

Report to: Confident Places Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet

Date of Meeting(s): 20 November 2013
21 November 2013

Subject: Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018

Report of: Director – Economy and Skills

Contact Officer: Peter Layland Telephone: 01942 489106

Cabinet Portfolio Holder and area: Councillor C Ready, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure Client Communications

Summary: To seek approval from Members to adopt and implement the new Homelessness Strategy and Multi Agency Action Plan.

Link to Corporate Priorities:

Confident People:

- Protecting vulnerable groups, improving life opportunities and independence, making sure people feel safe and supported in their communities.

Confident Council:

- Your Council has refocused resources towards early intervention and prevention to achieve more for less.

Wards Affected: All

Recommendation(s): For Scrutiny Committee

That the Confident Places Scrutiny Committee consider and comment on the following report and make any appropriate recommendations to Cabinet

For Cabinet

It is recommended that Members approve the adoption and implementation of the Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018 and Multi Agency Action Plan.

Implications:

<i>What are the financial implications?</i>	No variation from current funding/budgets
<i>What are the staffing implications?</i>	None
<i>Customer Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason)</i>	A full Customer Impact Assessment has been undertaken
<i>What are the property implications in terms of reduction, addition or change to the council's asset base or its occupation?</i>	None

Risks:

Variations in Homelessness
On-going implications from Welfare Reform
Reductions in future budgets

Has the Assistant Director - Legal (Monitoring Officer) (John Mitchell) confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? Yes

Has the Director Resources and Contracts (Deputy Chief Executive)(Paul McKeivitt) confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

Alternative options discussed and debated during the consultation stage with partners

Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?

Yes (2)

The Key decision made as a result of this report will be published within **48 hours** and cannot be actioned until **seven working days** have elapsed, i.e. before 3 December 2013 unless exempt from call-in.

This item is included on the Forward Plan.

There are no background papers for this report

Directorate Sign-off:	Peter Layland
Date:	7 th November 2013

Please list any appendices:-

Appendix number or letter	Description
Appendix 1	Homelessness Strategy
Appendix 2	Multi Agency Action Plan

1 Background:

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on councils to publish a new Homelessness Strategy at least every 5 years and to take it into account when discharging its functions. Wigan's existing Homelessness Strategy "A Place for All" 2008–2013 shifted the approach from dealing with the effects of homelessness to a preventative approach in tackling the main causes of homelessness through:
- early and timely intervention;
 - providing choice and options; and
 - arranging housing support.
- 1.2 Between October 2012 and June 2013, the Council's Housing Services Team have undertaken a comprehensive review of the current Homelessness Strategy to determine:
- an up-to-date understanding of homelessness and housing need in Wigan;
 - current and likely future levels of homelessness and homelessness trends;
 - services currently provided to prevent homelessness, to secure housing for homeless people and to provide them with support;
 - the resources available to the Council, other statutory organisations and voluntary organisations to provide services for homeless people; and
 - gaps in provision.
- 1.3 Stakeholders and Service Users have been consulted on the findings of the review, via a variety of methods including surveys to agencies and service users, focus groups at homeless hostels, and a workshop attended by over 20 homelessness agencies. Their views and comments contributed to the development of the new Strategy and Multi Agency Action Plan at Appendix 1 and 2. All members of the Homelessness Forum were given a further opportunity to influence the new strategy and multi agency action plan at a workshop held in September 2013.
- 1.4 All partner agencies, community and voluntary groups that attend the quarterly Homelessness Forum are key to the future success and delivery of the new Homelessness Strategy and Multi Agency Action Plan.

2 Achievements of the Last Strategy

- 2.1 The proactive preventative approach of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 and improvements in agencies working in partnership together has seen major successes in how the homelessness services in Wigan are delivered and the key successes can be summarised as follows:
- Major progress in transforming the homelessness service has been made via preventative strategies, including the roll-out of a range of repossession prevention measures, which has made a significant impact on reducing both landlord and mortgage repossessions.
 - Dramatic falls in homeless presentations and acceptances (well in excess of northern/regional trends) with fewer presenting cases being accepted as owed a statutory duty, and a significant increase in the number of

presenting cases who have been prevented from becoming homeless (see Table 1 below).

- Reduction in the numbers of placements into temporary accommodation and minimum spend on bed and breakfast provision.
- Improved services for people affected by domestic abuse, including a new service contract for the refuge provision and outreach service, with increased client capacity; alongside the establishment of the Integrated Safeguarding and Public Protection (ISAPP) Team based within Bamfurlong Police Station to address domestic violence in a joined-up partnership, quick response way. The team work to generate a daily response to incidents of DV, to stop them escalating further.
- Improved services for people who are rough sleeping or living at no fixed abode, incorporating individual support plans, group activities and strong links with partner agencies, including fully adopting the commitment to “No Second Night Out” and extreme weather provision.
- New supported housing scheme for young people with challenging backgrounds accessing training development in order to assist with future employability and gaining the life skills to achieve independent living.
- Development of the Social Letting Agency and improved access to the private rented sector – an additional 820 affordable lettings in the private rented sector since 2009.
- Housing Support Access Point (administered by Wigan and Leigh Housing) - introduction of a single point of access for temporary supported accommodation and floating support services so that clients are referred to the most appropriate accommodation for their needs with a view to moving them on from there when they are ready to manage their own tenancy.

