

THURSDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2015

## REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING &amp; WASTE MANAGEMENT

## HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY 2016-20

**PURPOSE**

To seek Cabinet approval of the refreshed Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2016-20, the annual Strategy Action Plan, the Spend Plan that sets out how the homelessness prevention activity will be resourced over the first two years to 2018 and the supporting review and evidence base document.

The report also seeks to obtain Cabinet approval of the Housing Solutions Fund, the Hospital Discharge Protocol and refreshed Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEPE), three key tools that will support the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan.

Additionally, the report seeks approval from Cabinet to increase the Bed and Breakfast Budget by £50K in order ensure the Council can assist those in need of temporary accommodation at a time of increased demand.

The report also seeks approval to participate in the Government backed Gold Standard scheme that will require the Council to have excellent services and partnerships in place that meet the 10 local challenges that underpin the scheme.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Cabinet approves the refreshed Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2016-20 and supporting Action Plan, Spend Plan and Review Document.

That Cabinet approves the Housing Solutions Fund, the Hospital Discharge Protocol and refreshed Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEPE).

That Cabinet approves an increase of £50K in the Bed and Breakfast income and expenditure budgets.

That Cabinet gives approval to participate in the Gold Standard scheme.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Homelessness Act 2002 required all Local Authorities to produce and publish a Homelessness Strategy and ensure this was reviewed and refreshed every 5 years. Consequently, a review of Homelessness in Tamworth has been undertaken (**Appendix B**) and this information has been used to support the development of the Council's vision and priorities that are included in the refreshed Homelessness Prevention Strategy (**Appendix A**). The Strategy sets out how the Council and its partners will provide effective services and assistance to those residents who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The Council's approach is underpinned by 5 priorities. These are:

1. Improving and enhancing homelessness prevention activities
2. Improving joint working to ensure effective partnerships are in place
3. Increasing the supply of affordable housing and provide more settled homes
4. Improving access to accommodation and services particularly for vulnerable people and those at risk of homelessness
5. Improve health outcomes and reduced health inequalities for those who are homeless

Each priority is supported by objectives and strategic actions. These actions are brought together in the Strategy Action Plan (**Appendix C**). The Plan will be refreshed every 12 months across the lifetime of the Strategy to ensure continued relevance against priorities, effective monitoring of delivery and sufficient resources are in place to continue initiatives as necessary or develop new services and prevention tools to tackle issues that might arise over the coming years. As these are reviewed and further developed, they will be brought back to Cabinet for approval. The Strategy and Action Plan have been fully costed utilising DCLG Homelessness Prevention Grant. Detail on what is to be resourced over the first 2 years to 2018 is provided at **Appendix D**. It is assumed at this point that Government Grant will continue to be made available to the Council for the purposes of preventing homelessness. However, this position will remain under constant review and should Grant continue to be provided, a strong case will be made to ensure that such resources remain targeted and utilised to prevent homelessness in the Borough. If Grant in the future is not forthcoming, the Council would be forced to withdraw cost effective prevention services and deliver its statutory homelessness services only.

The first priority highlights the need to ensure the prevention tools at the disposal of the Council are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they remain “fit for purpose.” To this end work has already commenced on reviewing key prevention tools and approaches. Consequently, it is proposed that the Repossession Prevention Fund (RPF) and the Spend To Save initiatives that were developed some years ago, are combined into one Housing Solutions Fund (**Appendix E**). This funding will be utilised to enable officers to provide the necessary financial assistance to prevent homelessness occurring. As has been outlined in previous reports to Members, this represents good value for money when the cost of someone actually becoming homeless are compared to the relatively small sums that are expended to prevent homelessness.

Similarly, it is proposed the Hospital Discharge Protocol (**Appendix F**) be adopted as this will again, contribute to the prevention of homelessness by ensuring secure accommodation is available so that no person is discharged from hospital either homeless or back to a home whose conditions make it unsuitable for them to live in. Developed in partnership with Lichfield District Council, the Protocol takes on board relevant guidance to ensure the Council and its partners take joint responsibility to ensure a protocol is in place so that no one is discharged from hospital to the streets or inappropriate accommodation.

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) (**Appendix G**) also takes into account best practice and guidance and has been developed to ensure the Council and partner agencies provide appropriate responses for rough sleepers during the winter and periods of severe weather. The Council should have enough adequate provision to prevent rough sleeping at any time of year but the winter period provides different opportunities for engaging with entrenched rough sleepers and hard-to-reach groups. Increased support provided under SWEP is available between October and March is essential in protecting the health and well being of rough sleepers.

It is also proposed that an additional £50K be made available for the Bed and Breakfast budget. This is in addition to the £100K increase to this budget already actioned this financial year. This request is necessary due to the increase in demand for Temporary Accommodation (TA) over the course of the last 12 months. Whilst the number of people in B&B has been reduced in recent months, additional budget will be required to ensure sufficient resources are in place until the end of the financial year. A review of TA is underway and a key priority for the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy is to reduce the reliance on B&B and seek to utilise a range of options that better meet the needs of customers and offer value for money alternatives for the Council.

