

Wiltshire Council

Full Council

26 November 2019

Subject: Homeless Strategy – 2019 - 2024

Cabinet Member: Cllr Richard Clewer – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Housing and Environment

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory obligation on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and develop and publish a homeless strategy to help prevent homelessness, based on the findings of the review. This strategy has been informed by Wiltshire Council's Homelessness Review 2018 and Homeless Health Needs Assessment.

This will be Wiltshire Council's first Homeless Strategy since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and will take into account new duties placed on the Council which represents the biggest changes in the homeless legislation in 20 years.

The effectiveness of the Act, which has an emphasis on the prevention of homelessness, is twinned with the effectiveness of partnership work with the statutory, voluntary and third sector agencies, therefore consulting with these agencies during the development of the strategy was essential.

The strategy sets out how Wiltshire Council and its partners will address the challenges identified through preventing homelessness and assisting homeless households to find affordable and sustainable housing solutions which will be delivered through five key priorities, which are:

1. To reduce rough sleeping
2. To identify and prevent homelessness at the earliest possible stage
3. To ensure services are designed to prevent homelessness and support those who are homeless
4. To ensure those who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless can secure and keep a suitable home
5. To maintain effective strategic direction and partnership working

The report was considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 8 October 2019. The minutes of this meeting are available [here](#).

Proposal(s)

That Full Council approve the homeless strategy 2019 – 2024 and agrees the implementation of the homeless strategy action plan.

Reason for Proposal(s)

It is a legal requirement imposed upon all local authorities by the Homelessness Act 2002 that a homeless strategy is produced. It also encourages the continued partnership working with other statutory bodies and voluntary sectors whose work helps prevent homelessness or meet the needs of people who have experienced homelessness.

Alistair Cunningham OBE**Executive Director, Growth, Investment and Place**

Wiltshire Council

Full Council

26 November 2019

Subject: Homeless Strategy

Cabinet Member: Cllr Richard Clewer – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Housing and Environment

Key Decision: Key

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Council's approval of the Homeless Strategy and its action plan.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. Wiltshire Councils business plan has a vision to create strong communities in Wiltshire and to help achieve this the strategic vision of the homeless strategy is "Wiltshire is a place where we all work together to strengthen our communities, to prevent and relieve homelessness and rough sleeping."

Background

3. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory obligation on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and develop and publish a homeless strategy to help prevent homelessness, based on the findings of the review. This strategy has been informed by Wiltshire Council's Homelessness Review 2018 and Homeless Health Needs Assessment.
4. The homeless strategy creates a shared vision for homelessness in Wiltshire with an emphasis on partnership working to deliver the identified priorities. It is a working document, setting out challenging objectives to deliver innovative solutions to tackling homelessness and building on existing successes to prevent homelessness in Wiltshire.
5. Our agreed strategic vision for homelessness is:

'Wiltshire is a place where we all work together to strengthen our communities, to prevent and relieve homelessness and rough sleeping'.

6. To help deliver this vision the strategy sets out how we and our partners will address the challenges identified through preventing homelessness and assisting homeless households to find affordable and sustainable housing solutions. In order to achieve this vision the strategy will be delivered through five priorities:

1. To reduce rough sleeping

2. To identify and prevent homelessness at the earliest possible stage
 3. To ensure services are designed to prevent homelessness and support those who are homeless
 4. To ensure those who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless can secure and keep a suitable home
 5. To maintain effective strategic direction and partnership working
7. Each priority is supported by actions to enable the priorities to be achieved. Monitoring this action plan regularly will make it easier to update, in light of potential change in national, regional and local policy and means we will be able to respond appropriately. We will review these actions through a multi-agency forum who will take joint responsibility for the success of the strategy

Consultation

8. A joint homeless and health needs assessment project board was set up which included directors from both housing and public health, cabinet members from both areas, the housing portfolio holder and a member representative from the ESC. The board has monitored progress and development of the data review, the homeless strategy and health needs assessment and helped to provide strategic direction.
9. Jointly with public health we held two informal consultation sessions in December 2018 to help develop the homeless health needs assessment, explore current trends of homelessness and identify gaps in provisions. These sessions were attended by partner agencies from both housing and health, we also attended various strategic groups to discuss the strategy development, including the Public Services Board, Health and Wellbeing Board, Environment Select Committee and all Housing Partnership Boards. Included as an appendix to this report is the information and responses to this informal consultation.
10. A formal consultation was launched in April 2019 for a three month period and ended in June 2019, see Appendix 5. A total of 112 responses were received ranging from individual residents to partner organisations. The strategic vision, aims and priorities were all agreed and feedback was provided for each area. All feedback was considered and a full response to the comments is included as Appendix 6 to this report

Main Considerations for the Council

11. The homeless strategy sets out how the Council and its partners will work together over the next 5 years to ensure that the needs and gaps in the provision of help for homeless people are addressed and actions within the action plan are achieved
12. The homeless strategy action plan sets out 5 strategic priorities and a number of actions under each of those priorities have been set. The success of the action plan relies upon the continued multi agency working and the emphasis on the prevention of homelessness. The action plan will be reviewed on an annual basis by the homeless strategy forum that will be established with partner organisations.

