

REPORT TO: Scrutiny and Overview Committee
LEAD OFFICER: Interim Director of Housing

21 March 2019

Homelessness strategy 2018-2023

Purpose

1. To seek approval for the Council's Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023.
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. Notice of the decision was first published in the August 2018 Notice of Key and Non Key Decisions.

Recommendations

3. That the Scrutiny and Overview Committee:
 - (a) Reviews and comments on the draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-23.
 - (b) Recommends Cabinet approve the draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-23.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The priorities in the Homelessness Strategy come from the findings and key issues emerging from the Homelessness Review. Many of the actions relate to new statutory responsibilities, initiatives to prevent homelessness and continuation of existing work with partner agencies.

Background

5. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on all Local Authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and, based on the findings of this review, to develop and publish a strategy to tackle and prevent homelessness. The strategy must be renewed every 5 years. South Cambridgeshire District Council's Homelessness Strategy was last published in 2013 and is now due for renewal.

Considerations

6. Levels of homelessness are increasing with a 45% increase in homeless approaches between 2012/13 and 2016/17 and a 64% increase in acceptances between 2012/13 and 2016/17.
7. The highest priority group for homeless acceptances is households that include dependent children, followed by those who are vulnerable due to mental health.
8. The main cause of homelessness is now termination of assured shorthold tenancy which accounts for two-thirds of all homeless acceptances.

9. The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force from 3rd April 2018 and increases the duties owed by the Council.
10. Private rented accommodation in the district is expensive and unaffordable to many households when comparing the local housing allowance with medium rents.
11. Home ownership is unaffordable for many households with lower quartile figure comparisons showing house prices to be 10.8 times higher than income (Sept 2018).
12. Homeless prevention has reduced since 2014/15 largely due to the difficulties of accessing affordable private rent.
13. The County-wide Trailblazer project is working to increase homeless prevention further through building stronger links between agencies and making homelessness the unacceptable outcome.
14. From the homelessness review and consultation, the following themes have emerged for the Homelessness Strategy 2018-23:
 - Working closer with partner agencies to prevent homelessness.
 - New private rent initiatives
 - Access to information
 - Access to accommodation and support.

Options

15. To approve the draft South Cambridgeshire Homelessness Strategy 2018-23. This includes work that the Council will need to do to meet its statutory obligations, and reduce the risk of an increase in demand for temporary accommodation. It also continues the good work already underway, for example, through the Trailblazer project.
16. To reject the current draft and recommend alternative priorities which may incur additional expenditure, as a significant proportion of the current draft is work that the Council will need to undertake to meet its statutory obligations and minimise the potential increase in expensive temporary accommodation such as B&B accommodation.

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. Meeting the statutory needs of the Homelessness Reduction Act and increasing access to the private rented sector via Shire Homes Lettings, all have financial implications. However, budgets for the current year have already been agreed for these and bids have been made to take account of on-going expenditure. These costs can be met by the Homeless Flexible Support grant up to and including 2019/20. The Council are yet to be notified of its level of allocation past this date. Investing in sufficient resources to help prevent homelessness will also help to minimise the risk of an overall increase in expenditure due to increased demand for temporary accommodation for homeless households, such as expensive B&B accommodation.

Legal

19. The Council have statutory obligations towards homeless households as set out in the Housing Act 1996. These duties have recently increased with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Staffing

20. Staffing levels have been increased to meet the demands of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Risk Management

21. Increasing costs of homelessness is one of the Council's highest corporate risks. Many of the mitigations for this are included in the draft Homelessness Strategy including homeless prevention within the private rented sector and working with partner agencies.

Consultation responses

22. Partner agencies were initially consulted on our priorities during the review of homelessness. Giving consideration to the four themes coming out of the review:
- 11/11 agreed with "working closer with partner agencies to prevent homelessness".
 - 11/11 agreed with "new private rent initiatives".
 - 10/11 agreed with "access to information".
 - 11/11 agreed with "access to accommodation and support".

23. On completion of the draft strategy, a 12-week consultation period ended on 9th October. The following responses were received:

24. (Anon) Other priorities that should be included – single women, disability and DDST (Dual diagnosis street team). Also, an observation that rough sleepers migrate to the City and therefore have no local connection and are excluded from some support services. Some temporary accommodation places people a long way from familiar surroundings and support.

Comment: No changes made to homelessness strategy. Homeless prevention options for single people are available to men and women. Disability assessed within our application process. DDST is 2 year pilot scheme and an initiative operated by Cambridge and Peterborough Foundation Trust covering Cambridge City only. Support and options available to those at risk of rough sleeping – if they migrate to the City they are usually entitled to support services as they are from the Cambridgeshire area in line with the Reconnections policy. Acknowledge that temporary accommodation can be some distance away from existing surroundings as this is emergency accommodation – emphasis on early prevention to either keep households within their existing home or work with them to find a suitable alternative solution.

(Diane Docherty – Emmaus, Cambridge) Would it be possible for the strategy to include a priority of supporting single homelessness in non traditional longer term supported housing options such as Emmaus.

Comment: Included a more general action around supported accommodation, as the budgets for such accommodation are not within our control. "Ensure vulnerable applicants are referred to appropriate supported accommodation that meets their needs. Monitor access to this supported housing and any unmet need to identify

ongoing needs and continue to engage with the County on their review of housing related support."

We have also included an action regarding single people – “continue to work with the City Council and contribute to the Single Homeless Service and identify other ways to meet the housing needs of single people”.

(Anon) Would be good to see reference to supported housing. Update the strategy to reflect the government decision to no longer look to change funding arrangement for supported housing.

Comment: As above regarding supported housing and strategy updated to reflect the recent government decision on funding for supported housing.

(Anon) Advice to prevent homelessness, especially in relation to universal credit.... There is no CAB drop in service for money advice – there is a service delivered once a week by appointment. Perhaps a drop in session could be considered or a 1:1 service targeted at specific groups.

Comment: No changes made – CAB drop in has been trialled and little take up. Applicants identified for debt advice to prevent homelessness are referred. Ongoing liaison and monitoring of demand, particularly in view of universal credit. An action is already included regarding the CAB.

(Alison Smith – Cambridgeshire County Council) – to work with partner agencies through a think family approach.

Comment: wording of action around partnership working amended to reflect this.

(Gary Hall – Clarion Housing Group) – the review is very comprehensive and gives a clear view of the amount of work that has gone on.... Strategic priorities seem very much in line with the findings of the review. ... We will continue to work in partnership with the Council in trying to meet the statutory duty both through nominations arrangements and the provision of new housing.

Comment – no changes made.

(Housing Advice team) – include more reference to the Duty to Refer as other agencies may look to the Homelessness Strategy for this information.

Comment – strategy updated to include this, and added action point.

Of the five E-forms completed and two email responses from outside the service, six respondents felt that the Homelessness strategy included the correct priorities.

Effect on Strategic Aims

25. Homes for our future – find solutions for people facing homelessness

Background Papers

- Homelessness Strategy 2018-23
- Homelessness Review 2018

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