

Cheshire East Council

Portfolio Holder Decision

Date of Meeting:	3 rd October 2017
Report of:	Frank Jordan – Executive Director of Place
Subject/Title:	Homelessness Strategy
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor A Arnold – Housing and Planning

1. Report Summary

- 1.1 Cheshire East's Housing Options service has an overarching aim of providing an exemplary service to provide housing advice and assistance to help residents find suitable accommodation. The service is facing a number of challenges which have been brought about by emerging national policies and local pressures.
- 1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 places 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. The Homelessness Strategy provides direction, a framework and an action plan so that any agency or individual can clearly understand what the Council and our partners are doing to support people in housing need.
- 1.3 The data and information contained within a Homeless Review underpins the Strategy and what the local landscape looks like in terms of services in place but also identifies any gaps in delivery. The Strategy details how the council and partners would work to prevent homelessness and ensure accommodation and support is available for those who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 1.4 The review has highlighted the increase in the number of homelessness prevention cases, which have been successful and have increased year on year. In 2013/14; 571 cases were prevented, 2014/15; 663 and 16/17; 714. We are however, also witnessing an increase in the number of homeless decisions in 2013/14; 181 decisions were made, 2014/15; 293 and 16/17; 468. It is imperative that the team continue to have options available to them to assist them in meeting the statutory duties associated with

homeless individuals such as placements into supported housing, the private rented sector and social housing.

- 1.5 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 affecting their educational attainment and emotional well-being. Cheshire East's Housing Options Team understands how important it is to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place but also to provide rapid intervention when crisis does occur.
- 1.6 The Homeless Strategy takes into account the Homeless Reduction Act which will come into force in April 2018 and places statutory responsibilities on Local Authorities to prevent homelessness. This new legislation directs that the Council must help more people and for longer periods of time which will place significant new burdens upon the Housing Options Team and partners to ensure more accommodation is available in the right place at the right time to meet those responsibilities. Additionally all public authorities will have a duty to refer people who they feel are at risk of homelessness to the Housing Options Team.
- 1.7 The Homelessness Strategy for 2017-21 (Appendix 1) has been developed putting residents at the heart of our service. Working groups have carried out discussions with residents to ensure that their experiences and views have been fed into the review and the strategy to support their needs.
- 1.8 The strategy sets out four clear aims which are to:
 - Help people who are homeless to secure accommodation
 - Enable more people to remain in their home and prevent them from becoming homeless
 - Provide interventions so no-one has to sleep rough in Cheshire East
 - Ensure adequate support is in place to help people maintain and sustain accommodation
- 1.9 Partnership working is a key focus of the strategy; several of the actions promote the need for a unified response, especially as the new Homeless Reduction Act imposes more duties upon the Council. This is aimed at embedding the joint approach as a driving force for the success of the strategy.

2. Recommendation

2.1. It is recommended that the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning:

- Note the draft Homelessness Strategy and its preliminary findings.
- To authorise officers to publically consult on the draft strategy for a period of 9 weeks, before incorporating the responses into the finalised strategy.
- To note that following the consultation period the revised strategy will be presented to Cabinet for formal adoption.

3. Other Options Considered

3.1. There are no alternatives to the options as it is a statutory requirement to have a Homeless Strategy in place. Cheshire East needs to ensure it's strategy is robust and in place to deliver effective actions prior to the Homeless Reduction Act being implemented.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 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. As a statutory document, it is important that we consult widely with internal services, external agencies and residents. This will ensure that we have identified any gaps and issues leading to an action plan which is appropriately supported and adequately resourced to address the gaps and issues.

5. Background/Chronology

5.1 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.

5.2. The extensive review commenced in December 2016. It spanned several months in development as it underpins the focus of the Strategy

moving forward. Statutory and voluntary agencies as well as residents have been extensively included in its development, attending input sessions in March and April to identify gaps in services and consider ways of improving access to services. This has been fed into the strategy and the actions attached to it.

5.3. The areas identified for action focus on four key priority areas:

- Help people who are homeless to secure accommodation
- Enable more people to remain in their home and prevent them from becoming homeless
- Provide interventions so no-one has to sleep rough in Cheshire East
- Ensure adequate support is in place to help people maintain and sustain accommodation

5.4. 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.