Table 1: Homelessness trends over the last 5 years

	2006/07	2011/12	2012/13	Apr – Sept 13
Homeless Presentations ↓	2,752	609	616	291
Homeless Acceptances ↓	1,051	271	219	97
Prevention cases ↑	272	1088	1404	1175 *
% cases where homelessness successfully prevented by WALH	Not available	49%	46%	Not available
% prevented per 1000 households (WALH together with partner agencies)	Not available	8.24%	10.02%	14.5%
Cases in temp at end of year ↓	50	24	27	24
Average length of stay in temp ↑		62 days	67 days	
Annual B & B costs ↓	£183,500	£841	£694	£790
Violent relationship breakdown cases ↓	137	76	58	20
Rough sleeper estimate ↑	6	11	15	Due Nov 13

*The large increase in homeless preventions for Apr to Sept 2013 is in the main due to resolving housing benefit problems (414 cases) and resolving rent or service charge arrears in social or private rented sector (224 cases).

3 Analysis of Our Current Position

- 3.1 Homelessness figures nationally are increasing (acceptances increased by 6% during 2012/2013 and households in temporary accommodation on March 2013 were 10% higher than at the same date last year), and there are fears they will continue to increase due mainly to housing market issues and welfare reform changes. However, locally current trends show that incidences of homelessness have been kept to manageable levels.
- 3.2 Preventing homelessness is far more cost effective than dealing with its consequences and the homelessness and advice service provided by Wigan and Leigh Housing offers value for money. Greater Manchester have undertaken an independent report on homeless prevention and found that the cost effectiveness of services in Wigan is good; the cost per successful prevention case is fifth best value in Greater Manchester. The number of successful preventions per 1000 households when adjusted for deprivation, is the fourth highest in the region.
- 3.3 We now have a wider range of services than before and these range from financial advice services (early debt interventions, strengthened financial support teams, financial inclusion and money/debt advice); services targeted at preventing repossessions (Mortgage Rescue Service, Court Desk Advocacy and landlord mediation service) and access to private rented services (rental bond, private sector leasing, shared accommodation service for singles).
- 3.4 However there is growing evidence that the impact of welfare reform and downturn in the economy is putting increased pressure on housing advice and homelessness prevention services. Clients are facing difficulties in managing their income and are facing difficulties in sustaining affordable accommodation. This is evidenced by more people approaching the homelessness prevention services with multiple debt problems and the length of stay in temporary accommodation during 2012/13 increased on the previous year. More detail on this topic can be found within the agenda item on Welfare Reform.
- 3.5 In the current dynamic situation it is difficult to predict what impact welfare reforms will have on future levels of homelessness, but there is no doubt that this is one of the greatest threats facing the homelessness services as other areas see increases and the impact of the under occupation penalty in Wigan is greater than in most of the country.
- 3.6 Whilst the review highlighted a relatively static homelessness position two further trends were noted that needed specific action. Firstly there has been a notable increase in cases of people with complex needs (those with mental health problems, addictions, negative behaviour, poor life skills). Secondly there has also been an increase in people accessing rough sleepers services, and the rough sleeper estimate in 2012 increased to 15 from 11 for the previous year.

4 New Homelessness Strategy

- 4.1 The new Homelessness Strategy builds on the success of the old strategy and proposes to continue to focus on prevention and early intervention. It will also look to gain a better understanding and tackle some of the wider experiences of homelessness that make households and individuals susceptible to it. Basically, it seeks to build greater resilience to try to meet the expected future challenges, whilst undertaking targeted work on the identified issues relating to increases in those with complex needs and rough sleepers.
- 4.2 It is also our intention to work with some established partners in Greater Manchester to achieve the newly announced “Gold Standard” in Homelessness.
- 4.3 The strategy has been developed in consultation with the Homelessness Forum, Support and Safeguarding Delivery Group and Youth Offenders Group.
- 4.4 The Homelessness Strategy 2014–2018 has 5 key strategic objectives and these are:
- (i) Target prevention, earlier intervention and support services to those most at risk of homelessness.
 - (ii) Strengthen partnerships and communications and improve pathways into accommodation.
 - (iii) Work towards the end of rough sleeping.
 - (iv) Prevent the use of bed and breakfast/increase in temporary accommodation.
 - (v) Continuous improvement in homelessness and housing options services and housing related services.
- 4.5 Further detail on how we will achieve the key objectives are in the homelessness strategy and Multi Agency Action Plan (Appendix 1 and 2).

5 Monitoring of the Strategy

- 5.1 The action plan will be monitored by the Homelessness Forum who will be responsible for ensuring the actions and outcomes contained in the action plan are implemented. This forum will advise on the annual review of the homelessness strategy, consider progress made during the year and to look forward to the priorities in the new year, and results will be reported to Places Scrutiny Committee. In addition, the Welfare Reform Board will receive quarterly statistics on homelessness trends.
- 5.2 There is flexibility within both the strategy and multi agency action plan to allow for change in focus dependent on future homelessness trends.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 It is recommended that Members approve the adoption and implementation of the Homelessness Strategy 2014-2018 and Multi Agency Action Plan.