

HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 20 MARCH 2019

PROPOSED HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019 – 2023 - OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In 2018 the Council undertook a review of the Housing Options Service and the response to homelessness in the district. The review was undertaken with the assistance of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group and the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The result of this review recommended an assessment of the homelessness situation in the district, in order to formulate a new strategy to prevent homelessness and provide suitable accommodation solutions to homeless households in order to effectively discharge of the Council's statutory duties.
- 1.2 In December 2018 the proposed Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy ("the Strategy") was considered by both Cabinet and Full Council who gave approval for the statutory consultation exercise to commence.
- 1.3 This report sets out the outcome of the consultation.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002 all local authorities are required to publish a homelessness strategy. As the last homelessness strategy was approved in 2003, it is important that an up to date strategy is in place.
- 2.2 Under s3(8) of the Homelessness Act 2002 before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy the authority shall consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate.
- 2.3 Under s3(4) of the Homelessness Act 2002 the Council must consult with any agency responsible for an action contained within the strategy.

3. CONSULTATION

- 3.1 On the 15 January 2019 the Council opened its consultation on the Strategy. The proposed strategy and a questionnaire were made available on the Housing Section of the Council's website. The consultation ended at 5pm on 20 February 2019.
- 3.2 The following groups were also specifically invited to consult on the Strategy:
 - (a) Statutory, non-statutory agencies and organisations delivering services to vulnerable people in the District.
 - (b) All private registered providers of social housing;
- 3.3 The Service Manager for Housing Options also visited the Job Centre Plus in Ringwood, a Care Leavers' Team Meeting and a Community Mental Health Team Meeting to promote the consultation. A presentation on the Strategy was also given to the Tenant Involvement Group and Homelessness Multi-Agency Forum.
- 3.4 During the consultation period the Service Manager for Housing Options has also responded to a request from Hampshire County Council Children's Services for assistance to review the joint protocol for 16/17 year old homeless people, which, coincidentally, is also an action contained within the Strategy requiring their support to achieve.

- 3.5 The Consultation received 24 responses. 8 responses were from the following organisations:
- a) NHS
 - b) The You Trust
 - c) The Handy Trust
 - d) Acts For Sharing
 - e) Citizens Advice New Forest
 - f) Two Saints
 - g) Community First New Forest
 - h) Tenant Involvement Group (TIG)
- 3.6 The remaining responses were from members of the public or elected Members.
- 3.7 A summary of the responses received, including a summary of the comments made on the Strategy and the Council's responses to them is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.8 The consultation outcome showed the majority to be in support of the Strategy; with 83% or more of the respondents approving each of the four key strategic priorities.
- 3.9 Following the review of consultation responses two further actions have been added to Strategic Priority 2 to ensure support to both victims of domestic abuse and households with complex needs is identified and provided.
- 3.10 An action to recognise 'Hidden Homeless' households and work with voluntary agencies to provide them access to housing assistance has also been added to Strategic Priority 2. An action to support ongoing refuge provision has been added to Strategic Priority 3 in accordance with the Homelessness Code of Guidance.
- 3.11 The statistics within the final proposed Strategy, at Appendix 2, have been updated to reflect the up to date homelessness situation both locally and nationally, given the first draft of the strategy was completed in September 2018 and other national statistics were not available at that time.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The majority of respondents to the consultation expressed support for the four key strategic priorities contained within the strategy. Looking at the consultation responses as a whole, it is important to have in mind the Council's commitment within the Strategy to provide its own emergency accommodation and support workers, providing a comprehensive solution to immediate homelessness.
- 4.2 Further, responses have provided insight into how partnerships and other agencies can help deliver the actions within the priorities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An increased focus on early intervention and partnership working resulting from the actions in both the homelessness and housing strategies, along with the Council sourcing more of its own emergency temporary accommodation should bring about a more efficient use of the current homelessness budget including a reduction in external Bed & Breakfast spend.
- 5.2 To achieve a number of the key actions contained within the strategy there is a requirement to complement the existing Homelessness and Advice Officer Team with Support Officers who will provide more dedicated welfare support to guide applicants along a pathway to sustaining accommodation and to support rough sleepers through

accommodation pathways. These additional resources are likely to be met from within the overall homelessness budget which will be kept under careful review.

6. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Ensuring that the right support is provided to homeless people at the right time will reduce any real or perceived crime and disorder issues that may arise from time to time.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are none.

8. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This strategy is for the benefit of all of the Council's residents as set out in the key objectives above and will have a positive impact by focusing the Council's resources to take a more proactive approach to the prevention of homelessness. Consideration has been given to the needs of those who identify with protected characteristic groups; in particular those with disabilities (both physical and mental health) who may find it difficult to access the Council's services. However, the Council has implemented partnership working with other agencies through the Multi-Agency Homelessness Forum and will develop further pathways which seek to identify and work with those who require support and assistance to prevent or relieve their homelessness.
- 8.2 This strategy must be read alongside the Council's other key housing initiatives including the Housing Strategy and the new proposed Allocations Policy which will all provide a means to meet the housing needs of those within these protected characteristic groups. It is recognised that the way in which the strategy is implemented and the impact on those with a protected characteristic will need to be regularly monitored to ensure that those residents are able to take advantage of the strategy's key objectives.

9. PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S COMMENTS

- 9.1 In leading the Homelessness Task and Finish group over the last year I have understood first-hand the huge impact homelessness has on the people of the New Forest and on the Council in responding to the issue. I have called for measures to be put in place to address this impact and I welcome the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy; with a set of key priorities that aim to end rough sleeping, increase access to suitable accommodation and which review frontline services to the betterment of those who approach for assistance.
- 9.2 I recognise the consultation responses reflect the views of a number of organisations and individuals. We have considered them all in our review and understood the wide range of views which both support the new strategy or provide us with valuable insight on how we may go about delivering our key priorities. As a result we are happy to make some minor additions to the strategic priorities to clarify our commitments. Overall I am pleased to see our changes are widely supported.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel consider the response to the statutory consultation and make recommendations to Cabinet as appropriate.

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Background Papers:

Public documents