

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

18th December 2012

COUNTYWIDE HOUSING STRATEGY FOR WORCESTERSHIRE

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr M Shurmer
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Deputy Chief Executive
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor Consulted	Not Applicable
Key Decision - Yes	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 The report brings before Members a Countywide Joint Homelessness Strategy for approval (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 The Strategy replaces the previous Countywide Homelessness Strategy and considers how austerity measures might adversely impact on homelessness and the measures that are needed to mitigate the impact of these.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that

the Draft Countywide Joint Homelessness Strategy and action plan attached at Appendix 1 be approved.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 A Countywide Homelessness Co-ordinator Post is jointly funded by the Worcestershire local authorities and Supporting People.
- 3.2 Where actions within the action plan are set to assess or investigate the potential implementation of certain new services and local funding would be required, a bid would have to be submitted for consideration under the Council's corporate annual budget process.

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Legal Implications

- 3.3 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to publish a homelessness strategy and this must be now in accordance with the 2007 Code of Guidance on Homelessness Strategies. The legislation prescribes that prior to the Homelessness Strategy being written a review into the nature and extent of homelessness in the local authority area is required.

Service/Operational Implications

- 3.4 In 2002 the Homelessness Act introduced the requirement for local authorities to review homelessness in their area and produce a Homelessness Strategy. This legislation acted as a catalyst for the strategic planning of homelessness services and helped local authorities move from reactive services to services that are planned, proactive and preventative with a strong emphasis on partnership working.
- 3.5 The first Countywide Homelessness Strategy 'Working Together to Change Lives' facilitated greater partnership working not only between local authorities but other key partners involved with service users who at some point in their life are likely to require some support to secure accommodation that meets their needs. Since 2007, the Worcestershire authorities have been successful in preventing homelessness and this has led to a decline in the number of homeless decisions and acceptances.
- 3.6 This Worcestershire Joint Homelessness Strategy replaces the previous strategy and considers homelessness in a setting of austerity, radical welfare reforms and the impact that these reforms may have on services. The strategy has been produced in accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002, the Code of Guidance (2007), Homelessness Strategies: A good practice handbook (2002), and more recently a CLG specialist advisors circular entitled "36 things to think about – developing a homelessness strategy in a changing world."
- 3.7 A separate comprehensive review of homelessness was carried out to analyse the nature and extent of homelessness across the County.
- 3.8 Officers and partners have developed a Redditch Homelessness Strategy and action plan to supplement the Countywide Joint Homelessness Strategy.

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Who is the Strategy aimed at?

- 3.9 The strategy is aimed at anyone with an interest in tackling and preventing homelessness within the County. Its objective is to influence thinking, policy making and action at a County and local level to provide homelessness services and to support Local Housing Authorities in attracting resources into Worcestershire.
- 3.10 Central to the strategy is the promotion of partnership working with customers, other agencies and across boundaries to ensure a synergy in approach that leads to maximum efficiency in the light of significant cuts in Central Government funding. The strategy identifies the importance of working with a range of partners including Supporting People and Health Services. Financial deprivation and worklessness are also key issues identified in the development of the Strategy. Lack of accommodation is identified as an issue and making better use of the private rented sector as a housing option for those who are socially excluded is considered a priority. In addition, a personalised approach to rough sleeping where services are proactive and responsive, offering a holistic approach that meets the needs of the individual to ensure No Second Night Out and tackles entrenched rough sleeping.

Who and what helped to shape the Strategy?

