

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
2.	Date:	16 June 2014
3.	Title:	Homelessness Strategy 2014 - 2018
4.	Directorate:	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

As part of the implementation of the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 each local authority has to produce a homelessness strategy and is required to consider housing need within its area, including the needs of homeless households, to whom local authorities have a statutory duty to provide assistance.

The first Homelessness Strategy was produced in 2003, and was refreshed in 2008. A new Homelessness Strategy is now required for the period 2014-18. In preparation for the new Homelessness Strategy, extensive consultation has taken place, and Improving Places Select Committee has undertaken a review.

The proposed Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan have been developed and priorities applied, in accordance with these findings and recommendations.

The revised Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018 is attached as Appendix 1, and the Action Plan is detailed in Appendix 2.

6. Recommendations

That Cabinet Member:

- **Agrees the Homelessness Strategy 2014 -2018 (Appendix 1) and Action Plan detailed in Appendix 2**

7. Proposals and Details

7.1 Under the Homelessness Act 2002 local housing authorities must have a strategy for preventing homelessness in their district. The strategy must assist everyone at risk of homelessness, not just people who may fall within a priority needs group.

Through the commitment of all partners and an holistic approach to the provision of service delivery the Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 has made a significant impact on the reduction and prevention of homelessness and has enhanced the lives of residents of the Borough.

The results of the Council's and partner agencies work so far in reducing and preventing homelessness has been very successful, and our challenge for the future is to consolidate and further develop ways that will sustain this achievement.

7.2 As part of the process of introducing a revised Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2014-18 the following actions have been completed:

- A comprehensive review of the Homelessness Service has been undertaken by the Performance and Quality team
- We have reviewed the achievements from the Homelessness Strategy 2008-13
- The Improving Places Select Commission Scrutiny Review Group has undertaken a review of the Homelessness Service, the outcomes has helped to develop the new Homelessness Strategy 2014-18
- Consultation has been undertaken with homeless people and those threatened with homelessness, support providers, statutory and voluntary organisations, Councillors, Staff and Residents.

7.3 We have also ensured that the Homelessness Strategy feeds into the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan, CP4 – 'Helping people to improve their health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities within the Borough,' the NAS Service Plan, Priority 5 – 'We will respond quickly to people's needs, mitigating the effects of poverty and helping them to thrive' and the Poverty Workstream in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy 2014-18 also links with Rotherham's new Housing Strategy 2013-2043 and focuses mainly on Commitment 6 of the new Housing Strategy, but also links to Commitments 1 and 9:

Commitment 1 – We will deliver Council Housing that meets people's needs

Commitment 6 - We will help people to access the support they need

Commitment 9 – We will help to improve Rotherham's private rented sector

We also measure performance on the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation. This is a local indicator, and our target for 2014/15 is not to have more than 26 households living in temporary accommodation at the end of each month. The monthly performance report also includes the reasons for the

placement into temporary accommodation, and the measures we are taking to reduce these numbers.

7.4 The Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018 works on an ethos of homelessness prevention, which means providing people with the right information and support at the earliest possible opportunity to meet their housing need and housing related support.

The priorities in the action plan for the Homelessness Strategy 2014-18 are:

- **Supporting Young People to live independently**
- **Ending Rough Sleeping in Rotherham**
- **Providing quality information on all housing options**
- **Reviewing the provision of temporary accommodation**
- **Reducing the risk of people becoming homelessness due to financial difficulties**
- **Helping more people to access and sustain private rented accommodation**
- **Improving access to suitable accommodation for people leaving supported and institutionalised establishments**

The Homelessness Strategy is supported by a comprehensive action plan. The outcomes will be to:

- Reduce repeat homelessness in Rotherham
- Increase awareness of all housing options available
- Ensure early intervention and homelessness prevention
- Provide appropriate accommodation and support at the right time
- Eliminate rough sleeping in Rotherham
- Reduce evictions in Rotherham

8. Finance

8.1 Focusing on homelessness prevention will facilitate a cost saving to the Council as it is likely to create 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, e.g. bed and breakfast.

It is difficult to offer a cost saving amount due to the fluctuating need for emergency accommodation, however by focussing on homelessness prevention activity, a cost saving to the temporary accommodation budget should be achieved.

8.2 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 NAS training plan.

8.3 Prevention activity is mainly financed through the homelessness grant which was set at £93,340 for 2013/14 and for 2014/15 this has reduced by 1% to £91,943.59.

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 The impact of the changes in Welfare Reform are also increasing the demand on the housing options service and advice is being sought by people feeling that they may be under threat of homelessness due to these changes, particularly in relation to the under occupancy tax.

9.3 The prospect of the introduction of Universal Credit also poses a risk, as some people have never had to manage the type of income they will receive in the future, and do not have the necessary budgeting skills to do so, which could result in household charges being neglected and an increased risk of eviction and the threat of homelessness.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The Homelessness Strategy has considered the impending changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy.

The Homelessness Strategy will contribute to the priority in the Rotherham Partnership's Community Strategy:

Support those who are vulnerable within our communities

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

Commitment 1 – we will deliver Council Housing that meets people's needs

Commitment 6 – We will help people to access the support they need

Commitment 9 – We will help to improve Rotherham's private rented sector

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- Homelessness Act 2002
- RMBC's Housing Strategy
- RMBC's Housing Allocations Policy 2008, revised December 2013
- Localism Act 2011
- Discharge of Homelessness Statutory Duty 18th July 2012

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