

Agenda Item

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Date	27 November 2018		
Ward (s) affected	All	Key Decision	No

Subject	Homelessness Strategy 2015 to 2020 Action Plan Update
Recommendations	
The Cabinet is asked to note the progress made over the last 12 months to achieve the actions contained in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2015-2020.	

Executive Summary	
<p>The Homelessness Act 2002, requires local authorities to publish a five year homelessness strategy. Mole Valley District Council's (MVDC) third strategy was approved by the former Executive on 3 February 2015, when it was agreed that progress be reviewed annually by the Scrutiny Committee and on this occasion it is also being considered by the Cabinet. The last review by the Scrutiny Committee was 14 November 2017.</p> <p>A key feature of the Strategy was to achieve the National Practitioner Support Service Gold Standard for Homelessness. Since the Strategy was approved the first stage peer review was completed with a score of 72% (pass mark 60%) and on the completion of the ten evidence based challenges the Gold Standard was achieved and awarded in June this year. This is a considerable accolade for the Council being one of only 16 local authorities to achieve it and demonstrates the Council's corporate commitment to homelessness, customer care and best practice.</p> <p>Other key achievements during the year were the implementation of the majority of the Homelessness Reduction 2017 from 3 April 2018, reduction in the number of families placed in bed and breakfast, an increase in the number of emergency accommodation units owned by the Council to temporarily house statutory homeless households and 40 new affordable homes completed.</p> <p>A summary of the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the implications were explained to the Committee in the 14 November 2017 report and report to the former Executive on 28 November 2017.</p> <p>The updated Homelessness Strategy Action Plan is attached at Appendix 1 and includes the recommendations from the peer review and actions required for the ongoing implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.</p>	

Community Wellbeing

Active communities and support for those who need it

- Improve opportunities for residents to live safe and healthy lives
- Deliver a programme of inclusive sports and wellbeing activities, increasing participation across all generations and targeting those communities most in need
- Foster community spirit, encouraging individuals, families and communities to support each other especially in times of particular need
- Support individuals and families who find themselves unintentionally homeless, seeking to minimize disruption to education and employment
- Work with cycling and other leisure groups to encourage healthy lifestyles, and responsible enjoyment of our parks, open spaces, countryside and roads.

The Cabinet has the authority to determine the recommendation in accordance with its powers to monitor policy objectives and performance targets.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Homelessness Act 2002, requires local authorities to publish a five year homelessness strategy. Mole Valley District Council's third strategy was approved by the former Executive on 3 February 2015. On 20 October 2015, the first six months of operation of the Strategy was reviewed by the former Executive. Upon approval of the Strategy, the former Executive Member confirmed that it would be subject to annual review by the Scrutiny Committee and this is the third such annual review.

2.0 PROGRESS

2.1 Progress is detailed in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan attached at Appendix 1. The key achievements to date are summarised below.

2.2 Key Achievements

- A key feature of the Strategy was to achieve the National Practitioner Support Service Gold Standard for Homelessness. Since the Strategy was approved the first stage peer review was completed with a score of 72% (pass mark 60%) and on the completion of the ten evidence based challenges the Gold Standard was achieved and awarded in June this year. This is a considerable accolade for the Council Valley being one of only 16 local authorities to achieve it and demonstrates the Council's corporate commitment to homelessness, customer care and best practice.
- Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 from 3 April 2018. An explanation of the Act was given in last year's annual report to the Committee on 14 November 2017 and to the former Executive on 28 November 2018. A summary is attached at Appendix 2.

- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has provided grants for homelessness and the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act that has enabled improvements and enhancements to the service. These include: two additional positions over two years which are a Housing Options Officer and a Housing Intelligence Officer (to assist in the detection of housing fraud); improvements to the housing software; when appropriate covering costs to prevent households becoming homeless; and a proposal to appoint to a role for two years to provide money and budgeting advice to prevent homelessness and assist clients affected by the implementation of Universal Credit.
- Reduction in the number of families placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. There have been no families living in this type of accommodation for 6 weeks or more in the last 12 months.
- Two additional self contained emergency accommodation properties have been acquired to increase the Council's stock for homeless households that the Council has a responsibility for under the homelessness legislation.
- Over the lifetime of this strategy the Council has assisted 137 households access accommodation within the private rented sector through the HomeChoice Plus rent deposit bond scheme. At the time of writing there are 150 households living in the private rented sector who have been assisted through the scheme and 62 of these being since April 2017.
- The Customer Excellence accreditation for the Housing Team has been renewed during the year.
- 40 new affordable homes were completed in 2017/18.

2.3 Key Homelessness Statistics

	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	30 Sept 2018	Estimate 2018/19
Nos. New Housing Options Cases¹	270	286	365	377	226	472
Nos. Homelessness Preventions / Reliefs²	96	110	130	221	67	134
Nos. Homelessness Applications	84	85	70	117	146	292
Nos. Homelessness Acceptances	28	41	28	39	20	40
Main reason for Homelessness	End of private sector tenancy	End of private sector tenancy	Family unwilling to accommodate	Family being unwilling to accommodate	Family unwilling to accommodate	
As at -	31 March 2015	31 March 2016	31 March 2017	31 March 2018	30 Sept 2018	
Nos. in Bed and Breakfast and nightly stay	15	11	18	12	6	
Nos. of Families in Bed and Breakfast Over 6 Weeks	0	1	1	0	0	
Total in all Types of Emergency Accommodation	39	40	54	39	33	

2.4 The statistics show the trends described below.

- While the table above shows fluctuations, the overall trend is upwards in terms of numbers approaching for housing options advice and applying to the Council as homeless, with a corresponding increase in the number of cases of homelessness prevented.
- From April to September this year there have been 226 new housing options cases compared to 164 for the same period last year. This is an increase of 43% and may be due to a greater capacity within the team to see and record cases, as well as a greater awareness of the Council's Housing Options service resulting in an increase in footfall.

¹ New cases seeking advice

² Cases where advice on housing options has been given and homelessness has been prevented or relieved

- The large increase in homelessness applications received (estimated to be a projected increase of 150% by the end of this year), is partly attributable to the change in definition under the Homelessness Reduction Act of when someone is threatened with homelessness, which has increased from 28 to 56 days.
- There are a fewer number of homelessness acceptances compared to applications because the Council's duty during the application period is often discharged in a number of ways. In the majority of these cases homelessness is prevented or relieved for example with accommodation in the private rented sector, directly from the Housing Register or with supported housing. In other cases applications are withdrawn and or the client loses contact with the Council and in a minority of cases a negative decision is made such as intentional homelessness.
- The table also shows that the main reason for homelessness continues to be households being asked to leave accommodation provided to them by family members (52 households). It is worth however noting that the number being asked to leave private rented sector accommodation was second with 41 households approaching the Council for assistance for this reason. The third main reason continued to be a non-violent relationship breakdown.
- The numbers of families living in bed and breakfast for six weeks or more has been zero for more than 12 months. We have in fact only placed one family in non self contained accommodation in the last 12 months and that was for a period of less than seven days.
- 2017/18 saw a large increase (from 36% to 59%) in the percentage of cases where homelessness was able to be prevented or relieved. The main methods of homelessness being prevented was through assisting with access to the private rented sector (63 cases / 29%) and accessing supported accommodation (59 cases / 27%).
- The higher number of cases where homelessness has either been prevented or relieved has had a knock on effect on the number of households that the Council has needed to accommodate in emergency accommodation, which in 2017/18 was down 28% on the previous year.

