

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 11 September 2008
AUTHOR/S: Corporate Manager – Affordable Homes / Housing Advice and Options Manager

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2008 – 2013

Purpose

1. To seek approval on the attached Homelessness Strategy for 2008 – 2013.
2. This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area of the District

Background

3. The council are required to produce a homeless strategy every 5 years. The previous strategy was published in 2003, and therefore we are required to have a new one in place in 2008.
4. Significant improvements have been made to the homeless services provided by the Council since July 2003, including:
 - (a) A significant reduction in the numbers of households living in temporary accommodation. The Government set all local authorities the target of reducing the numbers of households in temporary accommodation by half by 2010; SCDC reached our target for this in 2007/08.
 - (b) Minimised use of Bed and breakfast accommodation, including no use of B&B at all during 2007/08.
 - (c) Increased homelessness prevention. This includes new prevention initiatives including a settled homes scheme and a young person floating support scheme.
 - (d) Introduced a sub-regional choice based lettings scheme and new lettings policy.
 - (e) Awarded the status of Regional Homelessness champions by the CLG in October 2007.

Considerations

5. The new homelessness strategy aims to address the continued progress the service wish to provide, national and regional targets and priorities, and potential challenges ahead. The action plan accompanying the strategy includes:
 - (a) Monitoring the impact of the new choice based lettings scheme on homelessness.
 - (b) Further reduction in temporary accommodation, including minimal use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
 - (c) Increase homeless prevention.

- (d) Focus on the accommodation needs of young people.
- (e) Support to Travellers.
- (f) Potential hostel re-provision.
- (g) Maximise opportunity raised by being awarded Regional Champion status for the eastern region.
- (h) Meet the Audit Commission's inspection (KLOE) requirements relating to the service.
- (i) Working with partner agencies.
- (j) Ensure value for money
- (k) Increase access to the private sector.
- (l) Equality and diversity needs.
- (m) Housing futures.

Implications

6. Financial	The strategy will help to address the housing needs within the district and minimise the need for costly emergency accommodation. Some schemes to prevent homelessness may require funding and where possible it is hoped that this will be available within existing budgets.
Legal	The strategy is a legal requirement.
Staffing	The activities included within the strategy will be carried out by the existing staffing resources.
Risk Management	There is a risk that external factors in the housing market may impact on the anticipated outcomes of the homeless strategy.
Equal Opportunities	The strategy aims to address diversity and equality issues within the service.

Consultations

7. During the Homelessness Review surveys were sent to private landlords, RSL's, service providers and previous customers. The feedback received has helped to formulate the strategy and its action plan.
8. The draft strategy has been consulted on and has been available on the council's website for the public to view and comment. Partner agencies, service providers and parish council's have all been contacted directly during the consultation period.
9. As a result of the feedback received during this period no amendments have been made to the strategy document, although some minor changes have been made to the action plan, which accompanies this.
10. In addition, an equality impact assessment has been completed on this strategy, and as a result we have decided to amend the action plan to ensure that all elements of equality are monitored where appropriate.

11. The following comments were received:

Comment	Response/ action
<p><i>Jobcentreplus.</i></p> <p>Query raised over the impact of asylum seekers.</p>	<p>As the local housing authority, we do not have duty under the homeless legislation to Asylum Seekers (except in some circumstances where asylum was claimed before 3 April 2003), however we may have duties towards those granted refugee status or discretionary leave (if there is no clause attached that indicates they have no recourse to public funds). We receive very few applications like this. However, we are aware that the 16+ team at Cambridgeshire County Council, who are responsible for housing unaccompanied asylum seeking children have a high level of need and we will be discussing with them whether this should form part of a joint protocol we are developing with the County Council.</p>
<p><i>Cambridge Housing Society</i></p> <p>The review of homelessness was comprehensive, although would be interesting in future to monitor the impact of the growth sites.</p>	<p>The impact of the new growth site developments will form part of the monitoring on lettings and the new Home Link scheme.</p>
<p><i>Bar Hill Parish Council</i></p> <p>Approve of our draft homeless strategy.</p>	
<p><i>Domestic Violence co-ordinator</i></p> <p>Would like to see information on 'moving on' accommodation from refuge, and raised a query around recent case law.</p>	<p>Move on needs are now addressed in the new lettings policy, along with the needs of those accepted as statutorily homeless. This will therefore be covered under the action to monitor the impact of the Home link scheme. Officers will always have regard to recent case law and effects on the council's duty.</p>
<p><i>John Huntingdon's Charity</i></p> <p>Would have liked to have seen some mention of the generic floating support service that they operate in Sawston. Would like the profile of floating support to be raised.</p> <p>"We are well supported by SCDC in training and SCDC staff are very helpful at all times. It would be good to record our thanks for the partnership working in this instance".</p>	<p>This will be covered within the action plan, to raise awareness of all homeless prevention schemes, including our own floating support service and linked services such as this.</p>
<p><i>Wherry Housing Association</i></p> <p>Would like to see more co-ordination of floating support services to help address specific needs, including drink/drugs, mental health, ASB etc and more interlinking of all</p>	<p>Supporting People are currently looking at the provision of floating support services across the county. In addition, these specific points can be encouraged through the</p>

RSL's. Unaware of some of the homeless prevention services available.	development of a homeless strategy for housing association across the county, which is covered in our action plan. All RSL's in the district were provided with an information pack on the prevention activities following the council's review of homelessness, and an offer of attending team meetings etc have been made. However, as part of the need to raise awareness, such packs will also be sent to new housing associations developing in the area.
<i>Ickleton Parish Council</i>	
Positive response	

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

12.	Work in partnership to manage growth to benefit everyone in South Cambridgeshire now and in the future
	The strategy aims to build on the successful partnership working that has resulted in an improved service to date.
	Deliver high quality services that represent best value and are accessible to all our community
	Actions will be taken to ensure we meet the requirements of the Audit Commission KLOE for homelessness and housing need, and customer satisfaction with the service will continue to be sought. Actions within the strategy will enable us to maintain and build on the services, which have resulted in the service being named Regional Champions for homelessness for the eastern region.
	Enhance quality of life and build a sustainable South Cambridgeshire where everyone is proud to live and work
	The strategy aims to address housing needs within the district and provide better access to various housing options including social rented, low cost home ownership and private renting. Through pursuing various housing options and the choice based lettings scheme, customers will have more choice over their housing.

Conclusions/Summary

13. A new homeless strategy is required for 2008-2013. The attached strategy and action plan is designed to ensure that the Council can continue to address the needs of residents in the district who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Recommendation

14. It is recommended that the attached draft Homelessness Strategy be approved.

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