

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Adoption of the Homelessness Review and Strategy 2013-2018</b>
<b>Report to be considered by:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	09 May 2013
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX2580

**Purpose of Report:** To adopt the Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018.

**Recommended Action:** Executive approve and adopt the Homelessness Review and Homelessness strategy 2013-2018.

**Reason for decision to be taken:** The Council has a statutory duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to undertake a review of homelessness and to develop a Homelessness Strategy. The current Homelessness Strategy expired in 2011.

**Other options considered:** N/A

**Key background documentation:** None

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Strategy priority:

**CSP1 – Caring for and protecting the vulnerable**

The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Strategy principles:

**CSP5 - Putting people first**

**CSP7 - Empowering people and communities**

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Strategy priorities and principles by:  
ensuring that the Council works in partnership with other agencies to deliver effective and appropriate services that seek to prevent homelessness.

<b>Portfolio Member Details</b>	
<b>Name &amp; Telephone No.:</b>	Councillor Roger Croft - Tel (01635) 868638
<b>E-mail Address:</b>	rcroft@westberks.gov.uk
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	19 March 2013

<b>Contact Officer Details</b>	
<b>Name:</b>	Mel Brain
<b>Job Title:</b>	Service Manager, Housing Strategy & Operations
<b>Tel. No.:</b>	01635 519403
<b>E-mail Address:</b>	mbrain@westberks.gov.uk

## Implications

- Policy:** The proposed Homelessness Strategy sets out the Council's strategic approach to prevention of homelessness.
- Financial:** There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The Action Plan within the Homelessness Strategy makes reference to the likely resources required to deliver specific actions. Overall, it is expected that actions will be accommodated within existing resources (both internal and external) or that Homelessness Prevention Grant will be used to deliver identified actions.
- Personnel:** N/A
- Legal/Procurement:** The Council has a statutory duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to undertake a review of homelessness and to develop a Homelessness Strategy. The proposed Review and Strategy meet this duty.
- Property:** N/A
- Risk Management:** N/A

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes		Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:				
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Outcome</b> (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)				
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at <a href="http://www.westberks.gov.uk/eia">www.westberks.gov.uk/eia</a>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality				<input type="checkbox"/>

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position		<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months		<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only		<input type="checkbox"/>

# Executive Summary

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their district and to compile a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years. In line with the national agenda the West Berkshire focus is around early intervention and prevention of homelessness. The Council's current Homelessness Strategy expired in 2011.
- 1.2 Whilst the Council provides strategic leadership, the issue of homelessness is not the Council's responsibility alone. Many statutory and non-statutory services contribute towards the prevention of homelessness and a comprehensive Homelessness Strategy recognises this, and takes account of the most effective and efficient ways that agencies can pool resources and work together in order to deliver joined-up services.
- 1.3 The Homelessness Review, Strategy and Action Plan have been subject to consultation and responses have been considered, and where appropriate incorporated, into the documents presented for adoption. A whole day's scrutiny into homelessness by the Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission was also held in November 2011, the findings of which have also been incorporated into the documents where appropriate.

## 2. Proposals

- 2.1 The review highlighted three emerging issues that need to be addressed through the Homelessness Strategy:
  - (a) Impact of the ongoing welfare reforms
  - (b) Increasing difficulty in access to private rented accommodation, both as a consequence of the welfare reforms and due to the buoyant market in the district
  - (c) The concentration of young families (aged 24 years and under) who are asked to leave home by their family and friends.
- 2.2 The Homelessness Strategy is based on the following principles:
  - (i) That every homeless person should be treated with compassion and respect
  - (ii) That every person or family should be empowered to make informed choices that enable them to secure accommodation that is suitable for their particular needs and to work in partnership to ensure that once housed, they have the support they need to sustain their home in the future
- 2.3 After reviewing housing need, assessing the likely impact of the Government's welfare reforms and consulting widely with stakeholders, the Homelessness Strategy has five identified priorities:

- (1) Continue to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies
- (2) Mitigate the negative impacts of the welfare and housing reforms
- (3) Make best use of the District's housing stock
- (4) Improve the life chances of homeless people
- (5) Proactively work with partners to provide a co-ordinated approach to tackling and preventing homelessness

2.4 A detailed action plan underpins the priorities identified in the Homelessness Strategy and identifies specific projects or actions that will assist the Council, in partnership with other relevant agencies, to prevent homelessness and to tackle the causes of homelessness.

