

Decision Maker: **Adult and Community Portfolio Holder
For pre decision scrutiny by the Adult and Community Policy
Development and Scrutiny Committee**

Date: 10th April 2012

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2012 - 17**

Contact Officer: Sara Bowrey, Head of Housing Needs
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Chief Officer: David Roberts, Assistant Director Care Services

Ward: BOROUGHWIDE

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 To report to Members and seek approval for the Council's updated Homelessness Strategy for 2012 – 2017 "Tackling homelessness through prevention and housing options". The draft strategy sets out how the Council, in partnership with stakeholders, will tackle and prevent homelessness in the Borough. It identifies current and future trends, together with emerging issues in order to determine future priorities and areas for development over the next 5 years.
- 1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on local authorities to develop a homelessness strategy based on a full review of homelessness in their area, and to then produce a subsequent strategy at least every 5 years.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1 The PDS Committee are asked to :-

- a) Comment on the appended draft homelessness strategy and make recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for its approval.

2.2 The Portfolio Holder is recommended to:

- a) Approve the final draft of the homelessness strategy.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy.
 2. BBB Priority: Supporting Independence.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: No cost All expenditure associated with this report is contained within existing budgets including available homelessness grant funding
2. Ongoing costs: N/A.
3. Budget head/performance centre: ACS Housing Needs - homelessness
4. Total current budget for this head: £2.689m

Source of funding:

Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 59.5 FTE
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: This report is in relation to the work of the entire current Housing Needs Service and does not involve any additional staffing
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory requirement.
 2. Call-in: Call-in is applicable
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): On average the housing options and assessment service see around 9,000 callers per year facing some level of housing difficulty, with more than 4,000 facing imminent homelessness requiring immediate intervention to resolve the threat of homelessness. Since the economic downturn there has been a marked increase in the level of homelessness and numbers residing in temporary accommodation. In addition there has been a dramatic rise in the number of households applying to be placed on the housing register for social rented housing. This culminated in more than 8,000 registered households in July 2011, with on average 125 new applications being received each month.
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? N/A.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 The homelessness strategy sets out how the Council, in partnership with stakeholders, will tackle and prevent homelessness in the Borough. It identifies current and future trends, together with emerging issues in order to determine future priorities and areas for development over the next 5 years.

Background:

- 3.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on local authorities to develop a homelessness strategy based on a full review of homelessness in their area, and to then produce a subsequent strategy at least every 5 years. The current strategy covers the period 2008 – 2012.
- 3.3 Much has changed in the intervening years, predominantly as a result of the economic downturn, and as such it is timely to be updating the strategy at this stage to reflect both the current economic climate and recent legislative developments including the Localism Act, social housing and welfare benefit reforms. Whilst the updated strategy continues to adhere to the overall objectives set to prevent homelessness and promote sustainable housing options, the review seeks to ensure that services continue to respond to local needs and demand offering robust options to minimise the level of homelessness and housing need within the London Borough of Bromley.

2008-2012: Key achievements

- 3.4 Rising social, economic and government pressures along with uncertain supply of affordable housing, meant that tackling homelessness remained a challenging area of work. However much was achieved during the term of the previous strategy, including:
- Achieving more than a 50% reduction in the number of households residing in temporary accommodation.
 - Development and implementation of a robust homelessness prevention and housing options toolkit, preventing more than 2,000 households from becoming homeless each year, and overall achieving more than a 60% reduction in the level of homelessness.
 - Offering tenancy sustainment and advice to avoid repeat homelessness and consistently achieving less than a 1% repeat homelessness rate (less than 4 households per year).
 - Developing bespoke responses to specific issues such as mortgage repossessions and achieving one of the highest levels of mortgage rescue preventions in London.
 - Working closely with private landlords to improve access to private rented accommodation for low income households – assisting more than 550 households to access this form of accommodation during the last financial year.
 - Developing integrated services to offer support to vulnerable client groups and to minimise actual homelessness including young people joint assessments, move-on pathways for LD and mental health clients.

