposed through involvement of the Cabinet Housing spokesperson, Councillor Leggett, and opposition Spokesperson, Councillor Elkin on the Local Homeless Review Group. The Homeless Review is also due for consideration by Scrutiny Committee in March 2003. This will provide Members with homelessness information and enable them to identify key issues. It is also intended that Cabinet approve the Homeless Strategy in July 2003 to enable submission to the ODPM.
5.0	<u>HomeChoice / Allocations Policy</u>
5.1	Legislation which is effective from the end of January, has required us to re-visit existing HomeChoice criteria. Given that we are in the midst of conducting our HomeChoice Pilot we are exploring options with both our existing Steering Group and the ODPM. Uppermost in our mind, is the wish to restrict changes to the minimum in advance of our Pilot review.
5.2	As a result, we anticipate the following changes being proposed: Ø Existing urgent bandings to only reflect `reasonable preference` groups (e.g. Homeless households and Households who meet more than one reasonable preference criteria) Ø Hardship criteria to be reflected within existing `live` banding (e.g. Households with an urgent need to give or receive care)
5.3	In line with existing Policy regarding our HomeChoice Pilot, authority for such change is currently delegated to our Cabinet Spokesperson, in conjunction with the Director of Housing, Health & Community Finance. We will re-visit this issue and report to Cabinet in line with our proposed review.
6.0	<u>Consultations</u>

6.1	<p>Extensive stakeholder consultation is expected with, for example, agencies, voluntary sector, members, users and staff. The intention being to improve the service effectiveness, design, targeting, priorities and customer care. Consultation will be carried out through the Local Review group and a survey of agencies involved with homeless households. A list of agencies surveyed to collect homelessness information is shown in Appendix 3. It is also intended to use resources from Brighton University to carry out consultation work with stakeholders and users.</p>
7.0	<p><u>Finance and Resources</u></p>
7.1	<p>The Homeless Review and Strategy is to be carried out by staff within the Housing Division, primarily the Housing Advice and Lettings Manager supported by the Head of Housing Needs and Strategy. There are anticipated to be some costs associated with consultation mainly through seeking to commission a consultation exercise with Brighton University. This will be funded from a grant provided by the ODPM to help address homelessness and £5,000 has been earmarked for this purpose.</p>
7.2	<p>The Review will identify existing resources from the Council and other agencies being applied to tackle Homelessness. Financial implications arising from the Housing Strategy action plans are not currently quantifiable; however, it is recognised that resources are a potential constraint in developing services. The Housing Needs and Strategy Service Plan for 2003 has currently identified a need for additional resources to develop a wider range of homeless preventative measures and initiatives. Particularly to access more accommodation in the private rented sector.</p> <p>This service plan similarly flags the need for contingency funding to support the `mainstreaming` of our Choice Based Lettings approach, subject to the outcome of our planned review and report to Cabinet.</p>

7.3	<p>We are due to complete our HomeChoice Pilot in March and will be preparing a review report for Cabinet consideration. A key feature of the review will be the extent to which our Pilot has assisted us to tackle homelessness in line with our developing Strategy.</p> <p>At the same time, it should be noted that new allocations legislation and guidance incorporate the requirement to offer Choice to applicants.</p>
8.0	<u>Other Implications</u>
8.1	<p>There are wide-ranging implications to developing improved homeless prevention, accommodation and support services. These particularly apply to the most vulnerable and low-income groups in the community. Developing homeless strategies and services will particularly assist families with children, young people, vulnerable and special needs clients.</p>
9.0	<u>Conclusion</u>
9.1	<p>The Council is required under the Homelessness Act 2002 to carry out a Homeless Review and produce a Homeless Strategy by 31 July 2003. This process together with the scope of the review is outlined in the report.</p>
<p>Adrian Alderton</p> <p>Head of Housing Needs and Strategy</p>	
<p>Background Papers:</p> <p>The Background Papers used in compiling this report were as follows:</p> <p>Homelessness Act 2002</p> <p>Homelessness Strategies : A Good Practice Handbook</p> <p>Shelter – Homeless review and strategy</p> <p>To inspect or obtain copies of background papers please refer to the contact officer listed above.</p>	

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