### **3. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes**

3.1 A positive impact would be applied to women and young people, both of whom are over-represented in homeless households. The Strategy has a number of actions focused on strengthening support and increasing access to suitable accommodation which should benefit households falling within these groups. Those applicants who are aged over 60 years may also have additional options available to them that can prevent or relieve their homelessness without the need for them to make a homelessness application.

3.2 Similarly, disabled people, particularly those with mental health issues, should be able to access appropriate housing-related support and, where appropriate, supported housing provision. The Strategy seeks to better understand the health inequalities experienced by homeless households and will aim to build services around this understanding to ensure that people receive services appropriate to their needs.

3.3 Some limited negative impacts may occur. These include gender. Men are more likely to be under-represented in priority need groups who receive statutory services. However, the Strategy operates within a statutory framework and is not discriminatory. The Strategy seeks to continue offering services to non-priority groups, including the provision of direct-access hostel provision and housing-related support and overall, this group of households should benefit from improved housing options services arising from the Strategy.

3.4 Overall, the Homelessness Strategy seeks to strengthen and develop existing homelessness services for the benefit of both priority and non-priority need groups, ensuring that all households are able to benefit from high-quality housing and homelessness advice services.

### **4. Conclusion**

4.1 Executive are recommended to approve and adopt the Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018.

# Executive Report

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their district and to compile a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years. In line with the national agenda the West Berkshire focus is around early intervention and prevention of homelessness. The Council's current Homelessness Strategy expired in 2011.
- 1.2 Whilst the Council provides strategic leadership, the issue of homelessness is not the Council's responsibility alone. Many statutory and non-statutory services contribute towards the prevention of homelessness and a comprehensive Homelessness Strategy recognises this, and takes account of the most effective and efficient ways that agencies can pool resources and work together in order to deliver joined-up services.
- 1.3 The Homelessness Review, Strategy and Action Plan have been subject to consultation and responses have been considered, and where appropriate incorporated, into the documents presented for adoption. A whole day's scrutiny into homelessness by the Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission was also held in November 2011, the findings of which have also been incorporated into the documents where appropriate.

## 2. The Homelessness Review

- 2.1 The purpose of the review is to map and understand homelessness across the district and to highlight any trends or emerging issues that are likely to impact upon homelessness. It takes account of all forms of homelessness, not just those who are unintentionally homeless and in priority need.
- 2.2 The review of homelessness has been carried out against a rapidly changing context of both housing and welfare reforms. These reforms have reduced access to private rented accommodation and, combined with the economic climate which has impacted on delivery of new housing, are contributing to pressure on housing resources. Nationally, there have been increases in homelessness presentations and acceptances and a return to use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation as temporary accommodation. West Berkshire is not immune to these pressures and has experienced similar trends at a local level.
- 2.3 Whilst homelessness applications have increased, as indeed they have nationally, the actual numbers of households who approach the Council as homeless or threatened with homelessness remains low overall, with just 0.7 homeless approaches per 1000 of the population and 0.3 acceptances per 1000 of the population. The most recent rough sleeping estimate (December 2012) is very low at just 0.07 people per 1000 of the population.
- 2.4 The review highlighted three emerging issues that need to be addressed through the Homelessness Strategy:
  - (a) Impact of the ongoing welfare reforms

- (b) Increasing difficulty in access to private rented accommodation, both as a consequence of the welfare reforms and due to the buoyant market in the district
- (c) The concentration of young families (aged 24 years and under) who are asked to leave home by their family and friends.

