

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 7 October 2013
Report of: Housing Section Head
Title: Watford Borough Council's Homelessness Review and Strategy 2013-2018

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Each local authority has a statutory duty to produce a Homelessness Review and Strategy for its local authority area at least once every five years. Watford Borough Council's current homelessness review and strategy covers the period 2008-2013 and is due to expire on 31 December 2013.
- 1.2 The development of a new Homelessness Review and Strategy allows the following exercises to be undertaken in order to meet current and new challenges:
- i) Reassessment of priorities.
 - ii) Reassessment of the allocation of resources.
 - iii) Setting of new activities and targets in order to meet emerging needs.
- 1.3 A new Homelessness Review and Strategy for 2013-2018 has now been produced. Prior to presentation to Cabinet, it has been circulated for internal and external consultation and has been presented to the Housing Policy Advisory Group (HPAG).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the contents of the Homelessness Review, Strategy and Action Plan and approves these documents for publication.
- 2.2 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Portfolio Holder for Housing to approve amendments to the Review, Strategy and Action Plan on an annual basis

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Report approved by:

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3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Watford Borough Council's current Homelessness Review, Strategy and Action Plan were produced in 2008 and were scheduled to cover the period up to the end of 2013. The action plan contains targets under the following strategic priorities:

- a) To prevent homelessness
- b) To monitor and make best use of the supply of temporary accommodation
- c) To improve access to settled accommodation.
- d) To provide support to manage life and health issues.

It is proposed that, with minor modifications, these strategic priorities are retained for the Homelessness Review and Strategy for 2013-2018. All remain relevant to the current situation.

- 3.2 Details of the achievements in preventing and tackling homelessness under the Homelessness Review and Strategy for 2008-2013 are included in the new Strategy document.
- 3.3 The context within which the new Homelessness Review and Strategy has been produced is markedly different from the circumstances surrounding the production of the previous ones. The various factors which are affecting, and will affect, homelessness in Watford include:
 - The Welfare Reform Act 2012 and its associated changes.
 - The new affordable housing development regime.
 - The new nomination policy for the allocation of social housing.
 - The changes in the level of resources for local authorities, voluntary organisations and health organisations.
 - Demographic changes in Watford.
- 3.4 The guiding principles which have been proposed for the new Homelessness Review and Strategy are:
 - To prevent homelessness occurring by assisting households in remaining in their current settled home, or by encouraging them to follow planned pathways to a settled home.
 - Where homelessness cannot be prevented, to provide sufficient support to prevent homelessness occurring in the future, and to improve aspects of the lives of homeless households including health, access to education and employment opportunities.
 - To work in partnership with organisations in and around Watford to prevent and tackle homelessness
 - To manage demand for local services and the supply of affordable housing.
- 3.5 Because of the discrete amount of resources available to prevent and tackle homelessness, it is proposed that the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan focuses its actions upon a limited number of homeless groups, and that the Action Plan is reviewed and updated on an annual basis. It is proposed that the homeless groups who are the focus of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan for 2013/2014 are:

- Households who are homeless because of parental eviction
- Households who are homeless because of the ending of a privately rented tenancy.
- Households living in temporary accommodation.
- Single people with an element of vulnerability.

3.6 The principles upon which high priority for resources and action within the homelessness strategy action plan have been chosen are:

- High numbers of households experiencing particular types of homelessness in Watford.
- Identified gaps in provision for particular groups.
- Identified ability of certain projects to have a high impact in preventing or tackling homelessness.

3.7 It is also proposed that the priority groups, and the actions associated with each, are reassessed at each annual review. This will ensure that the Homelessness Strategy action plan remains responsive to changing circumstances and emerging trends, and can be modified accordingly. For example, the full impact of the changes introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012 are not yet clear; by mid 2014 it may be apparent that new actions need to be introduced to assist households who are having difficulty sustaining their tenancies due to changes in the amount of benefits which they receive.

