

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Meeting: | Cabinet |
| 2. Date: | 24th September 2014 |
| 3. Title: | Response to Scrutiny Review - Homelessness |
| 4. Programme Area: | Neighbourhoods and Adult Services |

5. Summary

The Scrutiny Review - Homelessness was undertaken by Improving Places Select Commission. The review took place between August 2013 and January 2014 and recommendations were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, at its meeting on 25th April 2014, and were then reported to Cabinet on 21st May 2014.

The report was welcomed and provided an opportunity to raise awareness and also explain homelessness procedures.

As the review coincided with the renewal of the Homelessness Strategy 2014 to 2018 most of the recommendations from the review were incorporated into the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2014 - 2018.

6. Recommendations:

- **Cabinet notes and accepts the recommendations and actions outlined in the attached plan. (Appendix 1)**

7. Background and Proposals:

The focus of the Improving Places Select Commission Scrutiny Review on Homelessness was focussed on improving information for customers who are faced with homelessness and the availability of temporary accommodation. The following three points were also introduced into the scope of the review.

1. To identify plans to re-populate the town centre(s) via empty properties, flats over the shops etc.
2. The partnership with private sector landlords to improve housing choices and the potential impact on the prevention of homelessness.
3. An update on efforts to enforce and improve standards within the private rented sector.

The recommendations are welcomed especially with the new Homelessness Strategy and Welfare Reform Policy.

The recommendations from the Improving Places Select Commission Scrutiny Review are outlined below:-

1. That the Homelessness Section should undertake work to raise public awareness of the '28 day rule'. Specific awareness raising/training should be undertaken with elected members to increase understanding of the implications of these changes.
2. Information and trends regarding rent arrears in relation to Welfare Reform "bedroom tax" should be monitored and reported to members at the Improving Places Select Commission meeting on a half yearly basis by the Homelessness Manager.
3. The Private Sector Housing Officer to explore the option of issuing a newsletter to private sector landlords to promote the benefits of the private rented sector and how they can contribute to reducing homelessness.
4. Improve communications between the Homelessness Team and private sector landlords via the Private Sector Housing Officer, holding regular meetings and being proactive in reducing the number of empty properties.
5. The Homelessness Section continue to explore potential partnership options to address the lack of bed space provision, particularly for women and young people who need additional support.
6. Explore the above and other potential opportunities for joint service provision sub regionally via the South Yorkshire Leader's meeting.
7. Develop a coherent, cross service approach to tackling empty properties within the Rotherham Borough utilising existing resources.
8. Consider ways to provide tenancy support to private sector tenants within Rotherham.
9. The Homelessness Manager to arrange implementing the suggested improvements to the crash pad provision.
10. The Strategic Housing Investment Team to look at building provision to both prevent and tackle homelessness in future regeneration schemes at the planning stages and

consider ways that this could incorporate an extension to the HOPE project or other similar projects.

11. For the Council to explore how it invests in property and assets with the aim of reducing homelessness and out of authority placements.

8. Finance

The Scrutiny review acknowledged the need for recommendations to be contained within existing resources and in the main there are no financial implications arising from this report.

Services provided in relation to supporting the private rented sector are extremely restricted, and consequently all developments if they are to be sustainable will need to be cost and time effective and wherever possible utilise resources inherent within the sector.

The emergency temporary accommodation “crash pads” service is self-financing as such there is no budget allocation from the General fund and relies wholly on the crash pad nightly charge for income. The income generated from the charge covers all staffing, furniture and operational costs. The scheme has been a financial success with no losses ever been made, this is mainly due to how the scheme was originally created and the tight financial monitoring that has taken place within the service.

9. Risks & uncertainties

Failure to respond adequately through the provision of information, advice support and services to homeless households could result in increased levels of street homeless

Strong partnership working is required to implement fully some of the recommendations in this report.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

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

The Homelessness Strategy also links to the priorities in the Council’s Corporate Plan, CP 4 – ‘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 thrive,’ and the Poverty Workstream in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

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

- The Corporate Plan
- Homelessness Act 2002
- RMBC’s Housing Strategy
- RMBC’s Housing Allocations Policy 2008, revised December 2013
- Localism Act 2011

Consultation

- Sandra Tolley - Housing Options Manager
- Jill Jones – Homelessness Manager
- Paul Benson – Private Sector Housing Officer
- Tom Bell - Strategic Housing & Investment Manager
- Paul Elliott - Business and Commercial Programme Manager

12. Contact details

Sandra Tolley – Housing Options Manager, Housing Options, NAS
Sandra.tolley@rotherham.gov.uk (01709) 255619 and
Mobile 07795475499