

**CABINET**  
**11 FEBRUARY 2014**  
**HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY**  
**2014 – 2016**  
**ADDENDUM REPORT**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Howard Doe, Housing and Community Services

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director Regeneration, Community and Culture

Author: Matthew Gough, Head of Strategic Housing

**Summary**

This addendum report sets out details of the discussion on the Homelessness Prevention Strategy at the Business Support Committee on 4 February 2014.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Homelessness Prevention Strategy on 4 February 2014.
- 1.2 The Council's Head of Strategic Housing introduced the report by advising that the draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy set out how Medway Council in partnership with stakeholders would tackle and prevent homelessness. The Strategy would influence services which contribute to preventing homelessness such as education and health. The Strategy was a flexible document through to 2016 and would be regularly reviewed to ensure it remained relevant.
- 1.3 Homelessness Act 2002 placed a statutory obligation on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and, based on the findings, to develop and publish a strategy to tackle and prevent homelessness at least every five years.
- 1.4 Strategy had been developed in a challenging climate. Individually factors such as the economy, unemployment, the welfare system and difficult housing market conditions could disproportionately affect vulnerable people and increase the risk of homelessness. The Strategy also recognised that homelessness is a complex problem with multiple causes requiring flexible solutions and the delivery of innovative services in order to reach the increasing number of people affected.

1.5 Members then raised a number of issues and questions including:

- Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan 2014/16 - the Strategy was welcomed. With a specific request to clarify targets in association with the Government “Making Every Contact Count” Standard.
- Private Sector Housing - the Committee asked if details were provided within the narrative about the work being done to provide support and advice to tenants of Landlords who decide to serve a notice to quit in order to sell their property as this seemed to be happening with increasing frequency. In response to a concern about the advice being provided to tenants by housing officers the Committee was assured that advice provided by officers to tenants in receipt of a Section 21 notice was always intended to clarify the legal position and the process involved. Officers also give advice on how tenants can manage the transition from one property to another and will signpost them to other useful organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau It was noted that private sector tenancies are time limited and that the option of a Council house was not available to the vast majority of tenants who’s tenancy would be ending in the private sector. Officers would always assist in identifying the range of possible options including Home Bonds, Deposit Schemes and Debt advice.
- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO’s) - Member sought clarification around the extent of the current inspection regime for non-licensable HMO’s. Officers referred Members to the recent Member briefing note provided following the last Committee in which the details of the regime were set out. Officers were able to confirm that Medway was one of a minority of local authorities who have undertaken inspections of both licensable and non-licensable HMO’s. The programme targets medium and high risk HMOs. Officers confirmed that the majority of HMOs have been inspected and that action will always be taken in relation to those defined a Category 1 hazard.
- Members noted the proposed action in relation to Rogue landlords, Officers confirmed that additional Government funding had been secured to target specific rogue landlords.
- Members asked that the list of trigger points be amended to include debt and employment on page 79.
- Volunteers - In respect of the Strategic Aim 2 Members asked for clarification of the item under the heading of Housing Solutions Service in respect of the volunteers who could assist with the development of service mapping. Officers confirmed that this network would comprise a range of partners and stakeholders from voluntary and third sector organisations many of whom are part of the Homelessness Forum.
- Rough Sleepers – Members welcomed the proposed assessment of need for a winter shelter, which would be taken forward under the strategy.
- Home Bond – the Committee discussed the refusal of some Landlords to accept Home Bond clients and noted that they could not be compelled to do so. Officers emphasised that Home Bond clients needed to be very

proactive in terms of exploring a variety of options, letting agents and locations and that the Council was working to improve the information available to reinforce this message and to manage client's expectations.

- Another Member advised that he regularly dealt with enquiries from potentially homeless people and thanked Officers for their competent, conscientious and prompt responses.

## 2. Director's Comments

2.1 The comments of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee are welcomed. With regard to the Committee's comments on the provision of advice and assistance, in relation to the ending of tenancies, this is provided under the first two strategic aims.

2.2 It is proposed that in respect of the points raised by the Committee, the following revisions are made to the draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy as set out at Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report:

- Additional trigger points of debt and employment are included in Strategic Aim one (page 217 of the Cabinet agenda).
- Points 1.4, 1.6, 1.7 and 1.18 of the Action Plan are clarified in terms of these target being in connection with the Government's Guidance "Making Every Contact Count" as set out below:

1.4	Ensure that there is a "Homeless Champion" within the Housing Options Team, HomeChoice Team, Social Care, Public Health and Education Department.	No additional resources required	There is a Corporate Commitment to tackle homelessness <u>and to meet the Government's Gold Standard as set out within "Making Every Contact Count"</u> .	Roll out programme from October 2014
1.6	Identify opportunities to engage and consult with young people to consider improvements in services, accommodation and support provision	Delivered through Housing Options and Housing Related Support. No resources required	Services are developed in consultation with young people <u>and to meet the Government's Gold Standard as set out within "Making Every Contact Count"</u> .	Consultation undertaken by April 2015 and improvements to services implemented by October 2015

1.7	Provide briefings to partner agencies and stakeholders to raise awareness around youth homelessness and the local services available to support young people	No additional resources required	Young people are given consistent, appropriate advice by services across all agencies <u>and to meet the Government's Gold Standard as set out within "Making Every Contact Count"</u>	Briefings undertaken by September 2014 and periodically updated
1.18	Work in partnership with Affordable Housing Providers to ensure that there is programme of back to work support available in Medway	To be delivered in association with Affordable Housing Providers	Support people to access employment <u>and to meet the Government's Gold Standard as set out within "Making Every Contact Count"</u>	Programme in place by April 2015 and monitored on a quarterly basis

**Recommendation:**

That the Cabinet be recommended to approve the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2014-2016 and the actions set out in the Action Plan, taking into account the revisions set out above.

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