

Decision Maker: EXECUTIVE

Date: For Pre-Decision Scrutiny by the Care Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 14th March 2018

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Key

Title: **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

Contact Officer: Sara Bowrey, Director: Housing
Tel: 020 8313 4013 E-mail: sara.bowrey@bromley.gov.uk

Chief Officer: Executive Director of Education, Care and Health Services

Ward: Borough-wide

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 This report presents the final Homelessness Strategy 2018-23 following the completion of the public consultation exercise. It details the feedback from the consultation, together with the final draft of the strategy taking account of the feedback received (Appendix A). The report now seeks consent to publish the strategy and action plan.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Care Services PDS Committee is asked to:

- i) Note the findings from the final homelessness strategy consultation and resulting revisions;
 - ii) Recommend that the Council's Executive approve the final draft of the homelessness strategy; and,
 - iii) Note that the implementation of specific proposed actions may be subject to further decision making in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation.

2.2 The Council's Executive is asked to:

- i) Approve, subject to final formatting, the final draft of the homelessness strategy.
 - ii) Delegate authority to the Director: Housing to finalise the action plan to implement and deliver the strategy; and,
 - iii) Note that the implementation of any of the proposed actions may be subject to further decision making in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation.

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: The Strategy seeks to support vulnerable adults and children through the provision of effective housing advice and support to assist them to secure settled, safe and sustainable accommodation and prevent the risk of homelessness.
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Corporate Policy

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

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable:
 2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Operational Housing
 4. Total current budget for this head: £5,735K
 5. Source of funding: EC&HS approved revenue budget. Contingency budget set aside for homelessness and welfare reform pressures. New burdens Homelessness Reduction Act grant funding.
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Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): N/A
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement:
 2. Call-in: Applicable: Executive decision.
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Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: N/A
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): The Council currently experiences in excess of 5000 households annually facing homelessness or related difficulties which could result in homelessness. The homelessness strategy sets out the Council's strategic priorities in preventing homelessness and supporting people to be able to sustain accommodation
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 The Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 2023 establishes the Council's priorities in order to prevent and reduce homelessness and to ensure that appropriate accommodation and support is available for people who are or may become homeless in Bromley over the next 5 years.
- 3.2 The strategy has been developed by officers of the Council in consultation with partners and agencies delivering services, customers and other stakeholders, reflecting the fact that in order to effectively prevent and reduce homelessness a strategic approach agreed by all key partners is required. A strategy and action plan agreed with key partners will enable a better collaborative approach to preventing and reducing homelessness, particularly when addressing complex needs and the wider factors which can lead to homelessness.
- 3.3 Putting a new strategy in place will enable the Council to both respond to the risk of increased homelessness and meet the new statutory duties arising from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which comes into force in April 2018.
- 3.4 The Homelessness Strategy identifies 4 key priority areas designed to make the most difference and target those at greatest risk of homelessness:
- **Early identification and prevention of homelessness:** To support people wherever possible before crisis and to provide excellent services to those at point of crisis to either prevent homelessness or assist them to secure alternative accommodation.
 - **Achieving positive outcomes for our young people:** Preventing youth homelessness and ensuring young people are supported to make a positive transition into adulthood.
- Increase access to and promote the supply of accommodation:** To make best use of all available housing options to increase access to accommodation that is affordable and sustainable and to increase through flow from temporary accommodation.
- **Achieving positive outcomes; Improving health and wellbeing and supporting people to break the cycle of homelessness:** To ensure services are accessible and tailored to individuals to enable them to secure safe and sustainable accommodation and to assist people to develop the necessary skills and resilience to sustain accommodation and avoid repeat homelessness.
- 3.5 The Executive Committee agreed at the meeting of 6th December to initiate an 8 week public consultation as the final stage prior to approving the homelessness strategy for publication.
- 3.6 This report provides a summary of the consultation results and presents the final draft of the homelessness strategy subject to final formatting for approval. Full details of the consultation feedback will be published alongside the Strategy.
- 3.7 An action plan will accompany the Homelessness Strategy to ensure its effective implementation. This action plan will then be reviewed, updated and published annually to monitor the progress and ensure any changes in pressures, legislative requirement and resulting priorities' are reflected. Key actions will also be fed into and from the Portfolio Plan and departmental business plan.

Consultation Overview

- 3.8 The consultation activities for the development of the homelessness strategy began early in 2017 with customer and stakeholder questionnaires. These were then followed up by a number of focus groups where issues raised from the consultation could be explored in more detail. A broad range of services were invited to the stakeholder consultation sessions

- 3.9 This consultation helped to inform the overarching priorities set out in the draft homelessness strategy.
- 3.10 The final stage of consultation was undertaken through a SMART survey accessed through the Council's website together with a series of stakeholder and customer focus groups. This consultation closed on 6th March 2018. The aim of this consultation was to confirm that the priority and objectives set out in the draft strategy is representative of the views of stakeholders and customers to ensure no areas have been overlooked. It also provided the opportunity for further suggestions and solutions on how priorities can be achieved to be included in the action plan.

