

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR (HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY)
TO THE EXECUTIVE
6 JUNE 2008

Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced a legislative requirement for all local housing authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their district and to produce a homelessness strategy setting out how homelessness was going to be tackled.
- 1.2 The first strategy was required to be published by July 2003, and strategies must be reviewed at least every 5 years. The Council's first Homelessness Strategy was published in July 2003.
- 1.3 The Council have now produced a second Homelessness Strategy 2008-13, which has been informed by the findings of a review of homelessness in the District carried out over 2007-08.
- 1.4 This report summarises the priority areas that the new Homelessness Strategy will seek to address. The Council is required to publish the Strategy by July 2008.
- 1.5 The Contact Officers for this report is Lyn Scaplehorn, Housing Advice Team Leader (01235 520202 Ext 579).

2.0 Recommendations

- (a) *That the Executive adopt the new Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*
- (b) *That the Executive ask the Housing Advice team to implement the action plans developed as part of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

- (a) This report relates to all the objectives of the Council's vision statement
- (b) This report complied with the Housing Strategy.
- (c) This report complies with existing policy in respect of homelessness.

4.0 Background and Supporting Information

- 4.1 The Council's first Homelessness Strategy was produced in 2003. Since then, there have been major changes to how homelessness services are delivered in the District.
- 4.2 This second Strategy builds upon successes by identifying what has worked well and ensuring these services are maintained and developed. The Strategy also identifies areas where there are still gaps in service provision, and action plans have been developed to tackle these gaps.

4.3 The Strategy has been produced based on the findings of the Council's Homelessness Review. The Review was carried out over 2007-08 and was made up of five main parts:

- An analysis of progress made on the action points of the first Homelessness Strategy.
- An analysis of homelessness data collected by the Council.
- A review of homelessness services using the model developed by the Department of Communities and Local Government.
- Identification of existing services for homeless people in the Vale.
- Consultation with key stakeholders, staff and service users.

5.0 The Homelessness Strategy 2008-13- Identification of Priorities

5.1 The Review has shown up areas where the Council needs to focus resources in order to deliver further improvements in outcomes for people threatened with homelessness.

5.2 These priorities can be grouped under six main headings as follows:

- (a) Improve partnership working to prevent homelessness.
- (b) Improve and develop prevention services for young people.
- (c) Target homeless prevention initiatives effectively.
- (d) Further professionalisation of housing advice services.
- (e) Improve and reduce the provision of temporary accommodation.
- (f) Maximise the supply of affordable housing.

(a) Improve partnership working in order to prevent homelessness

The Review showed up many examples of good partnership working that are having a direct impact on the prevention of homelessness. However, there still remain significant gaps that limit the ability of the Council to achieve its objectives.

We will improve partnership working by:

- Ensuring existing protocols are efficient
- Establishing new protocols and arrangements where necessary
- Raising awareness of protocols and partnerships
- Establishing a Vale Homelessness Forum to oversee the implementation of the strategy

(b) Improve and develop prevention services for young people

The review suggests that this is a priority because there is evidence that there are more significant barriers to young people accessing private rented accommodation, and therefore an increased risk of homelessness.

We have made significant progress in tackling this issue with acceptances of 16-17 year olds, falling to just five young persons in 2007/08; this represents 6% of all acceptances.

It is our intention to build on this progress by:

- Ending the use of B&B for young people by 2010 in line with Government objectives
- Reducing the use of out-of-area placements for young people
- Continuing to reduce the level of homeless acceptance for this group

- Improving prevention outcomes for young people

We will improve and develop prevention services for young people by:

- Developing a Youth Homelessness Strategy
- Establishing a supported lodgings scheme
- Working with The Foyer and the Supporting People Team to provide accommodation for young people with high support needs
- Establishing and promoting prevention options for young people
- Continuing to work with the Oxfordshire County Council Joint Housing Team to deal with issues.

