

PART A

AGENDA

ITEM 1

Report to: Community Services Portfolio Holder
Date of meeting: 1st June 2011
Report of: Rachel Dawson Housing Section Head
Title: Watford Homelessness Strategy 2008 2013, Mid term review 2011

1.0 **SUMMARY**

1.1 Under the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities are required to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and to publish a Homelessness Strategy based on the results of that review.

1.2 The current Homelessness Strategy for Watford runs from 2008 to 2013. The aim of the strategy is to prevent homelessness and to provide appropriate accommodation and support for those who are already homeless. It has the following five strategic priorities:

1. Prevention of homelessness
2. Monitoring supply and demand for temporary accommodation
3. Improving access to permanent accommodation
4. Providing support to manage health and life issues
5. Improving and developing services and partnership working

1.3 A mid term review of the Homelessness Strategy has been completed. This report seeks approval of the review and the process for further updates of the strategy and associated action plan.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That the Watford Homelessness Strategy 2008 to 2013: Mid term review 2011 be agreed.

2.2 That the action plan be kept up to date on an ongoing basis, with the portfolio holder being informed of all revisions made and giving approval where appropriate.

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Report approved by: Lesley Palumbo, Head of Community Services

3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

3.1 The current Homelessness Strategy was adopted in 2008. Although the key objectives are still relevant, there have been significant changes since this time, which mean that the actions needed to continue to work towards these objectives require considerable updating.

3.2 A mid term review has been completed to bring the strategy up to date with the current policy framework. Relevant statistical information has been analysed and housing managers, front line staff and partner organisations have all contributed their understanding of the most significant challenges for homeless services and how resources may be best deployed.

3.3 The full review and updated action plan are attached to this report and key aspects are summarised below.

3.4 Achievements in meeting the strategy objectives to date are summarised on pages 4 to 6 of the review document. They include:

- the establishment of a severe weather plan for particularly cold spells
- targeted work with
 - a small group of Eastern European entrenched rough sleepers
 - ex offenders
 - 16 and 17 year olds
 - those fleeing domestic violence.
- a project in schools aimed at preventing homelessness
- a money advice worker focused on working with people in mortgage arrears to prevent repossession
- a tenant liaison officer working with those in the private rented sector to assist with sustaining tenancies and avoiding repeat homelessness
- increased delivery of new affordable housing
- counselling and life skills training made available via voluntary sector partners

3.5 There are some very significant changes in the policy/legislative environment. There are changes to rights of A8 nationals. Some changes to the way housing benefit is calculated have started to be implemented and further changes are to follow. Broader changes to welfare benefits and to the framework for delivery of affordable housing and allocations are likely to indirectly affect homelessness. The Localism Bill is proposing changes to the way in which the homelessness duty can be discharged in the private rented sector.

- 3.6 As in all areas of public service resources are increasingly constrained and the homelessness services provided by Watford Council form part of an ongoing value for money review of housing services that is required to make considerable savings.
- 3.7 The key trends relating to homelessness, following many years on a positive trend, have altered over the last year. The number of households that we are required to make a homelessness decision about, and the numbers accepted as being owed the main homelessness duty, have both increased. The numbers in temporary accommodation have also increased and for the first time in many years we have some families in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 3.8 Our consultation has informed us that our partners are also being affected by funding cuts. They are primarily involved with supporting vulnerable people and have been affected by cuts to Hertfordshire County Council Supporting People budget as well as by pressure on other sources of grant funding.
- 3.9 There are some areas of work that need to be carried forward from the existing Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. These include work concerning ex offenders; illegal eviction; pooling of service user consultation; issues related to the economy and to housing benefit.
- 3.10 Areas of work identified as needing to be added to the action plan include: identifying areas where efficiencies can be achieved by partners working together; partners exploring opportunities for entrepreneurial activity; engaging non housing partners in the homelessness agenda (i.e. housing benefit colleagues, health partners); some problematic client groups (i.e. low level mental health, ex offenders, chaotic alcohol/drug takers).
- 3.11 Further updates
- The main objectives of the strategy remain valid, however the actions included in the original strategy have mostly either been completed or are no longer as pressing as some other issues.
- 3.12 While there is a value in a thorough review every few years, there is also a need to be able to respond and update the strategy action plan in an incremental way to ensure that it stays 'live'. The environment is at present very fast moving, making it all the more important that there is an ability for services to respond quickly with a minimum of bureaucracy.
- 3.13 The Action Plan contains a considerable number of high level actions. Further work will identify priorities within the various actions and add more detail including timescales, responsibilities etc.
- 3.14 It is proposed that the action plan be regularly monitored and as part of this monitoring process also be kept up to date with amendments as necessary. Unless queries are raised it will be assumed that such

amendments are accepted.

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 The Head of Strategic Finance comments that the report indicates the pressures upon the housing service. This is however against a background of reduced public expenditure. The Council's service prioritisation process has indicated the need to reduce the net cost of the housing service by £50k in 2011/2012 and £150k in 2012/2013. This report, in conjunction with the recently completed value for money study, will therefore, provide essential contextual material against which efficiency savings must be identified.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Head of Legal and Property Services comments that the legal implications are contained in the appended review document.

4.3 **Equalities**

4.3.1 This is not a new strategy and consequently has not been subject to an equalities impact assessment. Equalities data is routinely collected, monitored and analysed in statistical data relating to homelessness and this has helped to inform this review.

4.4 **Potential Risks**

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
Action plan will be irrelevant to the work undertaken and it will not be as systematically directed as it would otherwise be	2	2	4

4.5 **Staffing**

4.5.1 No direct staffing implications.

4.6 **Accommodation**

4.6.1 Not applicable.

4.7 **Community Safety**

4.7.1 The revised action plan will make a positive contribution to shared objectives with the Community Safety team.

4.8 **Sustainability**

4.8.1 Environmental sustainability is not directly affecting. The Homelessness Strategy makes a key contribution to achieving sustainable communities.

Appendices

Draft Watford Homelessness Strategy 2008 to 2013, Mid term review 2011

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.

File Reference

None.