3.5 Main driver and key challenges for the next 5 years.

- 3.5.1 The increased homelessness prevention and housing options work developed through the homelessness strategy has achieved year on year reductions in homelessness acceptances and the use of temporary accommodation. However like all London Boroughs, Bromley is witnessing high and increasing levels of housing need against a marked slowing up across the whole housing market. Most notable in this is the increase in homeless presentations as a result of the economic situation, increased buoyancy of the private rented market reducing access for low income households, increased levels of possession proceedings and difficulties in gaining access to owner occupation placing increased pressure on other forms of

accommodation. In addition the lack of supply and reduction in house building levels has increased competition for available accommodation and threatens to push up costs further limiting access for low income households placing increased pressure limited temporary and social housing resources.

3.5.2 Overall the above position has resulted in more than 150% increase in the number of households presenting in housing need. This equates to more than a 1,000 additional households faced with actual homelessness and even rough sleeping. The difficulty in accessing accommodation has placed increased pressure on temporary accommodation seeing an increase in use for more than 250 families during the current financial year. This situation, which is being reported across the whole of London and the Southeast, threatens a quick reversal of the successes achieved to date. It is therefore critical that the updated strategy reflects the current position and offers tailored responses to best tackle the main causes of homelessness and difficulty in acquiring and accessing accommodation.

3.5.3 In addition there are a number of current legislative and social welfare reform developments impacting upon the levels of housing need, available options and future supply.

3.5.4 Based upon the above, the updated strategy has been developed around the following 4 themes:

- **Housing Advice & Homelessness Prevention:** the prevention of homelessness through accessible and innovative services, giving effective, timely advice and support to enable people to maintain their accommodation.
- **Housing Options & Access to Housing:** To improve the access and availability and quality of housing across all tenures.
- **Supporting Vulnerable People:** supporting vulnerable people through effective assessment and co-ordinated decision making, offering more choice to independent living through sustainable housing options.
- **Working in Partnership;** partnerships working to tackle the wider causes of homelessness. Raising aspirations, tackling social exclusion and promoting independence.

3.6 Partnership working

3.6.1 The strategy recognises that a multi-agency cohesive approach is critical to tackling homelessness and meeting our statutory duties in relation to housing need and supply.

3.6.2 The strategy has therefore been developed in close consultation with key stakeholders including statutory and third sector agencies and service users, with the final documents reflecting the views and comments obtained throughout. This has included focus groups, presentations and workshops to review homeless levels and pressures to develop the key priorities together with follow-up review and comments on the draft strategy documents subsequently produced.

3.7 Monitoring and review

3.7.1 The strategy contains a detailed action plan to capture the key priorities and objectives for the next 5 years. This will be subject to on-going monitoring via the division performance monitoring and improvement mechanisms. Half year and annual performance reports will also continue to be presented.

3.7.2 The action plan will also be reviewed annually in consultation with key stakeholders to ensure that it continues to reflect key action areas and priorities.

2. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The strategy provides the basis for the development of services and policy decisions to continue to achieve the overall service objectives of effectively tackling homelessness in the borough. The strategy forms one document within the wider suit of housing related strategy documents sitting beneath the overarching Housing Strategy designed to dovetail together to offer a comprehensive approach to providing sustainable housing solutions and addressing housing need within the locality across all sectors of the market.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Any financial implications arising out of this report will need to be contained within the overall resources available – which includes the Homelessness and preventing repossession grants, the continuation of which is dependent on achievement.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 required all local authorities to produce and implement a homelessness strategy covering the following elements:
- Report on current levels and nature of homelessness in the borough;
 - Set out how the council will ensure sufficient accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless;
 - Demonstrate how the Council and its partners will prevent homelessness in the borough;
 - Ensure that there is satisfactory provision to support people who are or may become homeless.
- 4.2 The homelessness strategy 2012-17 is designed to meet this statutory requirement. It runs for a period of 5 years, but will be subject to annual review to ensure that it continues to respond to current and emerging priorities.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Personnel
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Homelessness Act 2002 London Borough of Bromley, Homelessness Strategy 2008-12