Finally, approval is requested to enable the Council to apply to participate in the Governments Gold Standard scheme. Gold Standard is a local authority, sector led peer review scheme designed to help Councils deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services. The challenge follows a 10 step continuous improvement

approach that starts with a pledge for local authorities aspiring to '*strive for continuous improvement in front line housing services*' and culminates in an application for the Gold Standard Challenge. The new Homelessness Prevention Strategy highlights the intention to develop a Gold Standard Housing Solutions Service in Tamworth and will be central to the Council's approach to homelessness prevention and the delivery of identified priorities. Crucially, one of the above 10 challenges highlights the requirement for the Council to have a homelessness strategy in place that sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness. It is anticipated that by endorsing the refreshed Homelessness Prevention Strategy, the journey to achieve Gold Standard will be underway.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

Key actions identified within the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Action Plan have been costed and are primarily derived from DCLG Homelessness Grant of £62K per annum which was allocated to the Council in previous years. Due to savings made in previous years funds are also available to deliver the full set of actions highlighted in the Spend Plan and these resources have been taken into account and comply with DCLG regulations allowing Homelessness Grant under-spend to be carried forward.

The use of DCLG grant for the purposes highlighted represent good value for money when the full costs of someone becoming homeless are taken into account. For example, DCLG in their paper "Evidence Review of the Costs of Homelessness" (DCLG, 2012) pulls together a number of research studies that have attempted to calculate the total costs of homelessness. Estimates of the annual costs to government from these studies range from £24,000 - £30,000 (gross) per person. Consequently, relatively small amounts of money can be utilised as proposed to prevent larger sums of money being expended to deal with the consequences of someone becoming homeless.

The use of this funding will also help to mitigate against the impact of cuts in funding, such as those made regarding the Supporting People programme. The effective utilisation of resources as proposed will assist in meeting the needs of a client base that has seen the numbers of people with complex needs increase in recent years.

As highlighted above, it is assumed at this point that Government Grant will continue to be made available to the Council for the purposes of preventing homelessness. However, this position will remain under constant review and should Grant continue to be provided, a strong case will be made to ensure that such resources remain targeted and utilised to prevent homelessness in the Borough. Should funding not be available at the end of Year 2, a full review of provision will be undertaken and the annual action plan amended accordingly to reflect what is deliverable with the resources that are available at that time.

A further increase of £50K is requested for the B&B income and expenditure budgets in order to ensure sufficient resources are in place to meet demand until the end of the financial year. Increased demand over the last 12 months has resulted in the original budget of £88,510 being expended by July. An increase in budgets of £100k was approved by the Section 151 Officer in line with Financial Regulations in order to meet further costs to November 2015. As the budget will soon be exhausted, it has become necessary to request a further £50K which under Financial Guidance will need Cabinet approval. Whilst the number of people in B&B has been reduced in recent months, the additional budget will be required to ensure both sufficient resources are in place until the end of the financial year and alternatives to B&B are identified.

## **LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND**

By not having a clear Strategy and plans in place to prevent homelessness, the Council is open to risk on a number of levels.

It is essential the Housing Solutions Team are equipped with the tools and resources to effectively prevent homelessness and take the appropriate action when customers present as homeless. This requires clear policy, procedures and guidance are in place to assist staff in delivering a customer focused, well informed and effective service. Failure to comply with relevant legislation or the incorrect application of tools designed to assist customers may leave the council open to legal challenge.

The adoption of the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy coupled with the intention to apply for Gold Standard demonstrates a clear intention to continuously improve services to a standard that lessens the risk of challenge and provides a first class service for those needing advice and assistance.

By having a clear strategic approach in place that is supported by effective policies, procedures and prevention tools, the Council can begin to meet the 10 challenges set by Government and achieve Gold Standard, thus ensuring a high quality service for customers accessing the Housing Solutions Service.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

The Council has for many years taken a prevention approach to tackling homelessness seeking to offer support to households in meeting their own housing needs wherever possible. The proposal within this report offer an opportunity for the Council to manage future demand in a number of ways:

By working with health colleagues to ensure a successful return to home from hospital the project has value in preventing further admissions for those households. This helps to reduce demand on NHS services and provides best outcomes for the households involved

Households with multiple and complex need place a disproportionate burden on a range of services. It is challenging for the Council to seek to deal with housing issues for individuals who have a range of other problems. By ensuring that a flexible and expert service is available to support such households to navigate the range of services required the Council will be able to focus on its own role. This will help to reduce demand on already overstretched services.

Some households, once re-housed, require on ongoing support to ensure that they are able to successfully sustain their accommodation. This support helps to ensure that households are able to budget properly, avoid problems of anti-social behaviour and are able to contribute to their communities in a sustainable way. This reduces demand in dealing with the negative outcomes for the above including rent arrears and other debts, neighbour disputes and harassment and social isolation leading to poor health and wellbeing.

The vision, priorities, objectives and actions contained in the Homelessness Prevention Strategy will contribute towards meeting targets and priorities set at national level as well as taking into account local evidence. They also feed into a number of corporate aims, objectives and strategies as well as those of many of the partner agencies involved in delivering housing and related services in the Borough.

## **REPORT AUTHOR**

Steve Pointon, Head of Strategic Housing



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