3.0 Homelessness Reduction Act Compliance

- 3.1 To comply with the Homelessness Reduction Act a factual amendment to reflect the requirements of the Act has been made to the current Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The revenue cost of the homelessness service is met from the Housing budget. There is pressure placed on the budget by the demands of meeting the Council's statutory homelessness responsibilities and in particular by: the cost of bed and breakfast accommodation when there are no alternatives; the up front costs of the private rent scheme, some of which are recovered through loans to clients; and the maintenance of the emergency accommodation stock that is subject to high turnover and consequent greater wear and tear.
- 4.2 The Council is also at financial risk if it is legally challenged on homelessness decisions, for which it may incur legal fees. In addition, if as a result of a mistake by the Council the applicant suffers real hardship, for example if a

family is placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than 6 weeks and makes a successful challenge to the Local Government Ombudsman, it can result in the Council paying compensation.

- 4.3 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has provided funding to assist with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act over two years and the additional benefit of the Flexible Homelessness Grant. The grant in 2018/19 amounts to £174,210 and unspent grant from 2017/18 has been carried over into this year. A further £193,000 will be made available from the MHCLG in 2019/20. There is currently no confirmation of MHCLG grant funding beyond 2019/20.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The extensive legislative provisions that applied on the adoption of the Homelessness Strategy (principally part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003) are intended to enable councils to identify, prevent and support persons who are homeless in the Council's area. The relevant powers and duties will continue to apply to the implementation of the Strategy throughout its term.
- 5.2 As set out in the report, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 imposed new duties on the Council. The key provisions were brought into force on 3 April 2018.
- 5.3 There remains a wealth of related legislation that will continue to apply throughout the term of the Strategy, including but not limited to the Human Rights Act, the Children's Act and the Health and Social Care Act 2012.
- 5.4 The Public Sector Equality Duty set out in the Equality Act 2010 (and any subordinate legislation) will also continue to apply.
- 5.5 The obligation to review the Strategy is set out at section 3(6) of the Homelessness Act 2002. Section 3 of the Homelessness Act 2002 refers to further obligations and powers, including but not limited to the power to modify the Strategy from time to time. Please refer to the Appendix 1 Action Plan.

6.0 Corporate Implications

6.1 Monitoring Officer Commentary

The Monitoring Officer confirms that all relevant legal implications have been taken into account.

6.2 S151 Officer Commentary

The review of the Homelessness Strategy does not in itself have direct financial implications. However, the report highlights the success of the Council in controlling a Housing budget that is essentially demand driven and highly dependent on changes in the economic wellbeing of Mole Valley residents. In addition the budget currently benefits from MHCLG grants for homelessness initiatives that have assisted in enhancing and improving the service.

Mole Valley is economically stronger than many areas of the UK, but a change in the economy or in the benefits system can still easily lead to a significant increase in pressure on the housing budget. As such it is

potentially one of the Council's most volatile budgets, which needs, and receives, particularly close monitoring and management.

6.3 Risk Implications

A sudden change in the economy that causes mortgage repossessions and private renters to lose their homes is a significant risk. This would increase homelessness applications, place pressure on the Council's stock of emergency accommodation and mean that the Council could possibly become heavily reliant on bed and breakfast accommodation. If families remain in bed and breakfast for more than six weeks the Council is at risk of challenge that is referred to above in the legal implications.

The Council's approach to homelessness is one of prevention and this alongside its past programme of investment to increase its own stock of emergency accommodation, enabling the development of new affordable homes and commitment to improve the homelessness service provides mitigation to reduce the risks identified.

The risks mentioned in the above paragraphs have been assessed and are included in the risk register.

6.4 Equalities Implications

An equalities impact assessment was produced for the Homelessness Strategy and there has been no significant change that requires it to be amended.

6.5 Employment Issues

There are no employment issues relating to this report.

6.6 Sustainability Issues

There are no sustainability issues relating to this report.

6.7 Communications

A press release will be prepared on the progress with the Homelessness Strategy.

6.8 Consultation

Consultation has not been undertaken with partners for this review.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Homelessness Strategy 2015 to 2020

Homelessness statistics

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and associated documents

Gold Standard National Practitioner Support Service documents