

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 6
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Report of the Housing Needs Manager

Contact Officer – Sarah Hebblethwaite
Contact Details – 01733 864057

REVIEW OF THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2008-2012

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the progress of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2012 and associated outputs and the development of the Homelessness Review and Draft Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The committee are asked to:

- (i) scrutinise performance against the existing Strategy, and to contribute comments and views which will then be considered in the drafting of the new strategy
- (ii) comment on and agree the approach being undertaken in the development of the new strategy and agree for the final draft of that document to be brought back for scrutiny and approval at its next meeting.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 Providing affordable, warm, safe and secure housing is the cornerstone of a strong society, and so the services described within this report are fundamental to the success of the Sustainable Community Strategy. The Homelessness Strategy itself supports the whole of the Sustainable Community Strategy, but particularly the priority to Create Strong and Supportive Communities.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 The statutory duty to have a Homelessness Strategy

- 4.1.1 In 2002, the Government amended the Homelessness Act 2002 to ensure a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness, in particular by requiring Local Authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy.
- 4.1.2 The Strategy must be based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their district. It must set out the local authority's plans for preventing homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support is, or will be, available for those who become homeless or are at risk of becoming so.
- 4.1.3 All organisations, whose work can help to prevent homelessness, or meet the needs of homeless people in their district, must be considered in the strategy. Plans for joined up working such as this have a massive impact on reducing those who would otherwise potentially experience the negative aspects of homelessness and risks of becoming homeless.
- 4.1.4 Through the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy, the aim is to reduce the number of people in the local authority area who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2012

- 5.1.1 The current Homelessness Strategy has been successful in building on our preventative approach and ensuring that there are the necessary support services to act as a safety net for persons who are threatened with homelessness or who are facing homelessness.
- 5.1.2 The Council and its partners have made considerable progress in both tackling and preventing homelessness. In 2011-12 we prevented and relieved homelessness for 258 households.
- 5.1.3 We continue to face challenges with a shortage of social housing and the impacts of welfare reform, and this places pressures on households including finding and sustaining accommodation.
- 5.1.4 In 2011/2012 the Housing Needs team based at the Customer Service Centre, Bayard Place, provided housing and homelessness advice to 14,568 people. Prevention of homelessness is the primary focus of the team. The service aims to ensure that everyone can access the help they need, when they need it, and to find sustainable solutions to their housing difficulties. We have seen a decrease in homeless presentations to the Local Authority over the period 2011/12 compared with 2010/11. However, as a result of early intervention, we are able to assist households to access alternative accommodation.
- 5.1.5 The Housing Needs service offers a Rent Deposit Scheme, which enables us to provide clients with an interest free loan to be used for the up front costs associated with securing a property in the private sector. This has created a real opportunity for the prevention and relief of homelessness and also increased access to permanent accommodation. In 2011/12 a total of 191 households were assisted into private rented sector accommodation with assistance with a rent deposit and so far this year, since April 2012, we have been able to assist 276 households.
- 5.1.6 The Tenancy Relations Service has further developed to provide support to both tenants and private sector landlords. It aims to promote good relations between Landlords and tenants and encourage good practice in the private rented sector. The service provides advice on disrepair, possession, deposit protection, security of tenure, rent and rent arrears and unlawful eviction. The service has been successful in establishing a framework for illegal evictions and utilised its power to prosecute under The Protection of Eviction Act 1977 by successfully prosecuting 3 landlords through the court system alongside supporting 194 households since January 2012.
- 5.1.7 We have also been proactively promoting the Government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme, where we are able to assist a homeowner who is at risk of losing their home through non payment of their mortgage by working with a local housing association to purchase their property who then rents it back to them. This has further enhanced our homelessness prevention activity and increased the number of properties owned and managed by our housing association partners. Since its introduction we have successfully assisted 27 households, who would have become homeless without our intervention.
- 5.1.8 We continue to assist individuals who find themselves sleeping rough after losing their accommodation and the Rough Sleeper Outreach officer has made great strides in ensuring that those who hit the streets are assisted before they reach a point where they are entrenched. In 2010, Peterborough was highlighted in the national media as a rough sleeping hotspot, with reported figures in excess of 70 individuals sleeping rough on any one night. Following the set up of a task and targeting group and a joint approach this number was quickly reduced with many being assisted to find work and accommodation, or being assisted to return to their country of origin. This work is continuing and we now have a hardcore of long standing rough sleepers in the city, which we are working with to assist them through a personalised approach to leave the streets.

5.1.9 By creating a successful partnership approach and through the established Rough Sleeper Task and Targeting Group we take a joint approach with clear pathways, working closely with voluntary sector and faith groups, the police, substance misuse agencies and outreach workers.

5.2 **The development of the Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018**

5.2.1 The development of the new draft Homelessness Strategy aims to continue to build on our achievements and invites all partners with an interest in housing to work together to prevent homelessness, sustain tenancies, increase access to accommodation and manage the challenges of welfare reform.

5.2.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory obligation on all Local Authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and, based on these findings, develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy with clear aims to tackle and prevent homelessness.

5.2.3 The current development of the Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018 has enabled us to commence a review to assess how effective we have been in tackling homelessness and meeting the future needs of households threatened with homelessness and who become homeless. The review will take into consideration the following information:

- Profile of levels of homelessness and homelessness services in Peterborough, both qualitative and quantitative
- National and local policy
- Feedback from focus groups
- The root causes of homelessness locally
- Gaps in, and duplication of, services
- Weaknesses in homelessness policy and procedure
- Analysis of outcomes of the previous Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

5.2.4 The multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Steering Group has continued to meet and will be key to the development of the new draft Homelessness Strategy. Whilst the Local Authority recognises the need to lead on the draft Homelessness Strategy it also acknowledges that the success of the Strategy will only be achieved through shared ownership and a joint approach.

5.2.5 We acknowledge that in order to provide a cost-effective and responsive service the Housing Needs team cannot achieve this in isolation. We need to continue to deliver our services in partnership with our statutory and voluntary partners including Peterborough Streets, New Haven Night Shelter, Salvation Army, Hope Into Action and the newly established Peterborough Food Bank.

6. **IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The strategy will have implications for all sections of society and all wards and parishes of the local authority area.

6.2 The Draft Homelessness Strategy will provide the necessary framework for partnership working and the delivery of effective joined up services for homeless persons and persons at risk of homelessness.

6.3 Financial Implications: There are no immediate financial implications.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Revision of the Action Plan through the Homeless Strategy Steering Group Focus Groups held in November and December 2012 on the prevention of homelessness, increasing access to accommodation, rough sleeping and promoting settled lifestyles and sustainable communities

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Draft Homelessness Strategy be brought to the March 2013 for scrutiny and approval before being taken to Cabinet and Full Council for adoption.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1 Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002)
Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities
Local Authorities' Homelessness Strategies, Evaluation and Good Practice

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Homelessness Strategy Action Plan Updated