

5 February 2019		ITEM: 6
Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee		
Homelessness Prevention Strategy Review		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Ryan Farmer – Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Carol Hinvest – Assistant Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

There is a statutory duty on every Local Authority to have a homelessness strategy which sets out the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are, or will be, available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

The local authority must ensure that all organisations whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people are involved in the strategy.

The current homelessness strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2015.

A new homelessness prevention strategy is now required which takes into account current homelessness in the borough, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and new opportunities for preventing homelessness.

1. Recommendation

1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this report, and comment on the proposal to develop a new homelessness strategy. In particular, the Committee are asked to comment on the consultation proposals as set out in section 5.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Following the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002, every local authority was required to carry out a homelessness review, then formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the findings of the review.

- 2.2 The 2002 Act also requires local authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the result of further homelessness analysis, within five years of the publication of their last homelessness strategy. Local authorities are able to undertake homelessness reviews and publish homelessness strategies more frequently if circumstances change.

Thurrock Council last published its homelessness prevention strategy in November 2015 and is now seeking to start work on the development of a refreshed document.

- 2.3 There have been a number of developments in case law and legislation since the homelessness prevention strategy was last published, most notably the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This Act amended and introduced a number of measures, including:

- Enhanced advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness
- New duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all those who are eligible for assistance, regardless of intentionality or priority need
- An extension of the period of time where people are considered to be 'threatened with homelessness' by local authorities
- New personalised housing plans and assessments which outline the steps which both the individuals and the local authority will take to attempt to secure accommodation
- A new duty for specified public authorities, such as prisons and hospitals, to refer service users who they believe to be homeless or at risk of homelessness to local authority homelessness services

The primary function of the 2017 Act places greater emphasis on the prevention of homelessness, and has significantly adjusted the criteria of those who approaching the Council who are eligible for assistance.

- 2.4 In the period between April 2017 and December 2017, 1023 people approached the Council for assistance, with the number of approaches between April 2017 and March 2018 totalling 1395.

By comparison, in the time between the 2017 Act coming into force in April 2018 through to the end of December 2018, 1167 people approached the Council for assistance, representing an increase of 12.3% for the same period within 2017/18. If this trend continues, it is estimated that by the end of the reporting year in March 2019 a total of 1566 households will have approached the Council.

- 2.5 In isolation the increased percentage of households approaching the Council for assistance appears to be slight, however when this rise is put into the context of the new measures introduced through the Homelessness

Reduction Act 2017 the scale of the new challenges and pressures facing the Council becomes apparent.

With each of the new 'prevention' and 'relief' duties lasting for a period of 56 days, the introduction of personalised housing plans and the implementation of more frequent case progression reviews, every eligible applicant who approaches the Council now receives more detailed information and better assistance specific for their particular circumstances for longer than before.

3. Homelessness Strategic Analysis and Strategy

3.1 Homelessness Strategic Analysis

3.1.1 A range of strategic analysis will take place, considering the various factors affecting the provision of homelessness services across the borough. This analysis will primarily look at:

- National context, considering matters such as national trends, changing legislation/case law, welfare reform, new government initiatives in end rough sleeping and regional factors affecting homelessness
- Local strategic context, considering the wider corporate priorities, strategies from across the Council and other partner organisations, and the statistical background of the borough
- Local housing context, considering reasons and trends in homelessness across the borough, household composition, the use and availability of temporary accommodation, and the supply of accommodation across tenure types in the borough.

3.2 Homelessness Prevention Strategy

3.2.1 It is anticipated that through the strategic analysis of homelessness a range of key issues will be identified. The homelessness prevention strategy will include:

- An identification of the main causes of homelessness in Thurrock and exploration of challenges and barriers which residents and services face
- A number of key priorities to be adopted in order to prevent and relieve homelessness across the borough
- The development of a clear action plan with regular progress reviews to ensure that goals are met in partnership with other public bodies and organisations.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 As outlined, the Council has a statutory duty to ensure that it carries out regular analysis of homelessness in the borough and publishes a refreshed

homelessness strategy at least every five years. The current strategy therefore requires a published refresh by November 2020.

- 4.2 Due to significant changes since 2015 in welfare reform, homelessness legislation and housing provision in the borough, it is recommended that the analysis of homelessness in the borough commence in early 2019 so that a new prevention strategy can be published ahead of the statutory deadline.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 As set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance published by MHCLG, the Council must consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations and other people considered appropriate before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy.
- 5.2 Consultation will also take place with service users and specialist agencies which provide support to individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness across the borough.
- 5.3 Examples of previous consultation activity which will be considered for use again includes face-to-face sessions with Council staff and partner agencies, online surveys, statistical analysis, and presentations to other key Council services, committees and boards.

Close work will take place with a range of partners and service providers, for example those which form the membership of the Council's Homelessness and Mental Health Forum, including NELFT, St Mungo's, Open Door, SERRIC, Mind, and Changing Pathways.

Discussions and consultation will also take place with services across the Council, including both Adults and Childrens Social Care, as well as with bodies such as the Leaving Care Council and Youth Cabinet.

- 5.4 It is intended that specific activity with members of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee will take place to ensure that all appropriate stakeholders and issues as identified by members can be included throughout any period of consultation.
- 5.5 The strategic analysis of homelessness is expected to take place between February 2019 and April 2019. It is anticipated that the consultation activity for a new homelessness prevention strategy will commence in May 2019 and run until August 2019.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Julie Curtis**
HRA and Development Accountant

By undertaking work to analyse homelessness in the borough and developing a new strategy in line with the preventative aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, it is hoped that the costs associated with the provision of services will reduce.

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Simon Scrowther,**
Litigation Lawyer

The Homelessness Act 2002, s1 (3) requires a Local Authority to review homelessness in its area and to produce a strategy. Section 1(4) requires that the strategy is reviewed and updated at least every 5 years. The Homelessness Reduction Act changes must be included in such a strategy. Thurrock Council must comply with the legal requirement of having an updated strategy.

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development Manager

As outlined within this report and set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance, consultation activity must take place with other public bodies, voluntary organisations, service users and other identified stakeholders before a new strategy can be implemented. By undertaking a homelessness review, a broad range of stakeholders throughout the community can be identified and involved in the activity to develop a holistic strategy. The consultation results will help to inform a Community Equality Impact Assessment prior to implementation of the strategy to identify and address any issues affecting those within the protected characteristics.

6.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None

7. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, MHCLG

8. Appendices to the report

- None

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