5.5. The action plan is ambitious and sets the tone for joint working and collaboration. Additionally it ensures that Cheshire East continues to be in the top quartile in terms of homeless prevention performance.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

6.1 All wards and all local ward Members

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1 Policy Implications

7.1.1 The Homelessness Strategy is a key deliverable to achieving the Corporate objectives of delivering the right type of housing in the right place and regenerating our towns and villages as well as supporting the wellbeing of our residents.

7.1.2 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.

7.1.3 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.

7.1.4 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.

7.2 Legal Implications

7.2.1 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 aimed at preventing homelessness in the local area but also for securing sufficient accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless. Furthermore, the strategy outlines how we will secure the satisfactory provision of support for people who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

7.2.2 The Council as local housing authority and social services authority must take their homelessness strategy into account in the exercise of their functions.

7.2.3 Before adopting a Homelessness Strategy the Council must consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate.

7.2.4 A new homelessness strategy must be completed at a maximum of every five years

7.2.5 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.

7.3 Financial Implications

7.3.1 The Strategy relies on Housing Options retaining its current base budgets as well being allocated the Flexible Homeless Support Grant and the

New Burdens funding. The Flexible Homeless Support Grant has been ring-fenced from Central Government for the delivery of prevention services. The New Burdens Grant will not be ring-fenced but will be essential to effectively delivering the anticipated 50% increase in footfall to the Housing Options Service.

7.3.2 The Flexible Support Grant has been outlined as:

- £176,000 for 2017/18
- £196,000 for 2018/19

At present this funding has only been announced for two years.

The New Burdens funding is yet to be announced but is anticipated to be in the region of £50,000 to £70,000 for two years.

If there is a need for further investment in this service this will be taken forward through the business planning process in future years.

7.4 Equality Implications

7.4.1 Whilst not a legal requirement, it is still considered best practice to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment which has been carried out during the development of the strategy. Third party agencies have been involved in the formulation of the Equality Impact Assessment and it has been determined that there are no groups who will be negatively impacted by the Strategy. It was assessed that a full Impact Assessment was not required.

7.5 Rural Community Implications

7.5.1 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.

7.5.2 The Strategy specifically highlights a section on rural homelessness and we will explore homeless issues in rural communities as highlighted by the recent research from the Institute for Public Policy Research.

7.6 Human Resources Implications

7.6.1 Due to the implications of the Homeless Reduction Act which are addressed within the Strategy there will be some implications for Human Resources and Organisational Development. This will take

the shape of ensuring that all CEC staff and Members are aware of the new duty to refer individuals and households who are at risk of homelessness within 56 days to the Housing Options Service. Some early discussions with Organisational Development and Democratic Services have already commenced to ensure adequate time and provision is giving to ensure that this new statutory implication can be met by April 2018.

7.6.2 Whilst not an implication of the Strategy, the Housing options team will be undergoing a restructure during 2017/18 in order to be in a strong position for responding to the Homeless Reduction Act.

7.7 Public Health Implications

7.7.1 There are no specific implications for Public Health with the exception of an anticipation that a collaborative and supportive relationship is maintained in delivering the action plan.

7.8 Implications for Children and Young People

7.8.1 The implications for Children and Young People will be positive as there is specific reference to improving pathways between services as well as ensuring that young people are supported in accessing a breadth of accommodation and support to enable them to live independently. Implications for the Child In Need /Child Protection teams are noted in the Strategy to maintain positive relationships around delivering services for homeless 16/17 year olds.

7.8.2 Children leaving care are also positively referenced with a focus on delivering sustainable, joined up services with Permanence and Through Care Teams. This includes consideration around tenancy ready courses, training flats and how we can use guarantors to support them securing properties in the private rented sector.

7.9 Other Implications (Please Specify)

No further implications noted.

8 Risk Management

8.1 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.

- 8.2 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. The working group is made up of senior officers from internal agencies and wider stakeholders.

1. Access to Information/Bibliography

[Link to Strategy and Action plans](#)

2. Contact Information

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