

BODY: Cabinet

DATE: 14 September 2016

SUBJECT: Homelessness Strategy

REPORT OF: Director of Service Delivery

Ward(s): All

Purpose: To seek Members' approval for the proposed Homelessness Strategy 2016 to 2021.

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Recommendations: Cabinet is recommended: (i) to note the finding of a Homelessness Review completed in 2016 and (ii) to delegate authority to the Director of Service Delivery in consultation with the Lead Member for Direct Assistance Services to approve amendments to the Strategy, subject to final consultation.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a legal requirement on local authorities to publish a Homelessness Strategy setting out its plans for preventing and responding to homelessness.
- 1.2 The Council's current Homelessness Strategy is embedded in its Housing Strategy 2013 to 2020, 'At Home in Eastbourne', under Theme 2, 'Finding and Keeping a Home in Eastbourne'.
- 1.3 There have been significant changes in national welfare and housing policy and in the local market since this Strategy was published and the levels and risks of homelessness have increased significantly. In light of these changes, the Council has carried out a new Homelessness Review with the aims of better understanding the challenges we face and providing the basis for a stand-alone Homelessness Strategy.
- 1.4 Lewes District Council has also been working on its own review of homelessness in the Lewes District and will be developing a Homelessness Strategy shortly. Whilst many of the market conditions and needs in Eastbourne and the Lewes District are similar, at this

stage the options for preventing homelessness, temporary accommodation and re-housing vary. It is therefore proposed that a stand-alone Homelessness Strategy is developed for Eastbourne at this stage, but with a clear intention to bring these together at a later stage when service mapping under the Joint Transformation Programme has been completed and a combined view of needs and options can be developed.

2.0 Homelessness Review

2.1 The 2016 Homelessness Review was carried out in accordance with the Homelessness Code of Guidance published by the Department for Communities and Local Government 2006:

"The purpose of the review is to establish the extent of homelessness in the district, assess its likely extent in the future, and identify what is currently being done, and by whom, and what level of resources are available, to prevent and tackle homelessness."

2.2 In carrying out its Review, the Council has collated information from a wide range of sources covering:

- local demographic information
- levels of and reasons for homelessness as evidenced by the Council's and key partners' records
- the characteristics of households presenting as homeless and those at particular risk
- the outcome of work to prevent homelessness and to secure accommodation for households who are already homeless
- the local private rental market and costs
- the impact of recent reforms to the welfare system
- the services available to different groups facing homelessness including rough sleepers and those with support needs
- changes to welfare benefits due to be implemented from 2016
- changes arising from the Housing and Planning Act 2016
- comments and feedback from providers of services to homeless people.

2.3 Some of the key findings of the Homelessness Review were:

- There was a significant increase in the number of households presenting as homelessness between 2014 and 2015, with a particular increase in the number of women with children becoming homeless.
- The main reason applicants to the Council give for the loss of their last home is the termination of their tenancy in the private rented sector.
- The majority of private market housing for rent is unaffordable to people on average household incomes in Eastbourne. The

need to prevent homelessness amongst those currently housed is paramount given the problems of accessible affordable housing in the private market.

- There was also a sharp increase in the number of households becoming homeless as a result of relationship breakdown.
- The main 'priority needs' of homeless households are the presence of children or a pregnant woman in the household and, in the case of single person households, vulnerability arising from poor mental health.
- There has been a decrease in the level of homelessness prevented through conciliation and mediation services and the reasons for this decrease need to be explored.
- There has been an increase in Domestic Abuse incidents being reported and the number of households becoming homeless as a result of violent relationship breakdown.
- There has been a fall in the number of homeless households accommodated in the private rented sector ('homelessness relieved') between 2014 and 2015. This presents particular challenges given the acute difficulties faced by people on modest incomes securing housing in the private market.
- Work with Rough Sleepers undertaken as part of the SHORE project has been effective. However, the Department for Communities and Local Government has confirmed that this funding will end in September 2016.
- The supply of very low cost accommodation for people with a history of homelessness and/or rough sleeping is extremely limited and reducing further.
- There are significant pressures on temporary accommodation and the costs of Bed and Breakfast and other accommodation paid for on a nightly basis are very high and set to increase.
- Supported Housing schemes are at significant risk of becoming blocked by a lack of affordable housing which their tenants can move on to when ready. These problems are particularly acute for young people. At the same time, potential reductions in local funding for support services and the proposed restrictions to the Local Housing Allowance pose major risks to providers of supported housing.