(c) Target homeless prevention initiatives effectively

The Council intends to maintain and further improve its homeless prevention framework. In 2004 we introduced a database to record all prevention and options activity. This has enabled us to more closely monitor statistical data to identify trends or areas of concern which may suggest that gaps in service are leading to rising levels of homelessness among a particular client group.

The review included analysis of this data that suggests we need to target services more effectively to the following client groups:

- people homeless as a result of leaving armed forces accommodation
- people homeless as a result of mortgage arrears
- people homeless due to domestic violence

We will ensure that prevention initiatives are targeted effectively by:

- Maintaining the current options toolkit
- Spending prevention funds effectively
- Entering into a new service level agreement with a company providing mediation services
- Marketing housing options for people leaving the armed forces
- Ensuring staff have appropriate expertise in dealing with mortgage repossessions
- Establishing refuge provision in the area
- Agreeing common policies and procedures with main housing association partners for people at risk of domestic violence

(d) Further professionalisation of the housing advice service

The housing advice service has worked with 1053 households over the past three years, achieving successes in 60% of cases. To maintain and build upon these successes we will ensure that the service is properly resourced and managed in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for homeless people.

We will maintain and build on these achievements by:

- Introducing individual performance monitoring for officers both in housing options and private sector lettings
- Introducing a framework for customer service feedback
- Introducing a rolling training programme for housing advice staff
- Setting up and maintaining a central library for housing publications
- Producing new literature for White Horse Lettings and developing a marketing campaign to attract new landlords
- Providing an enhanced service to homeless households

(e) Improving and reducing the provision of temporary accommodation

The review also focussed on our success in delivering the government's target of reducing temporary accommodation. The Council's 2010 temporary accommodation target was to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation from 180 to 90. This has been achieved two years early. We aim to further reduce this to 62 by 2010. The Council's 2010 Temporary Accommodation Plan sets out how we will achieve this target.

Even though the Council is committed to its 2010 target, some households will continue to be placed in temporary accommodation. It is therefore important that the Council takes steps to ensure that people's experiences of temporary accommodation are positive. It is also important that the Council adopts procedures to ensure that people are supported in temporary accommodation so as to prevent repeat homelessness and enable them to move on to permanent housing.

We will both improve and reduce the provision of temporary accommodation by:

- Undertaking a comprehensive review of temporary accommodation, to include value for money, best service provider, service level agreements, and the type (size, tenancy and location) of temporary accommodation
- Submitting proposals and a subsequent action plan following the comprehensive review
- Producing a new Temporary Accommodation Reduction Plan
- Proactively managing households in temporary accommodation by ensuring that they are bidding for permanent accommodation
- Improving support for households in temporary accommodation
- Introducing a service contract with a local removal company

(f) Maximising the supply of affordable housing

Demand for affordable housing continues to outstrip supply. Therefore, both the supply of affordable housing and the mechanism by which it is let has a direct impact upon homelessness levels in the District.

The Council has committed to a target of enabling the development of 100 new units per year of social housing.

We will maximise the supply of affordable housing by:

- Working with planners, developers and housing associations to meet new-build targets for affordable housing
- Implementing and reviewing the effects of the new Allocations Policy to ensure it supports the homelessness strategy
- Introducing and reviewing a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme

6.0 Taking The Strategy Forward

6.1 Full action plans have been produced detailing how the Strategy will be implemented in the coming years.

6.2 We will be setting up a Homelessness Group to oversee the implementation of this Strategy and to address emerging issues throughout its lifetime. This group will meet

twice a year and will be made up of representatives of all key stakeholders, including the portfolio holder.

- 6.3 In addition to this, progress on the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy will be reported to the Senior Management Team and the Executive as part of the service monitoring processes.

LYN SCAPLEHORN
TEAM LEADER (HOUSING ADVICE)

BACKGROUND PAPERS: Homelessness Strategy 2008-13