

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

**CABINET – 23 FEBRUARY 2009**

**TELFORD AND WREKIN HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR ADULT & CONSUMER CARE**

**1.0 PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to seek formal adoption and endorsement of the Borough's new Homelessness Strategy by Cabinet

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That Cabinet formally adopt the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013;**
- 2.2 That Cabinet endorses and supports the vision and principles of the Strategy;**
- 2.3 That Cabinet approve the funding of £50k from the Corporate Contingency for use in the pilot scheme set out in paragraph 5.5.5 and in the financial comment.**

**3.0 SUMMARY**

- 3.1 This report details the requirement for all local authorities to produce a strategy for tackling homelessness, and sets out the approach taken to develop a comprehensive multi-agency strategy which seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of households in the Borough.**

**4.0 PREVIOUS MINUTES**

- 4.1 Not applicable**

**5.0 INFORMATION**

**5.1 Background**

- 5.1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty upon all local authorities to develop strategies for tackling homelessness, with a requirement that the first homelessness strategy be published by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2003.**
- 5.1.2 Whilst the Act places a further requirement on local authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy within a five year period, Telford & Wrekin is exempt from this requirement as it is a 4 star authority.**

- 5.1.3 However there have been significant changes both in national policy and direction, and in local need and demand for services, and accordingly a new strategy for the Borough has been developed to ensure that we continue to focus on delivering efficient and effective services for people who are in housing need.

## **5.2 Methodology**

- 5.2.1 The Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) at Birmingham University completed an interim review of the Borough's first homelessness strategy in April 2007. The review highlighted three main areas where the strategy had not made as much of an impact, and these areas have been incorporated as key actions in the new strategy:

- to improve opportunities for service users to influence the services they receive
- to improve access to employment and employment training for homeless people
- to properly assess the strategy to ensure that it addresses the needs of our diverse community

- 5.2.2 CURS were commissioned to help to develop the new strategy and upon their recommendation Groundswell UK, a national organisation leading in the field of user involvement with homeless households, were also commissioned to involve our service users in the development of the strategy

- 5.2.3 The strategy has been developed through an initial workshop with stakeholders and partners to identify new actions required to build on existing achievements and to address any emerging gaps in service

- 5.2.4 The strategy was then tested with service users through focus groups and individual interviews involving 70 service users undertaken by peer researchers facilitated by Groundswell UK, exploring some of the actions that had been identified at the agency workshop.

- 5.2.5 A second workshop was held to enable joint work by local agencies and service users to further refine action plans with direct input of evidence from the Groundswell user research.

## **5.3 Consultation**

- 5.3.1 The first draft of the strategy was circulated widely across partner and stakeholder organisations after the initial workshop.

- 5.3.2 The Groundswell UK research offered an opportunity for a wide range of current and previous service users to discuss the draft strategy and to highlight what they feel is working well and what additional services

they think may benefit households threatened with homelessness in the future.

## **5.4 Publication**

- 5.4.1 The strategy will be published on CD disk, and will also include a separate analysis of local, regional and national policy, trends and statistics and a copy of the full report on the consultation undertaken by Groundswell UK
- 5.4.2 A limited number of printed copies of the strategy will be available on request, with the provision for further copies to be printed to meet demand. All printed copies will also be available in large print and in a range of other languages if required.
- 5.4.3 The strategy will be available on the internet, with links to the various strategies and guidance documents referred to within the strategy.

## **5.5 Key Actions**

- 5.5.1 The strategy sets out a series of objectives and actions. These can be summarised as:-
  - Working together to understand the causes of homelessness locally
  - Intervening to prevent homelessness
  - Ensuring that adequate accommodation and support services are available
  - Listening to homeless people to develop services that better meet their needs
  - Sharing and adopting best practice
- 5.5.2 The successes of the 2003-2008 strategy have been widely recognised, and it is important to set the current process within a review of achievements to date. Each section of the strategy identifies the progress made on specific issues, but draws attention to:
  - Year on year reductions in homelessness presentations and acceptances since 2004/5
  - The establishment of the KIP project for people at risk of rough sleeping and expansion of the STAY project to provide bespoke support services for younger single homeless people
  - The development of the substance misuse bond scheme
  - The introduction of a mental health and housing liaison officer role, to assist people with mental health problems to find suitable accommodation, and to improve links between services
  - The launch of a small specialist accommodation project for 16/17 year olds, focussing on tenancy sustainment, life skills and access to education, employment and training

### 5.5.3 The key actions for 2009 onwards are:-

- To prevent homelessness in 80% of all cases approaching the Council for assistance by 2011
- To reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation to no more than 50 at any one time
- To offer improved opportunities and outcomes for customers
- To improve opportunities for service users to influence the services they receive
- To improve access to employment and employment training for homeless people
- To assess the strategy to ensure that it addresses the needs of a diverse community

5.5.4 The Homelessness Strategy and action plan provides an overarching vision for the actions we will need to take, in partnership, to tackle and reduce homelessness in the Borough over the next five years. The strategy complements a range of operational action plans developed and implemented within the Council's Housing Needs Service, and pays particular regard to Government targets to reduce temporary accommodation use by 50% by 2010.

