



Executive Committee

No specific Ward relevance

10th March 2010

HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING ADVICE REVIEW, ENHANCED HOUSING OPTIONS STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

(Report of the Head of Housing)

1. Summary of Proposals

The Committee is asked to note the contents of the Redditch Homelessness and Housing Advice Review and approve the implementation of the Redditch Enhanced Housing Options Strategy.

The recent review takes account of current services in the borough; identifies progress made since the Redditch Homelessness Strategy published in 2003 and highlights lessons learned during the first nine months of the two year 'Trailblazer Initiative' which saw the Council being awarded £180,000 in grant by Communities and Local Government.

The Enhanced Housing Options Strategy was developed in partnership with all key stakeholders and will provide a framework for improving services for homeless households or those in housing need in Redditch.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to **RECOMMEND** that

subject to community consultation and Members' comments, the Enhanced Housing Options Strategy be approved and implemented.

3. Financial, Legal, Policy, Risk and Climate Change / Carbon Management Implications

Financial

- 3.1 There are currently no financial implications in adopting the Strategy. The implementation of the action plan could highlight areas for further consideration by Elected Members.

Legal

- 3.2 In line with the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) the Local Authority has a statutory duty to carry out a review of homelessness and homelessness services in

their area and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on this review. The Council has already met its legal obligations by working with the other districts to produce the County Homelessness Strategy 'Working together to change lives'. There are no legal implications regarding the development of a Redditch Enhanced Housing Options Strategy.

Policy

- 3.3 The Enhanced Housing Options Strategy was developed in partnership with all key stakeholders and will provide the framework for improving services for homeless households or those in housing need in Redditch. If approved it will enable the Council to take a more strategic approach in tackling Homelessness and encourage the Council and its partners to work together in a more joined up way so that customers are able to make informed decisions regarding housing, education and employment.

Risk

- 3.4 Failure to approve the strategy will make it difficult for the Council to achieve national, regional, county and local strategic aims.

Climate Change / Carbon Management

- 3.5 No implications.

Report

4. Background

- 4.1 Redditch Borough Council published its first Homelessness Strategy in 2003 which outlined the vision to 2009. The Council delivered all the key objectives outlined within that document.
- 4.2 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook a review of the Homelessness Service which concluded on 6th May 2006. The review recommended that greater resources were focused towards the prevention of homelessness and led to a restructure and the development of the Housing Options Service.
- 4.3 Officers from Redditch Borough Council worked as part of a County Wide Project Team to develop the Countywide Strategy 'Working Together to Change Lives' which was approved by Full Council in January 2009.
- 4.4 The overall number of Statutory Homeless Acceptances has drastically reduced since 2003, despite the amount of people

approaching the Council for assistance increasing by approximately 35%.

- 4.5 In August 2008 the Council had the second highest Statutory Homeless Acceptance rate in the West Midlands, averaging at 6.0 acceptances per one thousand in the population. They were ranked 13th highest of all 354 Local Authorities in England.
- 4.6 By the end of the year in 2008/09, the Council had improved its position considerably with the average number of Homeless Acceptances dropping to 2.4 per thousand households. The Council was then ranked 100th highest out of 326 Local Authorities in England (some areas became unitary, which is why the number has changed).
- 4.7 The Council has continued to improve its performance in 2009/10 and early predictions suggest that they are likely to do even better in the national rankings at the end of this year.
- 4.8 In 2009 the Council was awarded £180,000 in grant as part of the Communities and Local Government Trailblazer initiative to improve services for those in housing need, reduce overcrowding and provide more joined up advice regarding housing, education and employment.

5. **Key Issues**

- 5.1 A review of housing advice and homelessness services for all client groups has been undertaken which involved questionnaires and telephone interviews being undertaken with individuals from statutory agencies, voluntary sector partners and customers.
- 5.2 The review takes account of the lessons learned during the first nine months of the two year 'Trailblazer Initiative' which saw the Council being awarded £180,000 in grant by Communities and Local Government.
- 5.3 A number of partner and customer events have been held over the last twelve months which have been used to identify customer priorities for service improvements.
- 5.4 The findings from the Local Homelessness and Housing Advice Review have been used to develop the Enhanced Housing Options Strategy which sets out our local objectives for the next three years.
- 5.5 The development and publication of a Redditch Enhanced Housing Options Strategy will highlight the Council's commitment to keeping

the needs and opinions of local people at the forefront of service development.

- 5.6 Key priorities from the Redditch Homelessness and Housing Advice Strategy will be fed into the Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy - 'Working Together to Change Lives' when that is reviewed in 2010.

6. **Other Implications**

- Asset Management - None.
- Community Safety - Initiatives in the strategy should improve services for individuals suffering Domestic Violence or Anti-social behaviour.
- Health - Initiatives in the strategy should improve services for those with Mental Health problems.
- Human Resources - None.
- Social Exclusion - Initiatives in the strategy should reduce Social Exclusion by encouraging individuals to access appropriate support or undertake education or employment opportunities.
- Environment / Sustainability - The initiatives in the Strategy provide customers with a greater number of housing options and allow a larger number of households to access suitable good quality housing which can be sustained.

7. **Lessons Learnt**

The comments received during the consultation period will be taken into account prior to the implementation of the action plan. The Council has already seen benefits as a result of the Trailblazer Initiative and it is hoped that the new strategy will ensure that future services are designed to take account of the lessons learned.

8. **Background Papers**

Redditch Borough Council Homelessness Strategy — 2003.
The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by homelessness Act 2002).

Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy 'Working Together to Change Lives' – 2009.
Redditch Homelessness and Housing Options Review.
Redditch Enhanced Housing Options Strategy and Action Plan.

9. Consultation

The Homelessness and Housing Advice Review and Enhanced Housing Options Strategy have been produced following consultation with relevant Council Officers, statutory and voluntary sector partners and former customers.

10. Author of Report

The author of this report is Elise Hopkins (Housing Options Manager) who can be contacted on extension 3510 (e-mail: elise.hopkins@redditchbc.gov.uk) for more information.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Redditch Homelessness and Housing Options Review.

Appendix 2 – Redditch Enhanced Housing Options Strategy (the full action plan can be provided on request)