

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Portfolio Holder Housing and Jobs

Date of Meeting: 28th July 2014
Report of: Homechoice and Homelessness Manager
Subject/Title: Homelessness Strategy
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Don Stockton: Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning, Economic Development, and Regeneration;

1 Report Summary

1.1 Work is underway to complete the Homelessness Strategy for Cheshire East Borough Council to ensure that services are joined up and gaps are identified and addressed across the borough. This report summarises the findings of the draft Strategy and requests portfolio holder approval to progress the draft Strategy for public consultation to ensure that the Strategy is representative of the views of affected constituents and other stakeholders.

1.2 The draft Strategy builds on the work completed in the Homelessness Review and the consultation that took place as part of that review process back in February 2014. This strategy is the second such strategy for Cheshire East Council as the initial one was completed for the period 2010-2013. The draft Strategy has categorized actions into five groups including:

- Providing effective early intervention
- Complex needs and crisis management
- Support
- Accommodation and affordability
- Communication

1.3 Extensive research and consultation has been conducted across Council services and wider partners, resulting in the production of the draft Strategy. This draft highlights a variety of strategic priorities for each of the five priorities contained within the Strategy.

2 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that:

2.1.1 The draft Homelessness Strategy and its preliminary findings are noted.

2.1.2 Officers are approved to publically consult on the draft strategy, before incorporating the responses into the finalised strategy.

3 Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 It is a statutory requirement that Local Authorities have a strategy in place to prevent and deal with homelessness.

3.2 Finalising the Homelessness Strategy will be the catalyst enabling the Council to:

3.2.1 Map the current picture of services available across the Borough to support and provide for people who are at risk of becoming homeless; are in insecure accommodation or are homeless within the meaning of the Housing Act 1996 Part VII.

3.2.2 Use this information as a basis for developing an optimal model of accommodation and support provision for people experiencing a housing crisis.

3.2.3 Provide and incite an evidence base to inform decisions about future provision and services relating to households with a housing issue .

3.2.4 Realise Outcomes 3 and 5 of the Council's Three Year Plan:
People have the life skills and education they need to thrive
People Live Well and For Longer.

3.2.5 Realise Priority 5 of the Council's Three Year Plan: *Securing housing that is locally-led, community-based, and meets local needs.*

3.3 Public consultation is required to:

3.3.1 Ensure that the findings and priorities identified within the Strategy are representative of the views of affected constituents and wider stakeholders.

3.3.2 Ensure that the Council is transparent and participatory in the formation of its strategic direction.

4 Wards Affected

4.1 All

5 Local Ward Members

5.1 All

6 Policy Implications

6.1 The Homelessness Strategy is a key deliverable to achieving priority 5 within the Council's Three Year Plan framework:

- Outcome 5: *People Live Well and for Longer*
 - Priority 5: *Securing housing that is locally-led, community-based, and meets local needs.*

6.2 The accommodation of vulnerable people by virtue concerns a host of Council services that collectively work towards improving prospects and well-being for affected client groups. In its development there has been liaison with adults' services, children's services, public health and housing to ensure that the Strategy reflects the priorities and initiatives of these services.

6.3 Principally, the Strategy corroborates and expands on the Council's commitment to enabling independence, reablement, and recovery through the appropriate provision of accommodation and support services.

6.5 As such, the Strategy will set the direction of travel and accommodation priorities, which will inform future service commissioning work and planning policies to realise the determined approach through provider management and future development.

7 Implications for Rural Communities

7.1 Rural Communities will positively benefit from the introduction of the Strategy as it aims to address how we can provide an effective and efficient service to all areas of the Borough and acknowledges that the Homeless services on offer by both CEC and other providers need to be strengthened and developed in these areas.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 7.2** The exploratory and on-going actions recommended in the Strategy will be met from within existing resources.
- 7.3** Similarly, the Housing team will continue to lead and dedicate existing resource to the project-management of the Strategy , including the progression to public consultation and the incorporation of consultation feedback into the final Strategy iteration.

8 Legal Implications

- 8.1** Under the Homelessness Act 2002 it is a statutory requirement that Local Authorities have a strategy in place to prevent and deal with homelessness. The strategy is not only for preventing homelessness in their district but also for securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in their district who are or may become homeless and for securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in their district who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again
- 8.2** The Council as local housing authority and social services authority must take their homelessness strategy into account in the exercise of their functions
- 8.3** Before adopting a homelessness strategy the Council must consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate.
- 8.4** A new homelessness strategy must be completed every five years
- 8.5** A copy of the published strategy must be made available at the council's principal office for inspection and copies provided on request on payment of a charge if required

9 Risk Management

- 9.1** There is a risk that different elements of the Authority have different approaches to accommodation and relevant support services, as well as divergent information on the character and needs of vulnerable client groups. As such, the Strategy will help coordinate and connect the work of Council

services and wider partners and providers, ensuring a consistent and strategic approach to vulnerable people's accommodation.

9.3 Vulnerable person's accommodation is complex in nature, involves a large number of agencies, and is a deeply emotive and fundamental issue that has wide implications across individuals, families, and communities. As such, it is vital that affected individuals and agencies have the opportunity to comment on any relevant strategic direction, to ensure that the full range of opinions, experiences, and knowledge are incorporated. By publically consulting on the draft Strategy, the Council negates the risk of implementing a strategic direction that does not properly reflect the range of needs and views within the Borough, ensuring it is representative.

9.4 In terms of the risks associated with developing and implementing a new strategy, there are a number of associated and inherent risks:

- *Timescale slippage:* depending on the extent of comments received during the public consultation, there is the potential for time pressure in making any alterations. However, this has been mitigated by a well-monitored approval timescale, factoring in potential risks and charting all approval gateways.
- *Momentum, actions, and delivery:* As with any strategy, there is a risk that strategic direction does not translate into action on the ground. This is being mitigated by the creation of a comprehensive action plan for each key area and the action plan will be monitored quarterly by the Homeless Strategy working group. Engagement and support has been assured from the relevant services through involvement in the construction of the Strategy.

10 Background and Options

10.1 Local authorities are required to undertake a homelessness review within their area and use the information to formulate a strategy. The homelessness review should look at levels and likely future levels of homelessness in their district, establish the activities which are carried out to prevent homelessness, establish accommodation needs of the homeless and support needs.

10.2 Cheshire East's Homelessness team carried out the review in January 2014. Extensive consultation with statutory and voluntary agencies as well as service users took place to identify gaps in service and ways of improving access to services and this has been fed into the strategy and the actions attached to it.

- 10.4 The focus of the strategy is on working in partnership with internal and external partners to provide holistic services which provide value for money, take account of best practice and enhance the services to customers.
- 10.5 There are 52 actions set in the Homelessness Strategy which will be monitored quarterly by the Homeless Strategy Steering Group.
- 11.6 The Homelessness Strategy is now ready to progress to the consultation stage. Following this 6 week stage any required amendments will be made and then the strategy will be ready for Cabinet approval.

11 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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Appendix – Homelessness Strategy 2014/17