### **3. The Homelessness Strategy**

3.1 The Homelessness Strategy is based on the following principles:

- (i) That every homeless person should be treated with compassion and respect
- (ii) That every person or family should be empowered to make informed choices that enable them to secure accommodation that is suitable for their particular needs and to work in partnership to ensure that once housed, they have the support they need to sustain their home in the future

3.2 After reviewing housing need, assessing the likely impact of the Government's welfare reforms and consulting widely with stakeholders, the Homelessness Strategy has five identified priorities:

- (1) Continue to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies
- (2) Mitigate the negative impacts of the welfare and housing reforms
- (3) Make best use of the District's housing stock
- (4) Improve the life chances of homeless people
- (5) Proactively work with partners to provide a co-ordinated approach to tackling and preventing homelessness

3.3 A detailed action plan underpins the priorities identified in the Homelessness Strategy and identifies specific projects or actions that will assist the Council, in partnership with other relevant agencies, to prevent homelessness and to tackle the causes of homelessness.

3.4 Tackling homelessness and the causes of homelessness is not the responsibility of any single agency. Whilst West Berkshire Council have a statutory role in responding to homelessness, and in providing strategic leadership on issues of homelessness, multi-agency working is an essential foundation if progress is to be made against the identified priorities.

3.5 The Homelessness Strategy has been developed in consultation with the multi-agency Homelessness Forum and it is anticipated that the same forum will lead on its implementation.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The Action Plan identifies the resources that are likely to be needed to deliver each individual action. The term 'resources' does not refer solely to the Council's staffing and funding resources but recognises that all services working with homeless households will have access to resources that, if combined and used effectively, can contribute to the successful delivery of the identified actions.
- 4.2 In some cases the actions highlight a need to continue delivering existing services, whilst in others, it may be possible to use resources in a different way to achieve better outcomes. Some larger actions may require new or additional resources. These will be subject to a more detailed financial feasibility as the detailed delivery planning commences.

#### **5. Changes since the Draft Homelessness Review & Homelessness Strategy**

- 5.1 The draft Housing Strategy was subject to consultation and 6 responses were received. The proposed documents were well-received and respondents felt the Strategy had the right vision and supported its aims. No changes have been made to either the Homelessness review or the Homelessness Strategy as a consequence of the consultation.

#### **6. Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 6.1 From the EIA it has been concluded that there are a number of positive impacts alongside a few negative impacts.
- 6.2 A positive impact would be applied to women and young people, both of whom are over-represented in homeless households. The Strategy has a number of actions focused on strengthening support and increasing access to suitable accommodation which should benefit households falling within these groups. Those applicants who are aged over 60 years may also have additional options available to them that can prevent or relieve their homelessness without the need for them to make a homelessness application.
- 6.3 Similarly, disabled people, particularly those with mental health issues, should be able to access appropriate housing-related support and, where appropriate, supported housing provision. The Strategy seeks to better understand the health inequalities experienced by homeless households and will aim to build services around this understanding to ensure that people receive services appropriate to their needs.
- 6.4 Some limited negative impacts may occur. These include gender. Men are more likely to be under-represented in priority need groups who receive statutory services. However, the Strategy operates within a statutory framework and is not discriminatory. The Strategy seeks to continue offering services to non-priority groups, including the provision of direct-access hostel provision and housing-related support and overall, this group of households should benefit from improved housing options services arising from the Strategy.
- 6.5 It is predicted that no impact will be apparent within the equality streams of faith, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership.

6.6 Overall, the Homelessness Strategy seeks to strengthen and develop existing homelessness services for the benefit of both priority and non-priority need groups, ensuring that all households are able to benefit from high-quality housing and homelessness advice services.

## **7. Conclusion**

7.1 Executive are recommended to approve and adopt the Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018.

## **Appendices**

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Appendix A - Homelessness Review

Appendix B - Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018

Appendix C - Action Plan

Appendix D - EIA Stage 2

## **Consultees**

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**Local Stakeholders:** A one-day Scrutiny into homelessness was held in November 2012 by the Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission, with relevant stakeholders invited to give evidence. The recommendations from the scrutiny were incorporated into the Homelessness Strategy for consultation.

The draft Homelessness Review and Strategy were published for consultation on Consultation Finder and the Housing web pages. Copies were sent to key stakeholders, including all members of the Homelessness Forum.

**Officers Consulted:** Cathy Dodson, Housing Options Team Leader  
Karen Felgate, Housing Strategy Team Leader  
June Graves, Head of Care Commissioning, Housing & Safeguarding  
Officers who attend the Homelessness Forum

**Trade Union:** N/A