

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

5 November 2019

Executive Response to the final report of the Homelessness Strategy Task Group

Purpose of the report

1. To present the response of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Housing and MCI to the final report of the Homelessness Strategy Task Group.

Background

2. On 4 October 2018, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Housing and MCI, Cllr Richard Clewer, met with the former Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, Cllr Matthew Dean, to discuss Overview and Scrutiny (OS) involvement in helping the Cabinet to draft a Homelessness Strategy.
3. The Cllrs agreed that OS input could help to add value to the development and shaping of the Council's homelessness policies, through the work around the Council's Homelessness Strategy. Following this discussion, the Environment Select Committee endorsed the establishment of a Homelessness Strategy Task Group at their meeting on [6 November 2018](#).

Executive response to the Task Group's recommendations

(Please note numbers match the recommendations numbers in the [final report](#))

Recommendation No.2	<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. In order to ensure that intervention takes place at the earliest possible stage and that vulnerable clients have the best chance of maintaining appropriate accommodation, to consider implementing a "Passport to Housing" scheme, whereby the following are undertaken:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) Internal Data Matching: those on welfare benefits, those who have Council Tax arrears and rent arrears have their details centralised. This information to then be discussed, so that all appropriate Council departments are aware of the individuals/households most at risk of homelessness; leading to a process of earlier interventionb) Wiltshire Council's Departments, Wiltshire's main Social Housing providers, private landlords and the third sector forge a partnership working arrangement, so that
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	housing stock is better co-ordinated and different agencies become more aware and responsive to the needs of Wiltshire's tenants.
Reason for recommendation	This recommendation has been drafted to facilitate a more preventative response to homelessness and to ensure that vulnerable households are identified and supported earlier, before they reach crisis point.
Cabinet Member	Cllr Richard Clewer
Executive response	<p>The action plan includes a review of the customer journey; which includes all Council contact with those who are potentially homeless. This work is taking place with officers from the homeless and welfare and customer service areas, with the intention to design out duplication, but also ensure that customer information between services is shared to enable better early intervention.</p> <p>The action plan proposal to establish a strategic forum including the Council, social housing providers and the third sector will directly address recommendation B.</p>

Recommendation No.3	3. The council to consider all the ways of encouraging and supporting private landlords to rent their properties to those in receipt of welfare benefits and wider use of the 'Discretionary Housing Payment', in order to increase the housing options available to this group and reduce their vulnerability to homelessness.
Reason for recommendation	The Task Group found that some private landlords chose not to rent their properties to those in receipt of Housing Benefit and, as a result, this reduced the supply of housing available to those in receipt of social security.
Cabinet Member	Cllr Richard Clewer
Executive response	<p>The Council is in the process of reviewing its Discretionary housing payment policy, to address the concern raised in this recommendation.</p> <p>Engagement with private sector landlords and letting agents will continue to identify the obstacles to letting properties to</p>

	those who may be homeless, so that these issues can be addressed.
Recommendation No.4	<p>4. In order to ensure that Wiltshire Council can continue its positive work reducing homelessness in the county, to prioritise sustaining both the Emergency Accommodation provision (in each town where need has been proven) and Rough Sleeper Outreach Team for a significant period of time through, for example:</p> <p>a) Regularly recording data that evidences the need for, and impact of, the Emergency Accommodation provision and the Rough Sleeper Outreach Team</p> <p>b) Continually seeking funding opportunities to help maintain these services.</p>
Reason for recommendation	<p>The introduction of the Rough Sleeper Outreach Team has seen homelessness decrease in the county by 52% and individuals who traditionally chose not to engage with the Council, are now accepting help and support to transition out of homelessness.</p> <p>Additionally, Wiltshire has not had to rely on hostels or B&Bs for Temporary Accommodation, due to the provision of its Emergency Accommodation placements.</p> <p>The Task Group therefore feel that both the Rough Sleeper Outreach Team and Emergency Accommodation provision are integral to Wiltshire's fight against homelessness. In consultation with the Cabinet Member, the Chairman has written to the Wiltshire MPs about the fundamental need for these two entities.</p>
Cabinet Member	Cllr Richard Clewer
Executive response	<p>Rough sleeper counts are undertaken on a regular basis over and above the annual count that takes place each November. The returns required to support the rough sleeping funding will address the first recommendation.</p> <p>Work is ongoing to establish sustainable accommodation options for rough sleepers, if the funding reduces in the future.</p>

Recommendation No.5	5. In light of the Army Rebasing 2020 Scheme and to help manage the workload of Housing Options South, to establish a “prevention partnership” network with the Ministry of Defence and appropriate partners, which would enhance the housing support offered to those leaving the armed forces
Reason for recommendation	Housing Options South reported to the Task Group that homeless applications from veterans had been increasing and there was concern that the Army Rebasing 2020 Scheme could further impact the workload of the team.
Cabinet Member	Cllr Richard Clewer
Executive response	The Housing options team in the south will lead on developing the prevention partnership as recommended.

Recommendation No.6	6. For the Council’s homelessness webpages to be better publicised and more easily accessible from the Council’s homepage, so that those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, can more easily remotely access the support and advice that they need.
Reason for recommendation	The Task Group found that the Council’s website information on housing and homelessness for the homeless/those at risk of homelessness was not as easy to access as it could be.
Cabinet Member	Cllr Richard Clewer
Executive response	Review of the Council’s webpages for homelessness will be reviewed as part of the work on the new Council website.

Recommendation No.7	7. For the Environment Select Committee to consider a report in 12 months’ time, updating on how the Executive have implemented the recommendations set out above.
Reason for recommendation	As homelessness is such an important issue, the Task Group felt that it would be important for the Committee to maintain engagement with Housing in this respect.
Cabinet Member	Cllr Richard Clewer

Executive response	Agreed
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Proposal

4. To note the executive response to the **Final Report – Homelessness Strategy Task Group**.

Cllr Richard Clewer, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Housing and MCI

Officer contact: Natalie Heritage, Senior Scrutiny Officer, 01225 718062,
Natalie.Heritage@wiltshire.gov.uk