Final stage consultation Response:

- 3.11 A total of 232 individual responses were received in addition to the feedback from the focus groups. 37% of those responding are or have experienced homelessness. Representations have also been made from a wide range of organisations and sectors including housing associations, landlords, business organisations the voluntary sector (such as homeless charities and the Citizen's advice bureau), local authorities and health care.
- 3.12 Overall the vast majority of responders agreed that the appropriate priorities for addressing homelessness have been identified.

To prevent homelessness, we propose that the strategy should focus on the following four objectives below. Do you agree with our four strategic objectives?			
		Agree (%)	Neither Agree or Disagree (%)
		Disagree (%)	
1	Early identification and prevention of homelessness	88	11
2	Achieving positive outcomes for our young people	86	13
3	Increasing supply of accommodation	87	10
4	Achieving positive outcomes: improving health, wellbeing and supporting vulnerable people	89	10

- 3.13 Overall there were no key areas identified as excluded requiring revision. Some of the consultation response drew attention to additional points which are relevant to other strategic areas. An area of focus was in relation to the wider issue of affordable housing supply and will be considered in more detail in the forthcoming overarching housing strategy.
- 3.14 There were a number of emerging themes, which whilst included within the homelessness strategy key priorities, provided valuable information to help refine the accompanying action plan to implement and deliver on the key priorities within the homelessness strategy. The key points from this feedback have been detailed within Appendix B of this report. In summary these areas focused on:

- The need to work with those who are homelessness or at risk of homelessness to understand their needs and assist in the most appropriate way
- The need to ensure access to appropriate support, in particular for those with mental health needs

- The importance of debt and money advice and assisting people to manage and sustain tenancies
- The need to work closely to improve access to training, education and employment activities
- The need to ensure advice and information to resolve housing difficulties is flexible and provided in a range of formats and location
- The importance of working in partnership to prevent and reduce homelessness
- The need to focus on settled accommodation options which are affordable and sustainable

3.15 Appendix A of this report contains the final draft of the homelessness strategy for consideration and approval. The draft strategy, once approved, will be subject to final formatting prior to publication. The implementation action plan will be published alongside the strategy.

4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN

4.1 The Homelessness Strategy recognises the importance of suitable sustainable accommodation to enable vulnerable adults and young people to reach stability and improve their life chances. The actions contained within the strategy seek to prevent homelessness wherever possible and assist people to access settled suitable accommodation to meet their needs and achieve independence.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Homelessness Code of Guidance states that authorities in implementing their strategies must consider the needs of all groups of people in their district who are homeless or likely to become homeless.
- 5.2 The proposed strategy builds upon the approved policy in relation to the focus on preventing homelessness wherever possible and assisting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access settled sustainable accommodation.
- 5.3 Reducing homelessness will have a positive impact on all residents and the proposals will contribute to the priorities set out in Building a Better Bromley.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.
- 6.2 Regular reports have been presented setting out the current and growing pressures in relation to homelessness and the provision of temporary accommodation.
- 6.3 The strategy has been developed to ensure the best use of available resources, in particular the management of costs associated with the provision of temporary accommodation.
- 6.4 It is likely that there will be significant challenges to face with a potential increase in the need for services because of economic pressures and the new homelessness duties.
- 6.5 The impact of any such pressures and proposals set out in the strategy may be subject to further decision making. Any financial implications would be fully considered at that time.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 It is a legal requirement for every local housing authority to have a published homelessness strategy.

- 7.2 In formulating the homelessness strategy the council must have regard to its allocations scheme and tenancy strategy. The homelessness strategy is consistent with both of these documents.
- 7.3 The homelessness functions are set out in part VII of the Homelessness Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) There are a number of duties to both prevent homelessness occurring or to provide accommodation to certain people who are homeless and to give advice and assistance.
- 7.4 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 comes into force in April 2018 and extends the current duties in relation to the level of provision local authorities must provide to households who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
- 7.5 In developing the strategy the statutory requirements, Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities and good practice standards have been taken into account.
- 7.6 The equality duty is relevant to the Homelessness Strategy. The responses demonstrated that there was no one under or over representation of any of the equality groups. An equalities impact stage one screening has been undertaken confirming that a key function of the homeless strategy is in support of the Equality Act and will have a positive impact on equality groups. It will seek through the actions identified to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other prohibited conduct, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.7 There may be a requirement to undertake an equality impact assessment for particular actions set out in the Homelessness Strategy and accompanying action plan which will be carried out on the commencement of those projects. For example impact assessments have been undertaken for the Allocations Scheme, Welfare Fund, Discretionary Housing Benefit and the temporary accommodation placement policies. It has also already been identified that equality impact assessments will be required for the relaunch of the private rented sector initiatives and private rented sector offer and on the recommissioning of any temporary and supported accommodation schemes.

8. PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct procurement implications arising from this report. Where particular actions contained within the action plan contain procurement or commissioning implications these will be reported and considered through due process.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Personnel Implications.
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Homelessness Strategy 2012-17 Homelessness Contingency drawdown reports Homelessness Strategy Executive Report 5 th December 2017 Temporary Accommodation procurement and Placement Policy Allocations Scheme