

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO CABINET MEMBER

1.	Meeting	Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
2.	Date	3rd June 2013
3.	Title	Homelessness Strategy Scrutiny Review
4.	Directorate	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

As part of the implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002, Rotherham's first Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 was produced. This Strategy was refreshed in 2008 and had a stronger emphasis on homelessness prevention and partnership working. The Homelessness Strategy is due to end in 2013.

Last year the Homeless service started a consultation process to complete a thorough review. The review also considered how effective the Strategy had been and what further changes might be needed to ensure homelessness prevention is prioritised.

As part of the Homelessness Strategy review process, the Improving Places Select Committee has requested that a bespoke Scrutiny review is undertaken on the Homelessness Strategy. This work can start in June 2013.

6. Recommendations

- **That Cabinet Member considers the scope of the Scrutiny Review which will be undertaken by Improving Places Select Committee, this will start in June 2013 (Section 7)**
- **This report proposes that once the Scrutiny Review is completed by Improving Places Select Committee, a report is brought back detailing a proposed revised Homelessness Strategy 2013 - 2018**

7. Proposals and details

7.1. The scope of the scrutiny review will be to determine which are the most successful prevention strategies to help people remain in their current home, and what methods are available to obtain alternative accommodation. Performance issues will also be considered such as assessment timescales, accessibility and interview techniques. To help with the review process Communities and Local Government have recently published a Self Diagnostic toolkit which can be offered to Scrutiny Members to utilise to complete the review. This self assessment tool also looks at the customer experience of the Homelessness Service.

7.3 The Scrutiny Review will also consider how:

- homeless applicants can be encouraged to consider the opportunities that the private rented sector has to offer
- we can plug gaps in provision of temporary supported accommodation for single non priority need homeless applicants over the age of 25
- to raise awareness of the National Rough Sleeping reporting line and how we can improve Rotherham's Out of Hours service for homeless households

8. Finance

8.1 By focusing on homelessness prevention will facilitate a cost saving to the Council as it is likely to allow a reduction in the temporary units of accommodation currently needed for homelessness families. In Rotherham we utilise our own temporary accommodation (crash pads) which is our preferred option, and can be managed more effectively. It is more economical than other options used by other authorities, eg bed and breakfast.

8.2 Our focus is prevention of homelessness and we need to continue to support the Rent in Advance scheme which is self financing and carry out effective monitoring of payments within the homelessness team, as well as the close working relationship we have with the Key Choices Property Management Team.

8.3 The majority of the training will be carried out in house by the Homelessness Manager and the Homelessness Co-ordinator. £2000 has been set aside for additional legal training for 2013/14 and will be sourced externally - this is budgeted for in the training plan.

8.4 Homelessness prevention activity is mainly financed through the homelessness grant which is set at £93,340 for 2013/14 and 2014/15. For the previous 2 years the Council has also received a further £75,000 to help with downsizing, CLG have recently confirmed that this funding will no longer be allocated.

9. Risks and uncertainties

9.1 We are already seeing an increase in the numbers of people contacting the service, who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and we have to prioritise the work of the team accordingly. This is mainly due to the following:

- Complex lifestyles and the increasing need for support prior to and after rehousing
- Changes to Welfare Reform
- Mortgage and Rent Arrears

9.2 During 2012/13 we have accepted fewer people as statutorily homeless but the number of preventions has increased significantly from 670 households in 2011/2012 to 890 households. Prevention work is time consuming but very effective, and this must remain our priority.

9.3 The recorded homelessness preventions only include those that fall into the homelessness priority need groups (mainly families with children) but there are a number of other single person households that are also assisted to prevent homelessness. Where a single person households present as homeless the Council has a duty to provide advice and assistance to help the customer find suitable accommodation. Where the single person is over the age of 25 and requires accommodation on that night the homelessness team struggle to find a bed space. This is because there is no direct hostel in Rotherham to accommodate single people over the age of 25 year olds and bed spaces in the sub regional hostels are often already taken or booked up by their own Local Authority. Therefore this customer group is at the greatest risk of rough sleeping or sofa surfing.

9.4 Changes in welfare reform and the introduction of universal credit are expected to see an increase in households finding themselves in financial difficulty and potentially homeless. If our service is approached early enough we can provide the advice and support needed, but there is the likelihood that we will only be involved at a late stage or at crisis point. The Welfare Reform Action plan which is lead by the Strategic Welfare Reform group dovetails with the Homelessness Strategy.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Ensuring the Council's Homeless Strategy is as fair as possible will contribute to two of the priorities of Rotherham Partnership's Community Strategy: *Ensure the best start in life for children and families*, and *Support those that are vulnerable within our communities*.

It also contributes to four of the ten commitments within our new Housing Strategy:

- Commitment 1: We will deliver Council housing that meets people's needs
- Commitment 2: We will increase and improve the supply of affordable rented housing in Rotherham
- Commitment 6: We will help people to access the support they need
- Commitment 7: We will help people in Rotherham's most disadvantaged communities

11. Background papers and consultation

Background papers

- Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013
- RMBC's Housing Allocations Policy, December 2008 (updated February 2011)
- Discharge of Homelessness Statutory Duty, Cabinet, 18 July 2012

Consultation

Consultation was carried out during summer 2012 as part of the wider housing strategy consultation. We recorded a diverse range of opinions.

The main points from this consultation were:

- Lack of direct access temporary supported accommodation for single people over the age of 25
- Advice surgeries should be provided in local areas
- Early intervention when households initially seek assistance, particularly around debt issues
- Work in schools with Year 11 pupils to offer advice on housing and budgeting
- Awareness of who does what – both from a customer's perspective and within organisations and departments
- Ensure applicants are offered an individual service and that all necessary support and advice is provided at the earliest possible stage
- Know where to go for services - Improved marketing of services

12. Contact details

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