

BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 JULY 2017

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY 2017-19

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Summary

This report sets out the background to Medway Council's Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19, the consultation process, and the refinement of the strategy based on feedback received.

The comments of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be included in the report to Cabinet on 8 August 2017.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to take a strategic and integrated approach to tackling homelessness and allocating housing.
- 1.2 The Act places a requirement on authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in the local area. This review is to be undertaken with input from social services and in consultation with the voluntary sector and other relevant bodies.
- 1.3 The results of this review inform the formulation of strategies to tackle and prevent homelessness, which is then published as the authority's Homelessness Prevention Strategy.
- 1.4 This process is to be carried out periodically to ensure a new strategy is published within five years of the publication of the previous strategy.
- 1.5 Final approval of the Strategy will be a matter for Cabinet.

2. Background

- 2.1 Medway Council's existing Homelessness Prevention Strategy was written in 2014 following a review in 2013. It was recognised that an updated strategy was required to reflect the current and emerging trends in homelessness and the Council's planned response. To inform this, a review was carried out from June to August 2016 using statistical data from our housing services and in consultation with stakeholders from statutory and voluntary agencies. A stakeholder event was undertaken in July 2016 to better understand local pressures and look to agreeing best practice and potential future service development. Further input was sought, particularly from Adult Social Care and Children's Services, once the draft version was completed, and the review was amended accordingly to produce the final brief to inform the Homelessness Prevention Strategy. The revised draft Homelessness Strategy is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 2.2 The draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy was written in response to the review, but taking into account knowledge of the potential changes coming through the legislative framework. The key piece of legislation which will impact on our duties, and our strategic and operational response, will be the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- 2.3 Due to the uncertain timeframe of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the changes which will come with full Universal Credit rollout in February 2018, and the expected Green Paper on Changes to Supported Housing Funding due to be published in the spring, it was decided that a three to five year strategy would need to be updated frequently to reflect these changes, or become out of date. It was therefore agreed that a two year strategy would be written, with a review planned for 2018 to inform a new strategy in 2019.
- 2.4 The Strategy was drafted between September 2016 and February 2017 and was published after consultation with the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services in March 2017. The draft Strategy was uploaded to the council site with a consultation period running up until 21 April 2017. The website link to the consultation document and questionnaire was widely publicised to elected members, statutory partners, voluntary sector agencies and members of the public. Consultation events were held in commissioned Housing Related Support services for people receiving support and accommodation around homelessness.
- 2.5 A total of 35 responses were received to the consultation. The responses were broken down as follows; 10 from members of the public, 15 from service users and 10 from organisations.
- 2.6 The Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19 has been designed to tackle the homelessness situation in Medway through four overarching aims:
- Use early interventions to prevent homelessness before the crisis point is reached.

- Provide timely housing information enabling people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead.
- Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs.
- Ensure access to services to help people with housing support needs to sustain independent living.

2.7 The strategy has a detailed action plan, broken down into four subsections, giving specific outcomes to be met to progress each of the aims.

2.8 The consultation process directed people to explore whether the strategy (and related action plan) adequately targeted the aims as outlined, whether they felt that the strategy was wide ranging enough and whether there were further activities the Council should be undertaking.

2.9 The responses to the strategy have been analysed and discussed by officers within strategic housing services. This is summarised in section 4 – advice and analysis.

3. Options

3.1 The options available are:

- a) To agree to adopt the draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy with the current format and content.
- b) To propose further amendments to the draft Strategy before final approval by Cabinet.

4. Consultation

4.1 Consultation on the draft strategy ran from 16 March to 21 April 2017.

4.2 The responses were collated via:

- An online survey tool designed by officers from Strategic Housing and Housing Services with input from Communications colleagues.
- An easy read paper version (designed with input from one of our support providers) distributed to supported housing services, and supported by visits to services working with people with a history of homelessness.
- Direct email/letter responses.

4.3 The consultation process, included visits to supported housing schemes for vulnerable people and group discussion with service users.

4.4 The results of the consultation inform the following advice and analysis section.

5. Advice and analysis

5.1 The consultation process raised a number of common themes, which are summarised in appendix three. In summary the major themes which emerged were:

- Some respondents felt there will be an increase in housing need and related hardship beyond the scope of the strategy. Specifically it was felt that affordable housing will not meet demand and the council needs to build more housing directly.
- Concern was raised about the amount of social housing stock being used as temporary accommodation.
- Respondents felt that more work should be done to bring empty homes back into use.
- More work to support rough sleepers, or otherwise resolve issues around rough sleepers was suggested.
- Coordination of groups should be carried out to make sure resources are effectively used and duplication of services reduced.
- Some respondents felt that council staff should have additional customer service training.
- Some respondents felt that additional work needs to be done around provision of support to people with dual diagnosis.

5.2 In response to the consultation, the following action was inserted: '*Provide information to owners of long term empty homes regarding businesses that help people rent or sell their property.*' This has been agreed by the Council Tax section as an insert to Council Tax letters to owners of empty properties.

5.3 The other points which were raised are addressed through individual responses contained in the appendix. It is felt that these other suggested actions align with the activity which will flow from the implementation of strategy and accompanying action plan.

5.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment was carried out following the initial homelessness review, and was used in shaping the direction of the strategy.

