

17 June 2015		ITEM: 7
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Homelessness Prevention Strategy		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Dawn Shepherd, Housing Strategy Manager, Housing		
Accountable Head of Service: Dermot Moloney, Strategic Lead Housing		
Accountable Director: Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Every Local Authority must 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 last strategy was adopted in 2010.

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

A review of current homelessness, its impacts and anticipated needs for prevention of homelessness in the future has been undertaken.

An initial review document and draft action plan is presented to the Committee.

Further consultation will be undertaken and the final strategy and action plan will be presented to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2015.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the outcomes of the initial review and draft action plan be noted (outlined in Appendix 1).**

1.2 That a further period of consultation will be undertaken and that a final action plan will be referred back to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Every Local Authority must 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.

2.2 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.

2.3 Thurrock Council last implemented a homelessness strategy in 2010. Since then there have been many changes which have impacted homelessness including welfare reform, the Localism Act, a new housing allocations scheme, a new tenancy policy, recession and funding cuts.

2.4 The new strategy will have an emphasis on prevention and will identify actions to address the main causes of homelessness in the borough.

2.5 Between February and April 2015 a consultation with staff across the Council, and partner agencies, was undertaken. An online survey was sent out to 850 recent service users and presentations were made at the DMTs of Children's and adults services.

2.6 A statistical analysis of data was undertaken in order to inform the review. Subsequently a review document and draft action plan was written (Appendix 1).

2.7 The directorate is now holding a full consultation between May and July 2015, including face to face meetings with partners and Members, a public online survey and presentations to the tenant's excellence panel and Youth Cabinet.

The final strategy and action plan will be presented to Housing Overview & Scrutiny board in September 2015.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The initial consultation identified the following key issues. The new strategy will identify actions to specifically address these issues.
- 3.2 There are four main causes of homelessness in Thurrock
- Eviction by parents, family or friend
 - The ending of an AST
 - Violence or harassment
 - Mortgage or rent arrears
- 3.3 Non priority groups, i.e. those without children or vulnerabilities who would not be accommodated by the Council under a statutory duty if homeless, have few housing options:
- Home ownership is beyond the reach of many
 - Low cost home ownership is a more viable option for working residents
 - Private renting can be expensive with increasingly rising rents
 - Non-working residents in receipt of Housing Benefit may struggle to obtain good quality affordable rented accommodation since there is an increasing shortfall between Local Housing Allowances (the subsidy paid under benefit rules) and actual market rents
- 3.4 The impact of welfare reforms, particularly the introduction of Universal Credit are likely to worsen the situation – e.g. there are reports of local landlords who previously let to people in receipt of Housing Benefit but are now refusing to take tenants in receipt of Universal Credit, due to concerns over potential non-payment.
- 3.5 Further predicted reforms include non-payment of Housing Benefit for young people under the age of 25 except in certain circumstances – this has yet to be confirmed but the impact could be substantial.
- 3.6 A number of London boroughs have purchased or rented property in the borough, as a means of accommodating people to whom they owe a duty to house. The impact is that landlords are asking for higher rents which widen the gap between Local Housing Allowance and actual rent. This means fewer properties are available for Thurrock residents.
- 3.7 Anecdotally, a number of people have been moved into the borough with complex needs which are not being supported and there has been no pass over of services – this requires further investigation.

3.8 Debt and poor money management is a key factor to homelessness with rent and mortgage arrears as one of the top four reasons.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The Council has a duty to consult with organisations whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people and to ensure they are involved in the strategy.

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

5.1 An initial review of current homelessness in Thurrock has been undertaken over the past 3 months, including:

- Consultation meetings with staff and partners
- An online survey of recent service users
- A detailed analysis of the statistical evidence base
- A review of current policy, legislation and the socio-economic climate
- A review of the service working practices following a peer review in November for the Gold Standard
- Reports have been presented to the Children's, Adults and Housing DMTs

5.2 A second consultation period has begun from the end of May 2015 – this will include further meetings with partners.

5.3 An online public survey will be made available via the Councils public consultation portal.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 As part of the consultation a full impact assessment of proposed actions will be undertaken.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jo Freeman**
Finance Officer

The Local Authority holds statutory duties under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness act 2002) which have financial implications – especially around the provision of temporary accommodation.

The strategy will outline actions for minimising temporary accommodation and thereby reducing costs to the Council.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Alison Stuart**
Principal Solicitor, Housing & Regeneration

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.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Community Development Officer

A full impact assessment will be conducted as part of the consultation process to assess the impact of future actions on equality groups.

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

8. **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):

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2015 Review and Draft Action Plan.

Report Author:

Dawn Shepherd, Housing Strategy Manager,
Housing Business Improvement