

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 6th January 2015
Report of: Homechoice and Homelessness Manager
Subject/Title: Homelessness Strategy Ref. CE 14/15-11
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Don Stockton, Housing and Jobs

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Cheshire East's Housing Options team are a committed "award winning" team who put the needs of residents at the forefront of what they do. Their aim is to provide housing advice, helping residents find suitable accommodation. They also work tirelessly to prevent homelessness and to assist those who find themselves with no accommodation.
- 1.2 Homelessness or the threat of homelessness can have a detrimental effect on our residents in a number of ways. It can impact on both physical and mental health. It can result in a loss of self-esteem and the inability to deal with the situation including finding or maintaining employment and sustaining relationships. Children can suffer from the experience and uncertainty of being moved to temporary accommodation, sometimes effecting their educational attainment and emotional well-being. This is why Cheshire East's Housing Options team are determined to prevent homelessness occurring.
- 1.3 Their proactive approach is demonstrated through the number of homelessness preventions. The number of successful prevention cases has increased year on year. In 2012/13 727 cases were prevented and this year, to date 562 cases have been prevented from becoming homeless. We are also encouraging residents to help themselves, Cheshire Homechoice service launched the Enhanced Housing Options module in May 2014, which enables customers to make informed choices about their housing options.
- 1.4 There is still a need to provide services for those residents who find themselves homeless. Cheshire East has a specialist homelessness team to deal with those who are homeless, many of which have very complex needs and the team work hard to secure them with appropriate supported accommodation.
- 1.5 Evidence has demonstrated that preventing homelessness can save money in comparison to the cost of helping someone who is already homeless. Heriot-Watt University published research in 2007 which showed that the cost to the public purse of providing temporary accommodation and taking a household through the homeless route amounted to £5,300 per case. The cost of some of our prevention tools are considerably cheaper, for example:

- the costs per person of successful mediation are estimated at £600, around 9 times less expensive than providing alternate settled accommodation
- Advice on housing options (e.g. resolving Housing Benefit problems, rent or service charge arrears, negotiation/legal advocacy) is estimated at around 9 times less expensive than providing alternate settled accommodation. This is based on the assumption of operating costs at £71,000 per annum, dealing with 355 cases in one year.
- The cost of operating a rent bond scheme is 37 times less than the average cost of providing accommodation under the main homelessness duty. This based on the findings that our claim rate is approximately 11% per annum.

1.6 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty upon local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and formulate and publish a strategy for the future based on the results of that review, outlining how the council and their partners would work to prevent homelessness and ensure accommodation and support for those who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

1.7 The Homelessness Strategy for 2014-17 (Appendix 1) has been developed putting residents first. Close consultation with the residents of Cheshire East has resulted in the formation of a challenging strategy that is designed around their needs and demands.

1.8 The 2014-17 Homelessness strategy builds on the successes of the first 2010-13 Homelessness strategy and aims to challenge the Housing Service to produce several important benefits which will include:

- **Significant reduction in the numbers of single homelessness** through exploring the feasibility of a drop in facility in the south of the borough to provide holistic advice services.
- **Planned move on protocol for people leaving institutions and care** by improving the delivery of advice and liaison with both the 16 plus team and resettlement officers in prisons.
- **Eradicate rough sleeping in Cheshire East** by looking to build on the “No Second Night Out” project.
- **Preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity**, through a number of initiatives including the development of a private sector landlord offer to incorporate a tiered system of incentives.
- **Pathways for applicants with complex needs and mental health problems** by exploring the options for the provision of specialist accommodation for clients with substance abuse issues and developing a multi agency approach to assessing clients with complex needs, establishing joint protocols.
- **Addressing affordability** by working with the DWP and Registered Providers to prepare tenants for the roll out of Universal Credit.

1.9 Partnership working is a key focus of the strategy; several of the actions promote the need for a unified response. This is aimed at embedding this approach as a driving force for the success of the strategy.

2.0 Consultation outcome

2.1 Following approval for consultation the draft strategy was made available for public viewing and comment over a 6 week period, with an extension of a further 4 weeks to capture a wide audience.

2.2 The consultation has resulted in further clarification in the voluntary sector's role in the strategy and definition of Cheshire East's Partnership Team's role in the delivery of the strategy.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 That the final version of the strategy (*included within this report*) is approved by Cabinet.

4.0 Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 It is a statutory requirement that local authorities have a strategy in place to prevent and deal with homelessness.

5.0 Wards Affected

5.1 All wards

6.0 Local Ward Members

6.1 All local ward members

7.0 Policy Implications

7.1 The Homelessness Strategy is a key deliverable to achieving priority 5 within the Council's Three Year Plan framework- *Securing housing that is locally-led, community –based and meets local needs*. It also contributes to outcome 5- *people live well and for longer*.

7.2 The accommodation of vulnerable people 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.

7.3 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.

- 7.4 As such, the strategy will set the direction of travel the council needs to take and the accommodation priorities it will focus on. This will inform future service commissioning work and planning policies to deliver better provider management and future development of appropriate housing.

8.0 Implications for Rural Communities

- 8.1 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.

Implications on Health

- 8.2 Homelessness can have a significant impact on the health of those who experience it. These can manifest in a number of ways including both physical and mental conditions.

Research undertaken by Shelter found that:

- 58 per cent of families in temporary accommodation (other than bed and breakfast) said their health had suffered as a result of where they were living
- people who had been living in temporary accommodation for over a year reported increased health problems and greater use of health services
- almost half of parents with children and 71 per cent of childless people said they were depressed
- Cold, hunger and fear experienced by people sleeping rough disrupts their sleep, which in turn damages both mental and physical health.
- Health is damaged through a lack of basic facilities for personal care such as bathing and washing clothes.
- Homeless people often have problems with drugs or alcohol, made worse through being on the street.
- 21 per cent of people interviewed in a Shelter study said that mental health problems were one of the biggest problems facing rough sleep

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 For the financial year 2014/15 there are no financial implications as all costs can be met from existing resources which are contained within the Strategic Housing base budget.
- 9.2 If there is a need for further investment in this service this will be taken forward through the business planning process in future years.

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 The Council as local housing authority and social services authority must take their homelessness strategy into account in the exercise of their functions.
- 10.3 Before adopting a homelessness strategy the Council must consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate.
- 10.4 A new homelessness strategy must be completed every five years
- 10.5 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
- 10.6 Whilst not a legal requirement, it is still considered best practice to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment which was carried out during the development of the strategy. Although there is the possibility for some negative impacts on certain age groups this is only as a result of the specific positive work we are doing to address the short falls in benefits for young people and the need is evidenced in the strategy. It was assessed that a full Impact Assessment was not required.

11.0 Risk Management

- 11.1 There is a risk that different elements of the council 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.
- 11.2 As with any strategy, there is a risk that strategic direction does not translate into action on the ground. This has been 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.

12.0 Background and Options

- 12.1 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.

- 12.2 Cheshire East's Homelessness team carried out the review in 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.
- 12.3 The areas identified for action focus on five key areas: providing effective early intervention, complex needs and crisis management, support, accommodation and affordability and communication.
- 12.4 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.
- 12.5 There are 52 actions set in the Homelessness Strategy which will be monitored quarterly by the Homeless Strategy Steering Group.
- 12.6 The Homelessness Strategy has completed the 10 week consultation period and further comments from CEC's partnership's team and the Looking After The Homeless organisation have been incorporated.

13.0 Access to Information

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

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