2.4 The full Eastbourne Homelessness Review 2016 is attached at Appendix A.

3.0 Draft Homelessness Strategy

3.1 The Draft Strategy sets out the current national and local context including changes in the housing market, changes to benefit entitlement introduced under the government's Welfare Reform programme and relevant provisions of the new Housing and Planning Act 2016. The Strategy also takes account of the economic climate within which local authorities will operate in the coming years as set out in the Corporate Plan 2016 to 2020.

3.2 The Draft Strategy has been developed in discussion with Eastbourne's Housing Forum. The actions required to address the concerns identified in the Homelessness Review fall into two broad headings:

- to provide a comprehensive homelessness service
- to improve access to housing

3.3 The key areas for action to prevent homelessness are to:

- identify trends and risks to ensure the Council and its partners address any emerging issues quickly
- ensure people at risk of homelessness have access to the housing, legal, debt and money advice services they need and to any financial assistance for which they are eligible, and to liaise with DWP to minimise any risks arising from changes to the way welfare benefits are assessed and managed
- raise awareness of the risks of homelessness and to continue working with authorities in East Sussex to minimise the number of young people becoming homeless
- work with East Sussex District and Borough authorities to secure housing and support services to deliver government commitments for Syrian refugees
- provide appropriate services, housing and support for a range of people with specific needs, including those at risk of homelessness as a result of domestic abuse, with health, care and support needs, and those needing to be re-housed from hospital and from supported housing schemes
- continue working to achieve 'no second night out' for rough sleepers and improve services to street homeless people.

3.4 Actions to increase access to housing include:

- the development and adoption of relevant planning policies and identifying opportunities for the acquisition and/or development of affordable and market housing
- liaison with private landlords to increase access to rented housing for those at risk of homelessness or living in temporary accommodation
- a review of options for housing homeless households in emergencies and temporarily until they can secure a tenancy,

and for reducing the time which people spend in temporary accommodation, and

- work with neighbouring Councils to address problems accessing good quality temporary accommodation and to minimise the need to place homeless households out of area.

3.5 The Draft Homelessness Strategy is attached at Appendix B.

4.0 Consultation

4.1 Members of the Housing Forum were consulted as part of the development of the Homelessness Review and, again, at a meeting to discuss the draft Homelessness Strategy.

4.2 It is proposed that the Consultation Draft of this Strategy is forwarded to individual members of the Housing Forum and other service and accommodation providers working with homeless households, as well as statutory authorities and representative partnerships and for a in Eastbourne.

4.3 The Draft Strategy will also be published on the Council's website for comment and feedback from residents.

5.0 Resource Implications

5.1 There are no new resources required to deliver this Strategy.

Options to address the rising costs of Temporary Accommodation will be developed as part of the annual Service and Financial Planning process.

6.0 Implications for Equalities and Fairness

6.1 The Draft Strategy addresses a range of needs and takes account of those who have particular difficulties accessing suitable housing.

6.2 An Equality and Fairness assessment of the Strategy will be carried out during the consultation period.

7.0 Legal Implications

The publication of a Homelessness Strategy meets the requirements of the Housing Act 2002. The Draft Strategy presented has been developed based on the Department for Local Government's Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2006.

8.0 Other Implications

8.1 There are no Environmental, Staffing or other implications arising from this report.

9.0 Recommendations

- 9.1 Cabinet is recommended: (i) to note the finding of a Homelessness Review completed in 2016 and (ii) to delegate authority to the Director of Service Delivery in consultation with the Lead Member for Direct Assistance Services to approve amendments to the Strategy, subject to final consultation.

Ian Fitzpatrick
Director of Service Delivery

Background Papers:

None.