5.5.5 The national temporary accommodation target has been adopted locally through the Local Area Agreement and the Priority Plan, and an invest to save proposal has been agreed to pilot several new initiatives aimed at reducing the use of temporary accommodation, and in particular the reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation for emergencies. The pilot scheme will introduce five new targeted intervention posts for a 12 month period. These will support people who are homeless and will help them to be housed in permanent accommodation or in the case of young people leaving home under difficult circumstances to assist a return to home.

5.5.6 In addition, further work is being undertaken, as part of the Council's response to the current economic downturn, to explore options for a local mortgage rescue scheme and other measures which may alleviate situations where people may be facing homelessness. A further report will be presented to Cabinet shortly on these matters.

## 5.6 **Equality and Diversity**

5.6.1 The homelessness strategy and related activities are targeted at reducing adverse impacts on homeless people and promoting positive support for those who endure the worst effects of social exclusion.

## 5.7 **Environmental Impact**

5.7.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## **5.8 Legal Comment**

- 5.8.1 Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 gives housing authorities the power to carry out a homelessness review for their district and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review.
- 5.8.2 Section 1 (3) of the Act required housing authorities to publish their first homelessness strategy by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2003.
- 5.8.3 Section 1(4) of the Act requires housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a further homelessness review, within the period of five years beginning with the day on which their last homelessness strategy was published
- 5.8.4 Local authorities who are categorised as an excellent authority by the Secretary of State by virtue of the Local Authorities' Plans and Strategies (Disapplication) (England) Order 2005 are exempt from the section 1 (4) requirement.

## **5.9 Links with Corporate Priorities**

- 5.9.1 The recommendations within this report impact upon the following Corporate Priorities:
  - Priority 2 – Giving Children and Young People the Best Possible Start in their Lives
  - Priority 4 – Creating a Safe, Strong and Cohesive Community
  - Priority 5 – Promoting Healthy Communities and Improving the Quality of Life of Vulnerable and Older People
  - Priority 7 – an Efficient, Effective and Customer-Focused Council that Delivers Value-For-Money for the Community

## **5.10 Opportunities and Risks**

- 5.10.1 The opportunities and risks associated with this decision have been identified and assessed. Arrangements will be put in place to manage the risks and maximise the opportunities that have been identified

## **5.11 Financial Implications**

- 5.11.1 The recommendations of this report to adopt the revised homelessness strategy do not give rise to financial liabilities outside those existing under the current strategy. For actions involving funding requirements these will be sought from within existing budgets and with contributions from partner organisations. Where residual funding requirements exist these will be pursued through the Service and Financial Planning process.
- 5.11.2 The cost of initiatives to prevent homelessness and to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation including bed and breakfast remains a significant issue. There are a range of measures in place to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation

including prevention measures. The costs of temporary stays in bed and breakfast are significant due to the nightly rates commanded by the operators. The Government only contribute a small amount of the cost of bed and breakfast accommodation because of the cap on Housing Benefit subsidy grant.

- 5.11.3 The pilot referred to in paragraph 5.5.5 is the previously reported and agreed invest to save proposal and is being introduced to give further support to those at risk of becoming homeless to prevent them moving to temporary accommodation. If effective this will reduce the expenditure that the Council would have expected to spend on bed and breakfast accommodation. This may not necessarily be an absolute cost reduction due to the current economic circumstances and increasing pressure on homeowners maintaining their mortgages. There is the potential for a higher demand on the Housing Needs service to deal with the consequences of the downturn. However, the pilot scheme may limit any further increase in the numbers in temporary accommodation.

The costs of the invest to save scheme, which is a 12 month pilot, are forecast to be around £140k. This investment will be spent on 5 full time temporary posts. These staff will undertake varying roles to support homeless people to find permanent accommodation or in the case of young people who have left home in the midst of difficult relationships, to support and attempt to reinstate them at home. This will reduce the requirement to provide temporary accommodation and the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. Some of these posts are secondments and are already funded and others are being recruited to.

The total cost is being funded from Supporting People grant £47k, Corporate funding £50k from the revenue budget contingency and £43k from other grants within the ACC Portfolio which is already funding posts seconding to the new pilot. Therefore £97k of new funding is being invested in the scheme.

If successful in meeting a target reduction of 18 cases at any one time (with an average stay of 13 weeks this is equivalent to 72 cases per annum) the anticipated real savings on the current overspend position are expected to be around £165k and therefore in this scenario would exceed the investment.

- 5.11.4 There is also Government action to try to prevent homelessness and repossessions as part of an overall £1 billion national scheme and the Council will play its part in the outworking of these measures. In addition the Council has formulated a number of proposals to help people in the Borough during the current economic downturn. Proposals are being worked up and forecast costs will be presented in due course.

**6.0    WARD IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1    Homelessness may affect people from all wards in the borough. This decision therefore has District Wide implications.

**7.0    BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

*Report prepared by Kathy Jones, Housing Needs Business Manager  
Tel: 01952 381941*