

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 10 April 2018

Report Title: Homelessness Strategy

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Arnold – Housing, Planning and Regeneration

Senior Officer: Frank Jordan – Executive Director - Place

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 prevent homelessness and 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.
- 1.3 A Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2021 has been produced by Cheshire East Council which provides a framework and an action plan so that any agency or individual can clearly understand what the Council and its partners are doing to support people in housing need.
- 1.4 The strategy sets out four clear aims which are to:
 - 1. Enable more people to remain in their home and prevent them from becoming homeless.
 - 2. Help people who are homeless to secure accommodation.
 - 3. Provide interventions so no-one has to sleep rough in Cheshire East.
 - 4. Ensure adequate support is in place to help people maintain and sustain accommodation
- 1.5 The Homelessness Strategy takes into account the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which will come into force in April 2018 and places statutory responsibilities on Local Authorities to prevent homelessness.

- 1.6 The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Regeneration provided to carry out a public consultation on a draft Homelessness Strategy. This was conducted between the 13th October and the 15th December 2017. The draft document was placed on the Council's website, a press release was issued and consultation events were held. The draft document was also widely circulated via e-mail to a wide range of partner organisations and services.

2. Recommendation/s

- 2.1 Cabinet are recommended to:
- 2.1.1 approve the Homelessness Strategy (**Appendix 2**).
 - 2.1.2 note that the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Regeneration will oversee the delivery of the strategy in partnership through the members of the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group.
 - 2.1.3 note that the funding arrangements are in place to enable the delivery of the strategy
 - 2.1.4 delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Regeneration to make any further revisions to the strategy.

3. Reasons for Recommendation/s

- 3.1 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. As a statutory document, it was important that the Council can demonstrate that they have consulted widely with internal services, external agencies and residents.
- 3.2 Following consultation we have ensured that the Council has identified any gaps and issues in the draft strategy and this has led to the formulation of a robust action plan which is appropriately supported and adequately resourced to address any issues and delivery of the service.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 There are no alternatives to the recommendations as it is a statutory requirement for the Council to have a Homelessness Strategy in place. Cheshire East Council needs to ensure that the Strategy is robust in

order to deliver effective actions prior to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 being implemented.

5. Background

- 5.1. The Homelessness Strategy is a key document in achieving the Corporate objectives of delivering the right type of housing in the right place, regenerating our towns and villages, and supporting the wellbeing of our residents.
- 5.2. 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.
- 5.3. Principally, the strategy supports and expands the Council's commitment to enabling independence, reablement, and recovery through the appropriate provision of accommodation and support services.
- 5.4. As such, the Strategy will set the direction of travel the Council needs to take and the accommodation priorities it will focus upon. This will inform future service commissioning work and planning policies to deliver better provider management and the future development of appropriate housing.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1. Legal Implications

- 6.1.1. Under the Homelessness Act 2002 it is a statutory requirement that local authorities have a strategy in place to prevent and deal with homelessness. This strategy is not only aimed at preventing homelessness in the local area but to ensure that sufficient accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless. Furthermore, the strategy outlines how the Council will secure the appropriate support for people who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.
- 6.1.2. The Council as the local housing authority and social services authority must take their Homelessness Strategy into account in the exercise of their functions.

- 6.1.3. Before adopting a Homelessness Strategy the Council must consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate. This report demonstrates that this has been undertaken.
- 6.1.4. A new Homelessness Strategy must be completed at a maximum of every five years.
- 6.1.5. A copy of the published Strategy will be made available at the Council's principal offices for inspection and copies can be provided on request. The Strategy will also be published on the Council's website.

6.2. Finance Implications

- 6.2.1. The successful delivery of the strategy relies on the Service retaining its current base budgets as well being allocated the Flexible Homeless Support Grant and the New Burdens funding.
- 6.2.2. The Flexible Homeless Support Grant (£196,000 for 2018/19) has been ring-fenced from Central Government for the delivery of prevention services. The New Burdens Grant (£36,575 for 2018/19) will not be ring-fenced but will be essential to effectively manage the anticipated 50% increase in footfall to the Housing Options Service. This will provide enough resources to ensure that the strategy is delivered successfully.

