

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	Improving Places Select Commission
2. Date:	Wednesday 23rd April 2014
3. Title:	Homelessness Strategy Review
4. Directorate:	Chief Executive

5. Summary

The report includes a draft report of the sub group established to implement a scrutiny review of the Homelessness Strategy. The full report is attached as an appendix. There are still comments on factual accuracy to be received on this report prior to being submitted to Cabinet. It will be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on the 25th April 2014.

6. Recommendations

That Select Commission members:

- **Endorse the findings and recommendations of the report and make any amendments as necessary**
- **Agree for the report to be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and then Cabinet**
- **For the Cabinet response to the recommendations be fed back to the Improving Places Select Commission**

7. Proposals and details

The need for this review was identified as part of the service review and improvement process by Neighbourhoods and Adult Services and was referred to the Improving Places Select Commission to be progressed.

Members of the Review Group:

Councillor Jacquie Falvey (Chair)	Councillor John Swift
Councillor Neil Hamilton	Councillor Alan Gosling
Councillor Chris Read	Ms Pauline Copnell (co-optee)

Members were concerned about the implementation of the new Welfare Reform policy. This Scrutiny Review has been carried out alongside the renewal of the Homelessness Strategy 2008 to 2013 with findings and recommendations being incorporated into the Homelessness Strategy 2014 to 2018. This strategy is still to be finalised and approved by Cabinet.

The review identified a wide variety of information, in different formats and locations to assist people who are homeless or who are potentially becoming homeless. There appeared to be a lack of understanding with clients and with Members regarding the 28 Day Rule.

Information was provided about the amount of rent arrears owing compared with previous year's figures. The figures are comparable and the conclusion reached is that it is too early to draw any conclusions about the impact of the introduction of the Welfare Reform measures around "Bedroom Tax".

The number of emergency bed spaces is low and there is no direct hostel provision in Rotherham. There is also a lack of support for young people with learning difficulties in finding accommodation and employment.

Feedback from tenants who have used the crash pads was positive. Suggestions were made on how to improve the experience.

Rough sleeping is not a major issue in Rotherham. There is a 24 hour telephone service available, however if the person is not in the priority need category, then no immediate help can be provided.

Plans to repopulate the town centre through redevelopment of properties or new build, has been halted due to the effects of the economic downturn in the country. Discussions identified the need for any initiative to tackle the issue of homelessness would be better received if ideas were included at the planning/development stage rather than added on at a later stage.

Currently no comprehensive empty properties strategy is in place which would address the issue of bringing private sector properties back into use. The Private Sector Housing Manager has limited resources and work consists of providing advice to private property owners. Grants to bring empty properties back into use are available from Home & Communities Agency but only to social housing providers.

There is a Landlords Forum in operation, however the members are not usually the ones with empty properties. Other forms of communications used to contact private sector landlords include the publication of a newsletter and the creation of a website on the Council's site.

A partnership between the Council and Action Housing, provided apprenticeship places to refurbish 4 empty properties for habitation by the apprentices. The option to extend this scheme to other housing associations could be explored.

The review contains 10 recommendations in response to these issues.

8. Finance

The recommendations in this report relate to use of existing resources more effectively.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The main risks identified with this area of work are the need to ensure that services are sufficiently robust to cope with an increase in the number of people who are at risk of being/are homeless.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

This review supports the Corporate Plan priority "protecting our most vulnerable people and families"

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Details can be found in the main report appended to this paper.

12 Contact

Deborah Fellowes,
Scrutiny Manager
Legal and Democratic Services
Deborah.fellowes@rotherham.gov.uk Tel: 22769