



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Briefing Paper

Report of: Sally Horne, Principal Strategic Housing Officer
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Open

Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy

1. Summary

1.1 The Worcestershire Homeless Strategy 2012-16 replaces the previous strategy which ran between 2007 and 2011. The draft 2012-16 strategy has been written following a 12 month desktop data review and extensive consultation with service users and service providers and is about to go out for a final 12 week consultation.

2. Background

2.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all Local Authorities to publish a homelessness strategy and this must be now in accordance with the 2007 Code of Guidance on Homelessness Strategies. The legislation prescribes that prior to the Homelessness Strategy being written a review into the nature and extent of homelessness in the local authority area is required.

2.2 The review document, which informs the strategy, includes information on:

- the nature and extent of homelessness across the county
- a profile of those who have experienced homelessness including data on the most vulnerable homeless groups
- factors that will have an impact on future levels of homelessness in the county
- information on support, accommodation and resources available
- outcomes from the previous strategy
- analysis of consultation undertaken

2.3 The main finding of the review was that since 2007, the Worcestershire Authorities have been successful in preventing homelessness and this has led to a decline in the number of homeless decisions and acceptances being made by the local authorities. However, data from 2011 shows that the level of acceptances is now increasing. Whilst this is line with the national situation, particular issues that are impacting upon the Worcestershire authorities include exclusion from parents/friends homes, the loss of assured short hold tenancies and

relationship breakdown (violent and non violent). It is thought that pressures such as the economic downturn and future legislative changes such as the Welfare Benefit Reforms that are causing an increase and this is expected to continue to have an impact. Therefore, against this context the 2012-2016 strategy identifies the priority areas for action in order to tackle homelessness in the County.

3. Key Issues

3.1 The 2012 strategy builds upon the achievements of the 2007 -2011 strategy and aims to tackle the particular issues identified in the review document.

3.2 The homelessness strategy has four overarching goals and these are:

- Providing a pathway to a housing solution for everyone that accesses our services
- Creating strong partnerships to tackle homelessness
- Taking effective action to prevent anyone new to the streets, having to sleep out for more than one night
- Tackling financial deprivation of those affected by benefit reform, welfare reform and worklessness

3.3 Under the four goals, the strategy aims to continue the decline in homelessness presentation through prevention work. However, the 2012 strategy has a greater emphasis upon tackling homelessness amongst all people presenting, whether local authorities have a duty or not. This is in line with the national government agenda of 'No Second Night Out'.

3.4 However, the challenge that local authorities face in tackling homelessness, at a time when the public sector faces budget reductions and homelessness is on the increase, is not underestimated. Therefore, the strategy also emphasises the need to develop stronger, more efficient and effective relationships with a range of organisations across public, voluntary and private sectors.

4. Options

4.1 Members are asked to agree that the draft homelessness strategy be consulted upon for a period of 12 weeks from 16th March and that this be recommended to Cabinet.

and

4.2 That Members recommend to Cabinet to give delegated authority to the Director of Economic Prosperity and Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Shaping to agree the final Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy following the 12 week consultation to take account of any comments received.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 There have been various stages of consultation throughout the development of the strategy. This has included a consultation event, a questionnaire to all homeless service users and journey mapping work with a selected number of customers.

6. Related Decisions

- 6.1 There are no related decisions.

7. Relevant Council Policies/Strategies

- 7.1 Worcestershire Housing Strategy.
7.2 Home Choice Plus Allocations Policy.

8. Implications

- 8.1 Resources: There are no immediate financial implications to WFDC associated with the approval of the Countywide Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan as the implementation of these actions will be carried out within existing Strategic Housing staff resources. Where actions within the action plan are set to assess or investigate the potential implementation of certain new services and local funding would be required, a bid would have to be submitted for consideration under the Council's corporate annual budget process.
- 8.2 Equalities: An underpinning goal of the strategy is to embrace the diversity that exists within Worcestershire and ensure that we plan to meet the diverse needs of our communities.
- 8.3 Partnership working: This strategy has been developed in consultation with our partners
- 8.4 Human Rights: None.
- 8.5 E-Government: None.
- 8.6 Transformation: None.

9. Equality Impact Needs Assessment

- 9.1 An equality impact assessment will be undertaken for this strategy.

10. Wards affected

- 10.1 All wards.

11. Appendices

11.1 Draft Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy.

12. Background Papers

12.1 Worcestershire Homelessness Review.

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