6.3. Equality Implications

- 6.3.1. 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 (**Appendix 3**). 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. A Health Impact Assessment and a Community Impact Assessment are to be completed in relation to the final version of the strategy.

6.4. Human Resources Implications

- 6.4.1. Due to the implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which are addressed within the Strategy there will be some implications for Human Resources and Organisational

Development. This will include ensuring that all Cheshire East staff and Elected 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 given to ensure that this new statutory duty can be met by April 2018.

- 6.4.2. 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 to respond to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

6.5. Risk Management Implications

- 6.5.1. 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. The delivery of this strategy will help manage this risk by co-ordinating and connecting the work of Cheshire East Council services and wider partners and providers, ensuring a consistent and strategic approach to vulnerable people's accommodation.
- 6.5.2. 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 by the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group. The Steering Group is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Housing and Planning and is made up of senior officers and partners. Annual updates will be presented to the Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee to give reassurances that the actions are being progressed.

6.6. Rural Communities Implications

- 6.6.1. Rural communities will positively benefit from the introduction of the Strategy as it aims to demonstrate how the Council can provide an effective and efficient service to all areas of the Borough and acknowledges that the homeless services on offer by both Cheshire East and other providers need to be strengthened and developed in these areas.

- 6.6.2. The Strategy specifically highlights a section on rural homelessness and during 2018/19 we will explore homeless issues in rural communities as highlighted by recent research from the Institute for Public Policy Research.

6.7. Implications for Children & Young People

- 6.7.1 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.
- 6.7.2. 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 those securing properties in the private rented sector.

6.8. Public Health Implications

- 6.8.1. 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. Ward Members Affected

- 7.1 All wards and all local ward members

8. Consultation & Engagement

- 8.1. Over the 9 week consultation period, 114 people submitted comments on the draft Homelessness Strategy. The draft Strategy was promoted via the following routes and activities:
1. The draft Homelessness Strategy was promoted at the “Connected to Decision Making Event - How do we work together to improve and deliver services?” which was held in Congleton on the 31st October. Service providers and service users were asked to comment on the four strategic priorities. Thirty people engaged in the session, saying that the priorities were the right ones, with no one expressing disapproval.

2. An interview was held with Cheshire Without Abuse in Crewe on the 13th November to gather additional information. The organisation wanted to give feedback but was unable to make the consultation event on the 25th November.
 3. A workshop was held on the 14th November in Macclesfield with faith groups and voluntary / third Sector representatives. There was a willingness to provide for the first time Severe Weather Emergency Protocol provision (accommodation for all rough sleepers during the coldest weather) in Macclesfield through a partnership of local churches. This option is being actively explored.
 4. A consultation event was held on the 25th November at Crewe Alexandra Football Ground. Forty people from a range of services, statutory bodies and the voluntary sector attended. An open and frank discussion took place about homelessness in Cheshire East.
 5. A presentation on homelessness was given to The Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23rd January 2018 and a training session on the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was given to Elected Members on 30th January 2018.
- 8.2. The consultation events held as part of the consultation process demonstrated that there is a real commitment from agencies and providers in Cheshire East to achieve positive outcomes for people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness.
- 8.3. The online consultation saw 38 people respond. When asked about the Strategy's priorities and intended actions the overwhelming majority of respondents were supportive, on average over eighty per cent. As many as eighty-nine per cent of respondents agreed with Priority 1: "Enable more people to remain in their home and prevent them from becoming homeless."
- 8.4. The consultation feedback has led to additions to the strategy in relation to:
1. Increased communication, and the circulation of useful information between organisations
 2. Entrenched rough sleepers and the contribution that the faith and voluntary groups can make in relation to securing appropriate accommodation.
 3. The Hard to House panel for those who have used existing options

- 8.5. The consultation responses have been collated and are attached in **Appendix 1** along with the Council's response to them.

9. Access to Information

- 9.1. Appended to the report.

10. Contact Information

- 10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Lynn Glendenning

Job Title: Housing Options Manager

Email: lynn.glendenning@cheshireeast.gov.uk