3.8 The new homelessness review and strategy will aim to support the work of local stakeholder organisations who provide assistance to particular groups of people in housing need. These organisations include Watford New Hope Trust, Watford YMCA, Herts Young Homeless, GROW, and registered providers.

3.9 The Homelessness Review and Strategy 2013-2018 will be linked closely to the following corporate policies and strategies, all of which will be completed by the end of June 2014:

- The Housing Strategy
- The Nominations Policy
- The Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.

3.10 A consultation exercise on the homelessness review and strategy took place in May and June 2013, prior to the presentation to Watford Council's Leadership Team. The consultation included the views of service users and voluntary and statutory agencies as well as elected members and council officers. Full details of those consulted is available on request.

Responses from the consultation exercise have been incorporated into the Review and Strategy.

3.11 Two special consultation events with stakeholders were held on 21 March and 4 July, and a focus group meeting was held with residents of the YMCA in August 2013.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

The implementation of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan can be met within existing staffing resources and grant resources.

4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments the report's recommendations have no additional financial implications .

4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

The Homelessness Review and Strategy will allow Watford Borough Council to meet its obligations under the following legislation:

- The Housing Act 1996, Part VII
- The Homelessness Act 2002
- The Localism Act 2011

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the legal implications are contained within the body of the report.

4.3 Equalities

Watford Borough Council is committed to equality and diversity as an employer, service provider and as a strategic partner. In order to fulfil this commitment and its duties under the Equality Act 2010 it is important to demonstrate how policies, practices and decisions impact on people with different protected characteristics. It is also important to demonstrate that the Council is not discriminating unlawfully when carrying out any of its functions

An analysis of the effects of the Homelessness Review and Strategy upon protected characteristic groups has been carried out. The analysis has drawn on monitoring information and the results of research projects. We are satisfied that the outcomes of the Homelessness Review and Strategy will be positive in terms of furthering equality aims. The analysis of the effects of the Homelessness Review and Strategy is available for examination if requested.

4.4 Potential Risks

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
A decrease in Government resources e.g. Homelessness Grant withdrawn, Single Homelessness Project monies withdrawn	2	4	8
A decrease in Corporate resources	2	3	6
A decrease in resources among partner organisations, reducing their ability to deliver against the homelessness strategy action plan.	2	3	6

Unforeseen economic or demographic change causing an increase in homelessness	3	4	12
Publication delayed – unable to meet legal obligations under the Homelessness Act 2002 of publishing a new Homelessness Review and Strategy by 31 December 2013.	1	3	3
<i>Those risks scoring 9 or above are considered significant and will need specific attention in project management. They will also be added to the service's Risk Register.</i>			

4.5 **Staffing**

4.5.1 The implementation of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan can be achieved within existing staffing resources or those funded through partner organisations or the DCLG homelessness grant. .

4.6 **Accommodation**

4.6.1 There are no accommodation implications.

4.7 **Community Safety**

4.7.1 The Homelessness Review and Strategy aims to promote Community Safety with its focus on the following issues:

- Preventing illegal eviction
- Assisting persons who are being discharged from hospital
- Assisting persons who suffer from a number of health conditions which reduce their ability to find their own home.
- Assisting victims of domestic violence
- Supporting organisations who work with people sleeping rough in Watford

4.8 **Sustainability**

4.8.1 The Homelessness Review and Strategy contributes to the following objectives within the Watford Sustainable Community Strategy:

- Objective 1: A well-planned town with homes to suit all needs.
- Objective 3: A healthy town
- Objective 4: A prosperous and educated town.

The Homelessness Review and Strategy aims to promote strong sustainable communities and support tenants in maintaining their tenancies.

Appendices

Appendix One: Watford Borough Council Homelessness Review 2013-2018

Appendix Two: Watford Borough Council Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2013-2018

Appendix Three: Duty to produce a Homelessness Strategy

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.

File Reference

None