

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

THE COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 20 SEPTEMBER 2011

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH, HOUSING AND  
COMMUNITY SUPPORT

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

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

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**Purpose/Summary of Report**

- The report highlights successful performance on the third 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.

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

**Background**

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.

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 third annual report.

## Report

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.

The Council's second Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy and action plan was published in July 2008. Since then the Council and its partners have worked to progress and monitor the actions on the plan.

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 details progress on each action in the Homeless and Homeless Prevention Action Plan

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 primarily used by the Housing Options Team to provide rent deposits to enable homeless households to access the private sector, but it can be used for other reasons if it will prevent a household becoming homeless.

In 2011/12 this grant was increased by the Communities and Local Government Department from £30,000 to £50,000 as we had been recognised as achieving positive outcomes in homeless prevention. In addition it has confirmed that the grant will also be set at £50,000 for 2012/13 and likely to remain at a similar level for 2013/14 and 2014/15.

In 2010/11 the Council was able to prevent homelessness, by providing financial assistance to secure a private tenancy, for 26 households at an average cost of just over £1,200. In addition the Council has a budget for private sector tenancies which is set at £3,000 for 2011/12.

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. Primarily we use the grant to enable households that are homeless but for whom we do not

have a statutory homeless duty to access private sector accommodation. These are often single people or couples.

Recent changes to the Benefits Legislation have reduced the level of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) payable for different sizes of accommodation. The most significant change is on the increase in the age that an applicant is eligible for one bed roomed accommodation rather than a room in a shared house from 25 years to 35. This is likely to have a significant impact on our ability to assist homeless single person households under the age of 35 to find accommodation in the private sector. This is mainly due to the lack of shared accommodation or Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in East Herts. There is a short transition period for existing tenants in one bed accommodation, who are under 35 years old, and will need to move to shared accommodation or find the additional rent from their own income.

East Herts' Benefits Service has identified existing applicants in one bed roomed accommodation affected by this change. There are approximately 35 single people affected by this change with an estimated average reduction in benefit of £60. The Benefits Service are writing to all those affected explaining the changes and advising them to contact the Housing Options Service if they are cannot afford to pay the rent not covered by LHA from other income.

The Localism Bill that is currently passing through legislative procedures proposes an amendment to the homelessness legislation that will, so long as certain circumstances are fulfilled, allow local councils to discharge their homeless duty to applicants by securing accommodation in the private sector so long as the landlord offers a tenancy that is at least one year. This maybe a useful tool to us for some households where we have difficulties with a Registered Providers accepting a nomination but the supply of private sector accommodation where landlords are prepared to accept tenants on Local Housing Allowance in East Herts is limited.

### Implications/Consultations

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 (delete as appropriate):</p>	<p><b>Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities</b>  <i>Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.</i></p> <p><b>Fit for purpose, services fit for you</b>  <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p><b>Leading the way, working together</b>  <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.</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>None</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>The reduction in the eligibility for Local Housing Allowance for single person households less than 35 years of age may have an impact on our ability to assist them to find accommodation in the private sector and may lead to an increase in homelessness or rough sleeping.</p>