The findings of the Diversity impact assessment were as follows:

- No groups with protected characteristics would be adversely impacted by the priorities of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy.
- The implementation of the Strategy, in particular the move to earlier identification and prevention, as well as strengthening joint work across statutory services, was indicated to advance equality of opportunity for the following protected characteristics; Sex, pregnancy and maternity, disability and age.
- There was no anticipated impact on fostering good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 5.5 The Diversity Impact Assessment is presented as appendix 4.
- 5.6 The Action Plan is design to bring into operation the overarching aims of the strategy as summarised below.
- 5.7 Section one. Use early interventions to prevent homelessness before the crisis point is reached. This will be achieved by:

Partnership work. Strengthening our working arrangements with statutory partners to achieve better housing, income, training, work opportunities and health outcomes for vulnerable people. Draw up an overarching Youth Homelessness Action Plan with statutory partners. Work with Registered Providers on joint solutions to prevent homelessness. Directly assist households to take up private sector tenancies and encourage private landlords to work with us via provision of a support hotline, landlord forum, landlord accreditation and training and readying tenants to take up private tenancies through the tenancy accreditation scheme. Work with partners to deliver advice on housing through attendance at panels and MARAC and MAPPA meetings.

Signposting and information. Provide information and advice via dedicated pages on our website. Signpost people threatened with eviction to commissioned advice providers. Brief other agencies on identifying those who are at risk of becoming homeless. Provide information around the NACRO prison discharge service.

Practical solutions. Provide individually tailored advice to all eligible people presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness. Understand and prepare for the impact of upcoming welfare reforms on households and target advice and support to those affected.

Work to deliver preventative interventions to stop households becoming homeless.

Further developments. Establish viability of a 'one stop shop' for advice and support to non-priority households.

- 5.8 Section two. Provide timely housing information enabling people to make informed housing decisions and plan ahead. This will be achieved by:

Inform and advise. Develop 'myth busting' information packs for young people considering leaving home. Standardise information provided to people in temporary accommodation. Update and publicise information on resources available to homeless people across Medway.

Quality check. Audit customer outcomes for quality of work delivered and effectiveness across services provided by strategic housing services.

Further developments. Agree a homelessness charter covering voluntary and statutory agencies involvement and ensure it is widely publicised.

5.9 Section three. Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs. This will be achieved by:

Increase available supply. Work with developers to oversee delivery of agreed amounts of affordable housing. Provide support to people to facilitate downsizing into more appropriate housing. Provide information to owners of empty properties. Work with providers to deliver shared housing for young people.

Target resources effectively. Using a task and target approach to determine suitable housing outcomes for vulnerable homeless people. Build on existing work with winter shelters to look at housing solutions. Ensure the SWEP is appropriately publicised and referrals pathway understood. Understand impact of migration into Medway from other local authorities.

Further developments. Explore feasibility and cost benefits of housing first model using existing best practice.

5.10 Section four. Ensure fair access to a supply of housing to meet housing needs. This will be achieved by:

Housing related support provision. Assess quality of services using agreed frameworks and monitor outcomes achieved during support period.

Move on and success factors. Ensure that providers use a wide range of housing options in facilitating move on tailored to each person. Follow up successful maintenance of tenancies using longitudinal data.

Further developments. Review our overall provision in light of emerging priorities and any perceived gaps and plan future commissioning program.

6. Risk management

6.1 The following risks have been identified:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
That the strategy does not remain relevant.	With upcoming legislative changes, the strategy will require amendment in 2018/19	The strategy has been deliberately designed to be short term in nature and a new strategy will be written to cover the period from 2019	E4

That the actions required by the strategy are not carried out.	There is a detailed action plan, covering outputs which will need to be achieved to meet the outcomes required by the strategy.	Monitoring of progress against the action plan will be externally verified by the Homelessness Forum and be managed under the PDR process for officers in the Housing Strategy service.	D3
That agencies do not work in a coordinated fashion to achieve the aims of the strategy.	Actions detailed to fulfil the aims of the strategy will need the input of statutory and voluntary partners.	Officers will ensure that meetings are timetabled to progress specific elements of the strategy and that all agencies sign up to a charter of shared aims and commitments.	D2
That additional staffing and systems required exceed current budget provision.	Implementation of change – e.g. the homelessness Reduction Act - will require a change in focus and potentially need increased staffing resource and generate additional processes and monitoring.	Once the additional burdens funding amount is known, services can be tailored in response to this and efficiencies sought, e.g. by increased co-working with commissioned services and streamlining processes.	D3

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy and action plan does not include any budgetary commitments over and above those already planned for.
- 7.2 Additional requirements stemming from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will receive additional burdens funding, which will cover the period of the draft strategy. This may not cover the requirement entirely and is listed as a risk.
- 7.3 As part of Medway Council's strategic response, internal funding may be identified to support additional activity e.g. the creation of a coordinator post to work alongside existing statutory and voluntary provision.
- 7.4 There are no further financial implications arising from this report

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that Members consider the draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2019 and forward any comments to Cabinet.

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Appendices

- 1) Current draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19
- 2) Summary of consultation issues raised and responses
- 3) Accessible version of consultation questionnaire.
- 4) Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7841/152056.pdf

Homelessness Act 2002 Explanatory Notes

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/notes/contents>