- 3.11 Stakeholders were central to developing the strategy and a consultation event was undertaken. This 'Home Truths' event was well attended by key partners and commissioners. Service users who have lived through the experience of homelessness, shared their stories and ideas to improve the delivery of services. Workshops were held to develop an understanding of priorities and these priorities were incorporated into the strategy and delivery plan. In depth research into the journeys of homeless households was carried out to place the customer at the heart of the strategy development and look holistically at the root causes and consequences of homelessness. In addition, a survey was sent out to both customers and stakeholders in order to develop an understanding of key issues from the coal face.
- 3.12 The consultation feedback on the draft Strategy ended on the 6th July 2012, the main issues raised related to making a stronger link between homelessness and mental health issues with outcomes that relate to confidence building and tackling low self esteem. Making stronger links to specific groups such as ethnic minorities and gypsy & travellers. Develop closer working with CCG's, Healthy living action group and health and

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Well Being Boards, ensuring accessibility of services to all minority groups and building better relationships with employment services.

- 3.13 It is intended that the new Countywide Joint Homelessness Strategy will sit alongside the existing Worcestershire Housing Strategy and the Worcestershire Supporting People Strategy, which are closely aligned.

Key issues within the new Countywide Homelessness Strategy

- 3.14 The vision for Worcestershire is **'to ensure that everyone has access to a place they can call home, where they can close their door and feel safe'**. To achieve this vision the main focus is on preventing homelessness from happening at all. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, the aim is to ensure that appropriate support is in place for people whilst finding a new home and beyond, to ensure that people have a firm foundation from which to create a new home and develop the skills to make it sustainable.
- 3.15 The Strategy identified four primary goals:

Goal 1 – Providing a pathway to a housing solution for everyone that accesses our services.

This goal looks at how authorities can maintain and improve existing services whilst providing value for money. Its aims are to increase the number of households prevented from becoming homeless, ensure that there is a pathway into housing for everyone accessing services, to maximise the supply and use of new and existing accommodation and develop a range of holistic initiatives to tackle the root cause of homelessness.

Goal 2 - Creating strong partnerships to tackle homelessness

This goal looks at the relationship between homelessness and partner agencies. Its aims are to look at how agencies might work together in the commissioning of services, to ensure effective cross agency working to rise to the challenge of localism and create more housing opportunities in the private rented sector.

Goal 3 – Taking effective action to prevent anyone new to the streets having to sleep out for more than one night.

This goal takes a personalised approach to rough sleeping to offer support and services tailored to the individual's needs and aspirations. Its aims are to develop a No Second Night Out standard for Worcestershire, reduce the incentives for people to remain in a street lifestyle, ensure that

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there is a flow through supported accommodation and tackle entrenched rough sleeping.

Goal 4 – Tackling the financial deprivation of those affected by benefit reform, welfare reform and worklessness

This goal considers the impact of welfare reform and the recession. It's aims are to minimise the effects of welfare reform, provide good quality advice and signposting, assisting customers to maintain their accommodation and tackling worklessness.

Customer/Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.16 The actions set out within the document are designed to enhance the Council's response to homelessness and those threatened with homelessness and support the local authority in carrying out its statutory Duty under homelessness legislation.
- 3.17 The strategy and consultation process has been carried out in accordance with corporate equality and diversity policy. An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out on the Strategy to ensure that any adverse impact is identified and where possible mitigated or where this is not possible the reasons for this. An underpinning goal of the strategy is to ensure that initiatives are put in place to meet the diverse needs of our communities.

4 RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:

The ability to retain suitably qualified and experienced staff to implement the strategy and action plan.

The ability to maintain continued commitment and support from partners in addressing the actions identified.

- 4.2 These risks are being managed as follows:

Risk Register: Community Services
Key Objective Ref No: 4 - Effective, efficient and legally compliant Housing Service

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5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Countywide Joint Homelessness Strategy Document and Action Plan.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Homelessness Review available electronically upon request includes information on:

- a) The Review document which informs the Strategy includes information on:
- b) The nature and extent of homelessness across the County
- c) A profile of those who have experienced homelessness including data on the most vulnerable homeless groups.
- d) Factors that will have impact on future levels of homelessness in the County.
- e) Information on support, accommodation and resources available.
- f) Outcomes from the previous strategy
- g) Analysis of consultation undertaken

KEY AUTHOR OF REPORT

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