

Interim Homelessness Strategy

Report of the:	Head of Housing & Community
Contact:	Rod Brown
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Annexes/Appendices (attached):	Annexe 1: Draft Interim Homelessness Strategy
Other available papers (not attached):	Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013 Homelessness Act 2002 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Report summary

The proposed Interim Homelessness Strategy is intended to meet our legal duty to publish a Homelessness Strategy as set out in the Homelessness Act 2002. This interim strategy will satisfy this legal requirement until a more detailed strategy can be developed later in 2018.

Recommendation (s)

That the Interim Homelessness Strategy is approved.

1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy

- 1.1 Managing our resources – The proposal will ensure the Council is able to defend appeals against negative housing decisions which will reduce the expenditure on homelessness.
- 1.2 Supporting our community – The proposal will help those at risk of homelessness by ensuring scarce resources within housing are directed to those in most need.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Council, as a Housing Authority, is required to publish a Homelessness Strategy as set out in the Homelessness Act 2002.
- 2.2 The content of the statutory requirements include the need to set out how the council will meet the following homelessness objectives:

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- 2.2.1 The prevention of homelessness, including reducing the levels of homelessness against the main causes;
 - 2.2.2 Ensuring there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or who may become homeless;
 - 2.2.3 Ensuring there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again
- 2.3 The Council's previous Homelessness Strategy was agreed in 2008 and should be reviewed periodically to meet the legal requirement as set out above.
- 2.4 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will introduce significant changes to how local Housing Authorities will manage homelessness with a far greater emphasis on preventing homelessness.
- 2.5 In response to this major change in housing legislation, during 2018/19 the Council is proposing a substantial review of homelessness within the Borough, which will be instrumental in the preparation of a new strategy, in consultation with its partners and residents.
- 2.6 This substantial review will result in a further report to committee later in 2018/19 proposing a more definitive Homelessness Strategy incorporating the new provisions as set out in the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.
- 2.7 The majority of other councils are operating under Homelessness Strategies which will also be reviewed in light of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 The proposal is that the council approves the Interim Homelessness Strategy as set out in **Annexe 1** to this report.

4 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial or manpower implications arising from the recommendation within this report.
- 4.2 Should the recommendation not be supported there could be implications for additional expenditure on homelessness resulting from having to accommodate some applicants or enter into further legal processes.
- 4.3 **Chief Finance Officer's comments:** None for the purposes of this report.

5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

- 5.1 The Council is legally required to have a Homelessness Strategy and the previous strategy applied to the period 2008 – 2013.

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- 5.2 During the performance of its duties as a Housing Authority, the Council has to take decisions on applicant's requests for housing or housing assistance, as set out in relevant legislation and codes of practice.
- 5.3 On occasion, these decisions will be to refuse an applicant's requests for continued housing or associated support. There are statutorily defined opportunities for unsatisfied housing applicants to appeal the Housing Authority's decisions.
- 5.4 When this occurs it is important that the Housing Authority can be robust in defending that decision.
- 5.5 The absence of an up-to-date Homelessness Strategy could hinder the ability of the Housing Authority to defend decisions on housing provision and assistance. The consequences of which could include additional expenditure on homelessness by the council which may have been avoided.
- 5.6 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** *As a Housing Authority the Council is subject to a range of legal duties and requirements, which it must comply with. The interim strategy, as a measure whilst a detailed review is undertaken, helps to mitigate any risks of challenge to its decision making.*

6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

7 Partnerships

- 7.1 The Council as the Housing Authority works closely with numerous Housing Associations, public bodies, support services and community groups to perform its statutory housing duties.

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 The report's proposal will ensure the Council, as the local Housing Authority, meets the minimum legal requirement to publish a Homelessness Strategy.
- 8.2 Should the recommendation not be approved there is a risk that the Council may be exposed to financial and reputational risk associated with not being able to defend housing decisions in the future.

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 9.1 In light of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 the Council will be completing a review of homelessness as part of the process of developing its Homelessness Strategy, ensuring the relevant legal duty is maintained.

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- 9.2 In the meantime, whilst this work is being completed, the proposed Interim Homelessness Strategy fulfils the Housing Authority's duty to have and publish its strategy. This proposed strategy is set out in **Annexe 1**.
- 9.3 The proposed strategy details a wide range of activities the Council is involved in to support those at risk of becoming homeless and it is recommended that this interim Strategy be adopted.

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);