



Committee

Shropshire Council Cabinet

27th April 2016

Item

Proposed new Homelessness Strategy for Shropshire for 2015-17

Public

Proposed new Homelessness Strategy for Shropshire for 2015-17

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1. Summary

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on Local Authorities to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy and to renew this at least every five years.
- 1.2 Despite the increasing financial challenges faced by all public sector services, Shropshire Council remains committed to working towards the prevention of homelessness across the County.
- 1.3 The proposed new Homelessness Strategy for Shropshire provides a working document indicating how the Council intends to achieve the above aim through early intervention, working together with key partner organisations as well as members of the public whom may become threatened with homelessness.
- 1.4 Shropshire Council's Housing Options team currently receives approximately 1000 new homeless presentations each year. Also, the Council's Housing Options team additionally handle over 1500 enquiries each year from households whom have not yet become homeless but are experiencing housing-related issues or difficulties.
- 1.5 Almost all English Local Authorities are now signed up to work toward achieving the Government's 'gold standard' level of service for housing options. The new Homelessness Strategy Action Plan has been developed based on Shropshire working toward this goal through addressing each of the ten 'local challenges' to achieve the 'gold standard'.
- 1.6 The new Homelessness Strategy proposes as its overarching keys aims:-
 - an increase in the prevention of homelessness; and
 - improving outcomes for households impacted by homelessness.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That members adopt the new Homelessness Strategy for Shropshire for 2015-17 and the document is made public via the Council website at the earliest opportunity;
- 2.2 That members note the new Strategy will make public Shropshire Council's corporate commitment to adopting a joint approach to preventing homelessness, based on early intervention and continuous improvement, as set out in the proposed Portfolio Holder for Housing's Foreword to the new Homelessness Strategy (thus achieving the first of the ten 'local challenges' toward a 'gold standard' housing options service for Shropshire);
- 2.3 The new Homelessness Strategy sets out the Council's Housing Options team's commitment to work towards achieving the nationally recognised 'gold standard' level of service for our customers, and introduces the re-commencement of a Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group, to be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Housing or their Deputy, with the aim of encouraging sector-wide participation and responsibility for the effective implementation of the new Homelessness Strategy Action Plan;
- 2.5 That members note the new Homelessness Strategy recommends the implementation of the powers introduced in section 148 of the Localism Act 2011, to enable the Council's Housing Options team to discharge its accommodation duty, owed toward statutorily homeless households (under sections 193 or 195 of the Housing Act 1996), through the provision of a private rented sector accommodation offer of a suitable assured shorthold tenancy which is for a fixed term of at least twelve months.

REPORT

3. Background

- 3.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on Local Authorities to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy and to renew this at least every five years. The Homelessness Strategy is intended to be an active working document with an emphasis on the prevention of homelessness, through the provision of relevant advice and support, and on the provision of suitable accommodation for households where homelessness cannot be prevented.
- 3.2 The new Homelessness Strategy includes a review of homelessness reported for Shropshire to the Department of Communities and Local Government every quarter during the lifespan of the previous document (2011-15).
- 3.3 In keeping with the overall national trend the homelessness review identified a 25% increase in homelessness presentations in Shropshire for the 2014/15 financial year. The numbers of new homeless presentations in Shropshire now appear to have stabilised just below the 2014/15 levels for the last financial year with approximately 1000 new homeless applications being received for the year.
- 3.4 The homelessness review has identified relationship breakdown, being asked to leave by family / relatives, and loss of assured shorthold tenancies as the three main reasons for homelessness amongst households accepted as owed a duty of accommodation by Shropshire Council throughout 2011-15 (where each reason is the cause in approximately one quarter of all homeless applications accepted). This is also representative of the national trends in homelessness.
- 3.5 In Shropshire the homelessness review has indicated there has been an increase in homelessness due to being asked to leave by family (in particular by parents) and due to assured shorthold tenancies being brought to an end over the last two financial years.
- 3.6 In 2011 the former Coalition Government published 'Making Every Contact Count', in which the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness set out their vision for a joint approach to preventing homelessness based on early intervention with everyone at risk of losing their home. In the report the government set out their commitment to make sure that every contact a vulnerable household makes with a local agency really counts to: tackle troubled childhoods and adolescence; improve health; reduce involvement in crime; improve skills, employment and financial advice; and to pioneer social funding for homelessness. These commitments provide the context for local authorities and their partners to provide a gold standard level of service rooted in 10 local challenges:
1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
 2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
 3. Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
 4. Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative

5. Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
 6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
 7. Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
 8. Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
 9. Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
 10. Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks
- 3.7 Through delivery of this new Homelessness Strategy for Shropshire the Council's Housing Services is aiming to achieve the gold standard level of service detailed above and to receive recognition of this through accreditation awarded via the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funded National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS).
- 3.8 The homelessness review combined with stakeholder consultation, government policy and legislative changes have all influenced the proposed new Homelessness Strategy's keys aims, which are:-
- an increase in the prevention of homelessness; and
 - improving outcomes for households impacted by homelessness.

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1 An Equality and Social Impact Inclusion Assessment (ESIIA) has been completed for the proposed Homelessness Strategy and is included in the appendices to this document.
- 4.2 It is not anticipated there will be any negative impact as a result of the proposed new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan. To the contrary, the ESIIA identifies potential for a positive impact on households threatened with or affected by homelessness through the successful implementation of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.
- 4.3 A Homelessness Strategy consultation event was held with the Council's stakeholder partners on 14th July 2015. There was common consensus amongst the twenty two delegates whom attended on behalf of stakeholder partners of the need for earlier intervention, improved joint working and more timely and relevant information sharing between agencies. There was substantial interest amongst the stakeholder partners in recommencing a Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group meeting quarterly to review and continuously develop the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. A pictorial summary of participant's feedback during this event is provided in the appendices of the Homelessness Strategy.
- 4.4 The draft Homelessness Strategy was made available for public consultation via Shropshire Council's website for six weeks from 1st October 2015. The response was very limited with the only feedback being a couple of constructive e-mail reminders for needs of all service user groups to be addressed. All feedback has been given due consideration in developing the proposed new Homelessness Strategy attached.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The new Homelessness Strategy has been designed to be delivered within existing Council budgets and in accordance with the Local Authority's Financial Plan, there are no additional expenditure requirements anticipated.
- 5.2 As identified in the proposed Homelessness Strategy document successful implementation of the new Strategy has the potential to deliver financial savings for the Council through its focus on the prevention of homelessness and the recognised and proven cost benefits of this approach to tackling homelessness issues.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on Local Authorities to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy and to renew this at least every five years.
- 6.2 Despite the increasing financial challenges faced by all public sector services, Shropshire Council remains committed to working towards the prevention of homelessness across the County.
- 6.3 The proposed new Homelessness Strategy for Shropshire provides a working document indicating how the Council intends to achieve the above aim through early intervention, working together with key partner organisations as well as members of the public whom may become threatened with homelessness.
- 6.4 Almost all English Local Authorities are now signed up to work toward achieving the Government's 'gold standard' level of service for housing options. The new Homelessness Strategy Action Plan has been developed based on Shropshire working toward this goal through addressing each of the ten 'local challenges' to achieve the 'gold standard'.
- 6.5 The new Homelessness Strategy proposes as its overarching keys aims:-
- an increase in the prevention of homelessness; and
 - improving outcomes for households impacted by homelessness.
- 6.6 Successful implementation of the new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan, including members endorsement and the implementation of the recommendations detailed above in section 2, has the potential to deliver financial savings for the Council through its focus on the prevention of homelessness and the recognised and proven cost benefits of this approach to tackling homelessness issues.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7597/200459.pdf

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Councillor Mal Price

Local Member

All – this is a County wide matter

Appendices

Homelessness Strategy for Shropshire 2015-17

Equality and Social Impact Inclusion Assessment (ESIIA)