

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

23 MARCH 2010

Subject: **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

Cabinet member: **Councillor John Brady – Economic Development,
Planning and Housing**

Executive Summary

This is the first Wiltshire Council Homelessness Strategy 2010/2015 which sets out the council's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support will be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

The homelessness legislation placed a duty on all local authorities to produce a homelessness strategy and this strategy builds on the achievements of all four previous district council strategies and sets a framework for the continued improvement of homelessness services.

A total of five strategic priorities have been set which identify the main expected outputs of the homelessness strategy. The strategy is an important document that will ensure we sustain and improve upon the work already undertaken and meet new national indicators, local area agreement targets and other government initiatives. The action plan sets out key objectives under each priority and will drive continued improvements to the homelessness services that are delivered by the council and other partner agencies.

The five strategic priorities are:

1. Improve information about the accessing of accommodation for both customers and agencies
2. Improve access and support for all customers with a particular focus on renting privately
3. Continue to improve the prevention of homelessness through a comprehensive advice service and having an effective range of housing options for customers
4. Increase the supply of affordable housing and promote choice
5. Provide effective partnerships and improve communications and publicity

The strategy will be available on the website with a hard copy available on request.

Proposal

That Cabinet recommends that full council approve the homelessness strategy 2010/15 and agrees the implementation of the homelessness strategy action plan.

Reason for Proposal

Legal requirement imposed upon all local authorities by the Homelessness Act 2002. 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.

Graham Hogg
Service Director, Housing

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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To seek Cabinet's endorsement of the Homelessness Strategy.

2. Background

2.1 The homelessness act 2002 placed a statutory duty on all local authorities to have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their district. The first strategy was required by July 2003 and reviewed at least every 5 years. A review of the previous four district councils was required in July 2008 however, due to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), the Government Office of the South West (GOSW) allowed for an extension of this requirement and accepted an interim action plan which included the main action points from the four district councils.

2.2 To understand the needs and gaps in service provision, a full review of homelessness in Wiltshire through information gathering days and consultations with service users and stakeholders was undertaken. The strategy builds on the achievements of all four previous district council strategies and sets a framework for the continued improvements of homelessness services.

2.3 The review was carried out between April and August 2009 and considered the nature and extent of homelessness within the county. In particular it focused upon:

- Exploring current and previous trends in levels of homelessness
- Identifying the causes of homelessness within Wiltshire County Council
- Gauging current service provision for homeless households
- Identifying gaps in the provision of current services

2.4 The homelessness 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 targets to deliver innovative solutions to tackling homelessness and building on existing successes to prevent homelessness in Wiltshire.

2.5 The strategy is a strategy written, owned and delivered by Wiltshire Council in partnership with the housing community of Wiltshire. It links to other strategies and plans such as the local area agreement for Wiltshire, the sustainable

community strategy for Wiltshire 2007-2016 and Wiltshire Council's first year plan 2009-2010.

3. Main considerations for the Council

3.1 The homelessness 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 objectives within the action plan are achieved.

3.2 The homelessness strategy action plan sets out the 5 strategic priorities and a number of objectives under each of the 5 priorities have been set. The success of the action plan relies on the continued multi-agency working and the emphasis on the prevention of homelessness.

3.3 The homelessness strategy is an important document that will ensure we can sustain and improve upon the work already undertaken and meet new national indicators, local area agreement targets and other government initiatives.

3.4 It is a legal requirement for all local authorities to produce a homelessness strategy

3.5 It is proposed that cabinet recommends that full council approve the homelessness strategy 2010 - 2015 and agrees the implementation of the homelessness strategy action plan.

4. Environmental Impact of the Proposal

4.1 Not considered applicable.

5. Equality & Diversity Impact of the Proposal

5.1 The homelessness strategy detailed herein aims to deliver quality services without prejudice and discrimination to meet the needs of all the community, regardless of age, cultural or ethnic background, disability, gender, marital status, religious or political persuasion or sexual orientation and will adhere to the equality and diversity policy developed by Wiltshire Council.

6. Risk Assessment

6.1 The risk of not endorsing the homelessness strategy will result in the council being open to legal challenge for failing to produce a mandatory document. It will also result in the council not having an up-to-date strategy in place for addressing the needs and gaps in provision of help for homeless people.

6.2 Endorsing the homelessness strategy will ensure that the council has an up-to-date strategy and action plan to address the needs and gaps in provision of help for homeless people. It will also ensure that the excellent multi-agency work will continue and the emphasis on the prevention of homelessness will continue

to play a major role in improving the homelessness services delivered by Wiltshire Council and other partner agencies. The government supplements housing authorities' resources with specific programmes to help them deliver effective homelessness strategies and services to prevent homelessness.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 Revenue - The proposal is not expected to increase costs in the revenue budgets of the housing team.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness within their district. Failure to produce an up-to-date strategy will be open to legal challenge.

9. Options considered

9.1 Doing nothing is likely to have a detrimental impact on the prevention of homelessness and the reduction of households in temporary accommodation. The sustainable community strategy, local area agreement for Wiltshire and Wiltshire Council's first year plan set targets and goals to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation. Without clear objectives and multi-agency working it is likely that a rise in households presenting as homeless will result.

10. Conclusion

10.1 It is requested that Cabinet recommend that full council approve the homelessness strategy.

Graham Hogg
Service Director, Housing

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Background Papers

None

Appendices

Homelessness Strategy
Action Plan