

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

12 March 2019

Task Group and Programme Boards Representatives Updates

Purpose

To provide an update on recent task group and programme board activity and propose any decisions requiring Committee approval.

1. Homelessness Strategy Task Group

Membership:

Cllr Matthew Dean

Cllr David Halik

Cllr Deborah Halik

Cllr Gordon King

Cllr Pip Ridout

Cllr Tom Rounds

Cllr Graham Wright (Chairman)

Supporting Officer: Natalie Heritage

Terms of Reference:

1. To support the development of a Homelessness Strategy which aims to prevent and reduce homelessness in Wiltshire by considering:

- a) Partnership working arrangements - which can help to facilitate a holistic response to the causes of homelessness and the accessibility of advice and information around homelessness and housing options
- b) Projections of homelessness in the county
- c) The availability of suitable and appropriate accommodation
- d) Provision for the needs of vulnerable groups deemed as most at risk of homelessness
- e) The reasons why individuals become either at risk of or homeless

2. To meet every 8 weeks or on an ad-hoc basis as appropriate, until the conclusion of the Cabinet's work in in drafting a Homelessness Strategy September 2019.

Recent activity:

15 January 2019

The Task Group held a focus group session with a range of stakeholders involved in combatting homelessness in Wiltshire. Attendees included internal officers from the Homelessness Advice and Prevention Service, as well as Housing Income and Revenues and Benefits. External partners included some of the county's main housing providers, Alabaré, the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Department for Work and Pensions.

The discussion highlighted the need and importance of targeted, co-ordinated and earlier intervention to help prevent homelessness and all agreed that a multi-agency approach would help to reduce homelessness even further in Wiltshire. The Task Group are going to discuss the outcomes from the focus group with the Executive at their forthcoming meeting.

19 February 2019

The Task Group met on 19 February to consider the draft Homelessness Strategy and receive responses to some questions that they had put to the Executive following their December and January meetings. These questions centred on the provision of accommodation/housing support for Care Leavers, the implementation of the Housing First initiative in Wiltshire, partnership working arrangements, the newly established Rough Sleeper Outreach team, Temporary Accommodation provision, preventative work and the private rented sector. The Task Group were satisfied with the responses that they received.

In regard to the Homelessness Strategy, the Task Group made several recommendations around wording for the Universal Credit section and the content of the tables of priorities. All of these were accepted by the Executive. The Executive made a special point of thanking the Task Group for their input; which they felt had been extremely valuable and they signalled that they would take the points that had been raised in the discussion back to Officers.

As Housing were intending to conduct a 'Mystery Shopping' exercise around Housing Options, it was agreed that the Task Group could be involved with this work and, therefore, the meeting listed on the Forward Work Programme for March was amended, to focus instead on the private rented sector.

Feedback from January's Focus Group was that a large majority of eviction notices originate from the private rented sector, in the form of a Section 21 notice and these contribute to homelessness. As no stakeholder from the private sector was involved in January's session, it was agreed that this area required further research.

The Task Group have decided to draft some questions to independently put to private landlords/agents in their division and they are then going to report back on their findings to the entire Task Group on 11 March.

Separately, in consultation with the Chairman, it was agreed that Cllr Walsh step down from the Task Group.

Proposal

For the Environment Select Committee to endorse the stepping-down of Cllr John Walsh from the Homelessness Strategy Task Group, and the Group continuing to operate with seven members, as follows:

- **Cllr Matthew Dean**
- **Cllr David Halik**
- **Cllr Deborah Halik**
- **Cllr Gordon King**
- **Cllr Pip Ridout**
- **Cllr Tom Rounds**
- **Cllr Graham Wright**

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