

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder

16 October 2013

LEAD OFFICER: Director of Housing

Homelessness Strategy 2013-18

Purpose

1. To present the new Homeless Strategy for 2013-18 and associated policies for the consideration of the Housing Portfolio Holder.
2. This is a key decision because it is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards or electoral divisions in the area of the relevant local authority and it was first published in the March 2013 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Housing Portfolio Holder:
 - Approves the Homeless Strategy and action plan for 2013-18 Appendix A and B
 - Approves the Discharging Duty Policy Appendix C
 - Approves the Reconnections Policy Appendix D

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The proposed strategy and action plan represents a number of actions to help address the anticipated challenges faced by the housing advice and options service. These are expected to include:
 - An increase in applications and people seeking assistance.
 - The impact of the Welfare Reforms.
 - Increased difficulty in accessing affordable housing options, including the private rented sector.

Background

5. The Council are required to produce a homeless strategy every 5 years. The current strategy was published in 2008 and covers the 5 year period up to 2013. Since the introduction of this homeless strategy the Council have made significant improvements, including:
 - (a) Increase in homeless prevention.
 - (b) Reduction in the numbers in temporary accommodation.
 - (c) The Home-link Sub Regional choice based lettings scheme.
6. However, the economic climate has changed significantly since 2008 and, following a change in government, new housing policy and changes to the benefits system are expected to have a high impact on the housing advice and options service. During

the last year of the previous strategy (2012/13) the Council have seen an increase in homeless applications and those needing temporary accommodation, at the same time as homeless prevention is decreasing due to more difficulties accessing the private rented sector.

7. A review of homelessness in the district was conducted prior to the homelessness strategy and the findings reported in the Homelessness Strategy Review February 2013.
8. The Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities the power to discharge their duty to secure accommodation for homeless applicants through the private sector, for those accepted as homeless after 9th November. This policy is set out in Appendix C.
9. The Discharge of Duty Policy sets out the different ways in which the Council may discharge its homeless duties, including through the private rented sector. It also covers the circumstances that will be taken into account when assessing accommodation as suitable, taking into account the needs of the household and the limited supply of accommodation.
10. In addition due to the increase of households in temporary accommodation, it has been necessary for officers to actively manage cases in order to discharge our duties. The new lettings policy (Implemented in April 2013) enables the Council to place bids on behalf of homeless applicants or direct lets to applicants in order to discharge our duties and free up temporary accommodation (minimising the need to use expensive and unsuitable Bed & Breakfast accommodation).
11. In 2012 the CLG granted the sub region funding to work together to prevent rough sleeping and homelessness amongst single applicants. The sub regional authorities are continuing to work together to provide accommodation for single people where they are connected to the sub region. For those not connected to the sub region, we are adopting a Reconnections Policy to help reconnect those at risk of rough sleeping with the area they are connected to. This policy is set out in Appendix D

Considerations

12. The main objectives of the homeless strategy set out in Appendix A are:
 - The prevention of homelessness
 - Ensuring there is sufficient accommodation available to people who are, or who may become homeless.
13. The new action plan includes specific actions to address a range of issues many of which link to other strategic work of the Council and County Council. These are set out in detail in Appendix B and include:
 - Floating support – to monitor the impact of increased demand and identify any gaps in the service provided by the County Council contract.
 - Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) policy – to monitor the revised policy to take into account the welfare reforms.
 - Mental health – in response to the increase in the proportion of priority need, to work with mental health services to try to prevent homelessness.
 - Provision of money advice and support in relation to finance and budgetary assistance to link to the development of a financial inclusion strategy.
 - Work with sub regional partners using government funding for single homelessness.

- Monitor the effectiveness of the new reconnections and discharge of duty policies.
- Assess the impact of the King Street Home Finder scheme.
- Manage the transition to the new Robson Court hostel with Sanctuary Housing.
- Investigate the feasibility of a foyer scheme for young people with the County Council.

Options

14. The Portfolio Holder has the option to approve the Homeless Strategy, action plan and linked policies regarding discharge of duty and reconnections.
15. The Portfolio Holder may choose to recommend amendments to the strategy and policies attached.
16. The Council will risk being in breach of its statutory obligations to have an active Homeless Strategy if no strategy is approved.

Implications

17. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:

Financial

18. An increase in resources may be required if the demand for the service increases. The actions relating to homeless prevention will work towards minimising any increase as much as possible.

Legal

19. The strategy is a legal requirement, as is the provision of homelessness assistance.

Staffing

20. It is anticipated that the activities included within the strategy will be carried out by the existing staffing resources, although demand for the service will be monitored closely.

Risk Management

21. There is a risk that external factors in the housing market may impact on the anticipated outcomes of the homeless strategy.

Equality and Diversity

22. The strategy aims to address diversity and equality issues within the service.

Consultation responses (including from the Youth Council)

23. A 12 week consultation period ran between July and October 2013, and during this time a stakeholder event was held, which supported the Homeless Strategy. Feedback included:
 - Should we be doing more for separated fathers (public consultation)?
 - Could there be more sub regional work around under occupation (stakeholder event)?
 - Positive support for the need to increase temporary accommodation and other actions identified (stakeholder event).

The Youth Council has not responded to the consultation.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Aim 6 - Increase the supply of temporary accommodation, prioritising council-owned properties whilst not restricting options in other sectors.

24. The homeless strategy and action plan includes actions to help us minimise the need for temporary accommodation, through homeless prevention and increase the supply of temporary accommodation for those who become homeless.

Background Papers

South Cambridgeshire District Council - Homelessness Review February 2013

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