13. It is a statutory requirement for all local authorities to produce and publish a homeless strategy. The strategy will ensure that the work to prevent and reduce homelessness is sustained and better coordinate the work of the Council and partner organisations in Wiltshire.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

14. Overview and Scrutiny were fully consulted throughout the development of this strategy through their dedicated task and finish group which was established in November 2018 to help add value to the development and shaping of the strategy. A separate report is included, see Appendix 8, however all recommendations from the report have been accepted and will be included within the strategy and action plan.

Safeguarding Implications

15. Adopting the homeless strategy would have no safeguarding implications

Public Health Implications

16. The links between homelessness and, are well documented. Evidence shows that access to good stable accommodation has positive long-term benefits on the health and wellbeing of our population. The homeless strategy was developed alongside the development of a homeless health needs assessment which was led by public health. The recommendations from this needs assessment were considered when finalising the homeless strategy action plan to ensure all appropriate actions were included.

Procurement Implications

17. Adopting the homeless strategy will have no direct procurement implications, however if a further round of grant funding is announced and supports the commissioning of services, we will work with procurement to develop the bid and associate procurement plan which will be undertaken in line with the council's procurement rules

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

18. An equality impact assessment for this strategy can be viewed in Appendix 7 and was updated throughout the development and review of the strategy to ensure compliance with our public sector equality duty. The EIA identified that certain groups are more likely to be affected by the strategy as they are more likely to present themselves to the council as homeless, these groups are:

- Those aged between 25 and 44
- Females expecting a child or who have dependent children or pregnant women
- Low income households
- Those with a physical or mental disability

19. The strategy's focus on preventing homelessness will therefore benefit these groups. Although the strategy recognises that any households can become at risk of homelessness, those most vulnerable include a high proportion of households without social / family networks that can support them and are most likely to be from deprived areas and on low or welfare based incomes. The strategy is specific in seeking to tackle exclusions, improve accessibility and assessment and enable individuals to achieve sustained outcomes that include improved health, wellbeing and choices.
20. The proposed priorities and actions identified within the strategy are designed to address the needs of those who are disadvantaged, and a number of the equality groups within the EIA are positively targeted with actions designed to support and help them to maintain a home. The emphasis is on providing an accessible service and effective pathways to ensure sufficient advice and support is in place to make sure that once accommodation is found it is maintained.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

21. Adopting the homeless strategy would have no environmental or climate change implications

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

22. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must have in place a homeless strategy based on a review of homelessness within its area. Failure to produce an up to date strategy will open us up to legal challenge. It will also result in the Council not having an up to date strategy for addressing the needs and gaps in provision of help for homeless people.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

23. The actions and priorities contained within the strategy action plan can be achieved within existing budgets, however some actions are to consider longer term funding opportunities to enable current services to continue and if current funding is not extended or new funding opportunities provided then some services and accommodation will cease.
24. All of the rough sleeping staffing and accommodation provision we currently have is funded through a 2 year RSI funding grant from central government which ends on 1 April 2020, we have identified actions to look at ways to continue these services
25. Our current housing options staffing structure is funded 'in part' using the government's three year FHSG funding, which equates to £310,000pa. This was awarded to allow Local Authorities to prepare and create structures to respond to the Homeless Reduction Act which focuses on prevention of homelessness. We await to hear how this funding may or may not continue but if funding ceases we will be required to review staffing in line with revised budgets

26. Recommending to adopt this Strategy has no identified risks that would need to be mitigated or managed but areas of concern include the discontinuing of both the RSI funding and FHSG funding from central government

Financial Implications

27. Adopting the homeless strategy and delivering the five priorities can be delivered within the existing and approved Housing revenue general budget and awarded grants.

Legal Implications

28. Under the Homeless Act 2002, all local authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of homelessness within its area. Failure to produce an up to date strategy will open us to legal challenge.
29. The legal context for development of this strategy is set out in detail in appendix two. The proposed strategy is consistent with the Statutory guidance put out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in February 2018 and the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

Conclusions

30. It is requested that Full Council approve the homeless strategy and action plan.

Simon Hendey (Director - Housing and Commercial)

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26 September 2019

Appendices

Appendix 1 Homeless Strategy
Appendix 2 Homeless Data Review 2018
Appendix 3 National, Regional, Local context
Appendix 4 Initial informal consultation
Appendix 5 Formal consultation results
Appendix 6 Formal consultation results with comments
Appendix 7 Homeless Strategy EIA

Background Papers

None