

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING
27TH SEPTEMBER 2007

The Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy

OPEN	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:	Improved Health and Wellbeing
CORPORATE PLAN THEME:	Enabling and Community Wellbeing
KEY PRIORITY:	Housing and Independent Living
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Anne Hingley
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Head of Planning, Health and Environment
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APPENDICES	Appendix 1 – Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/housing/housing-advice/homelessness-help-and-advice/

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To confirm the Council's adoption of the Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy (Appendix 1).

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND to Council that:

- 2.1 **the Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy be adopted.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The first County Homelessness Strategy has been developed through joint working by the District Housing Authorities and Registered Social Landlords within Worcestershire. The introduction of Homelessness Strategies in 2002 have made significant improvements in working arrangements and have provided a context for the development of this Strategy. The Strategy is a new co-ordinated approach across the County and has been developed with regard to the Supporting People Strategy which also runs until 2010. It is intended the Strategy will become the overarching Strategy for Wyre Forest with the Council having last amended its Homelessness Strategy in 2006. The strategy looks at housing options available to homeless people in the County and for those people who are potentially homeless. The Strategy identifies that some groups are more likely to experience

homelessness than others, including young people, particularly care leavers, those experiencing domestic violence and those suffering from mental health issues.

3.2 The Strategy provides a strategic context for the development of a range of services having identified there are still some gaps in provision for certain groups. In particular a shortage of move-on accommodation to bridge the gap between emergency and permanent re-housing is identified and that floating support services for key groups, including those suffering with mental health problems, needs further development. Service users as well as service providers, including Housing Associations and Worcestershire Supporting People, have been involved in shaping the Strategy and have also responded to the final consultation. It is critical to work in partnership with providers to ensure that services meet needs and aspirations and to build on the already developed strong working relationships. The responses to a service user questionnaire sent to all homeless households accepted for re-housing in 2005/06 identified a number of areas that required improvement:

- the need to make the homeless process more transparent
- to keep applicants up to date as their application progresses
- the need for greater information sharing between departments and agencies and
- to ensure all information produced is jargon free.

3.3 The Strategy covers a three-year period and will guide service development within Worcestershire over this time. The ambitious vision it sets out for Worcestershire is 'to ensure that everyone has access to a place they can call home, where they can close their door and feel safe'. The Strategy, in providing a context for service development has, as its main theme, the desire to prevent homelessness from happening at all and where it does happen to support people until they can be re-housed and fully settled in their home thereby creating and maintaining a sustainable community. It seeks to identify the root causes of homelessness, involving a holistic approach to assisting each household according to their needs and not only providing accommodation.

4. KEY ISSUES

Consultation Process

4.1 The County Homeless Strategy Group tasked with writing the Strategy have participated in a sub-regional stakeholder day from which a suggested sub-regional action plan has been developed for further discussion with the South Housing Market Area Partnership. Some districts also held local events to canvas the views of local service providers and sent out questionnaires to service providers to identify gaps in service provision. All the Worcestershire Councils sent out the service user questionnaire referred to earlier.

Consultation Summary and Issues from the Information collected

4.2 The Group received over 200 responses from both postal and via telephone questionnaire. The information collected demonstrates an increasing problem of affordability caused by high house prices and low wages so that each of the Councils is experiencing difficulties in meeting the demand from forming households.

- 4.3 There were over 4,000 approaches to Councils between April 2004 and March 2006 and of these the Councils accepted a duty to re-house 2227, which is a reduction in acceptances mainly due to an increase in the number of households prevented from being homeless.
- 4.4 In the period 2004-2006 the largest type of homeless household accepted was households with dependant children, accounting for 51.7% of all acceptances. There were also nearly 200 young people accepted and 163 people with a mental health problem. There are some variances in priority need types across the County, with some high levels of approaches from certain groups. The three main causes of homelessness are similar across the County, namely, parents, friends and relatives no longer able to accommodate accounting for just under 1,000 acceptances between 2004-06, the end of assured shorthold tenancies (just under 400 in the same time period) and the relationship breakdown due to domestic violence (267).
- 4.5 The knowledge developed of the issues faced by homeless people and the increased awareness of good practice examples from across the Country built up over time, together with all the information analysed has assisted in devising a challenging action plan that is intended to make a positive contribution to changing homeless people's lives for the better. This action plan contained within the Strategy document builds on and complements the existing local District Homelessness Action Plan developed by the Wyre Forest Homelessness Forum (which is attended by representatives from all groups and agencies with a local involvement with homeless or potentially homeless people). This same approach applies equally in relation to the Homelessness Action Plan of the other Worcestershire Districts.
- 4.6 The County Strategy's Action Plan has been developed around six key objectives:
- To better understand the needs of key client groups for the delivery of a range of appropriate housing services
 - To develop a countywide methodology and system of data collection
 - To share good practice in, and knowledge of the effective delivery of housing and homeless services
 - To develop joint working processes and strategic partnerships to improve the delivery of services
 - To empower customers to make a positive change to their lives
 - Support the development of appropriate types of accommodation for key client groups
- 4.7 The intention is for the County Homeless Strategy Group to work in partnership to oversee the revision of the data and the delivery of the objectives over the life of the Strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Strategy should assist the Council meet its own corporate objectives.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 This Strategy should help improve services to homeless people in Worcestershire and the Council's continued input at officer level will assist in this achieving this objective.

9. CONSULTEES

9.1 Corporate Management Team

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy 2007-2010.
<http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/housing/housing-advice/homelessness-help-and-advice/>