

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 26 OCTOBER 2010

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND HOUSING

REPORT TITLE: MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE HOMELESS AND HOMELESS PREVENTION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN 2008-2013

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- The report highlights successful performance on the second year of the Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy Action Plan 2008-2013. The report also presents to Members, for consideration and comment, a review of the Action Plan.

<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR : Community Scrutiny Committee</u>	
(A)	Members to consider and comment on the progress of the Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy Action plan 2008-2013.

1.0 Background

1.1 Under the Homelessness Act 2002 all local authorities are required to carry out a homeless review and to develop and publish a strategy based on the review every five years.

1.2 East Herts published its second Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy in July 2008. At the Community Scrutiny meeting of 22 July 2008 Members agreed to an annual report being presented to Community Scrutiny to monitor progress of the action plan. This is the second annual report.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 The Homeless Act 2002 places stronger duties on local authorities to assist homeless and potentially homeless people. One of the key aims of the Act is to ensure that housing authorities take a comprehensive and strategic approach to managing and preventing all forms of homelessness in their district.
- 2.2 The Council's second Homeless and Homeless prevention Strategy and Action Plan was published in July 2008. Since then the Council and its partners, mainly through the Council's multi-agency East Herts Homeless Strategy Group have worked to progress and monitor the actions on the plan.
- 2.3 The Council and its partners have made significant progress on providing and improving services to those people that are homeless or potentially homeless in East Herts. Essential Reference Paper B attached to the report now submitted, details progress on each action in the Homeless and Homeless Prevention Action Plan. The report highlights three significant actions that have been successfully achieved, from the action plan, since the last report in July 2009.
- 2.4 **Action 4: Continue to ensure money advice services and other services offering help with financial problems are available to all that need them.** The Housing Options Service, with assistance from the Government's Mortgage Re-Possession grant have extended the specialist debt advice service provided by the CAB from one to two days a week. This has dramatically reduced the waiting time for this advice from three weeks to one week. The Money Advisor is embedded within the Housing Options Team and the service is available one day a week in our Hertford offices and one day in our Bishop's Stortford offices. Members of the Housing Options Team refer clients to the Money Advisor as part of the housing advice/prevention service. This specialist advice has been successful (see data in relevant section on Essential Reference Paper B) in the prevention of homelessness where clients have rent or mortgage arrears as well as the management of general debt to enable clients to effectively manage their circumstances rather than face a crisis homeless situation.
- 2.5 **Action 21: Agree an information sharing protocol for relevant partners within data protection guidelines for the prevention of homelessness and the Housing Options Service.** The protocol was drafted by the Council's Housing Strategy Service

and agreed by the Information Manager. It is currently being rolled out for signature with a range of Housing Options Service partners; to date approximately 30 agencies have been identified that require signatures. Signed copies are held centrally. The protocol is due for review in June 2012.

- 2.6 **Action 6: Support the effective working of the Young Persons Protocol:** All ten local authorities across Hertfordshire, Youth Connexions, Youth Justice, Herts Young Homeless Group and the County Council's Children's Schools and Families Service have agreed a joint housing protocol for homeless 16/17 year olds, careleavers and intentionally homeless households in Hertfordshire. The protocol was signed by all partners and launched as a joint working document in July 2010. The protocol has been developed in compliance with legislation and guidance which requires Housing Services and Social Care Authorities to work together. It outlines the joint responsibilities of the signatories concerning the assessment of need and provision of accommodation services to homeless applicants in these client groups. Monitoring meetings between all partners are currently being held bi-monthly to ensure the protocol is working effectively and to discuss general principles of interpretation; this will reduce down to six monthly. Separate meetings are held with relevant agencies to discuss individual cases.
- 2.7 The Council's Housing Options Service works to either prevent homelessness or for those where homelessness cannot be prevented find a solution that best suits that household. Since 2002 the government has provided a grant to each local authority called the Homeless Prevention Grant. This grant is currently used by the Housing Options Team to provide rent deposits to enable homeless households to access the private sector.
- 2.8 In 2011/2012 this grant will be paid in the first instance to the County Council as part of the Area Based Grant rather than directly to the local district/borough authority. In addition the Government has notified all local authorities that this will be the final year of the Homeless Prevention Grant. The grant value for East Herts was £31,300 in 2010/2011 but it is unclear how much it will be in 2011/2012 or how it will be affected by the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 2.9 Since the grant was introduced, by the Government, in 2002 the Council has been able to prevent homelessness for 15-20 households per year at an average grant payable per household of

just over £1,200. In addition the Council has an in-house budget of £10,000 for private sector tenancies and has assisted an average of 7 to 8 households per annum.

2.10 The use of the Homeless Prevention Grant, to secure tenancies in the private sector, is considered a significant option in the prevention of homelessness especially where clients are difficult to house in social housing, require very specific accommodation or are not statutorily homeless but have no available accommodation. Any significant reduction and ultimately the loss of this grant will have a significant impact on the assistance that the Housing Options Service can provide to homeless households in East Herts and may result in an increase in homelessness.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within Essential Reference Paper 'A'.

Background Papers: None

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ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives <i>(delete as appropriate):</i></p>	<p>Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities <i>Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.</i></p> <p>Fit for purpose, services fit for you <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p>Leading the way, working together <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>Through the Council's East Herts Homeless Strategy Group, that is led and co-ordinated by the Council and includes partners from the statutory and voluntary sectors who have an interest in homelessness. This includes the CAB, Hertfordshire Probation Service, YMCA, Riversmead and South Anglia Housing Associations, Vale House and Shelter. There are also 'sleeping' members of the group who were included in the process such as the PCT.</p> <p>The Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy is available on the Council's website.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>The Homelessness Act 2002 places a legal duty onto the Council to produce a homeless review and Homeless Strategy every five years.</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<p><i>ref to section 2.9</i></p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>The possible reduction in the homeless Grant in 2011/2012 and loss in 2012/13 may have an impact on the levels of homelessness in the district.</p>