

**CABINET**

**Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013  
Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2008**

**Report of Corporate Director (Community Services)**

<b>PURPOSE OF REPORT</b>				
To request Members to approve the Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013				
<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Non-Key Decision</b>		<b>Referral from Cabinet Member</b>
<b>Date Included in Forward Plan</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> March 2008			
<b>This report is public</b>				

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR JOHN GILBERT**

**(1) That Members approve the Homelessness Strategy**

**1.0 Introduction**

1.1 This is the City Council's second Homelessness Strategy since the Homelessness Act 2002 placed a statutory duty on housing authorities to produce such strategies every five years.

It follows the production of a Homelessness Review which was carried out during 2007/8 and which includes both quantitative and qualitative information on homelessness in the District. This is available in full on the Council's website. The strategy summarises the main findings of the Review and details strategic priorities and an action plan. It is affixed at Appendix A

**2.0 Proposal Details**

2.1 The Strategy includes six strategic priorities

- Prevention of homelessness through timely advice, intervention and support

- Prevention of homelessness by developing further the range of good quality temporary and emergency accommodation available
- Reducing homelessness among young people, those affected by domestic violence, and offenders/ rough sleepers
- Reducing the use of temporary accommodation and Bed and Breakfast by the statutorily homeless
- Increasing the supply of good quality affordable housing
- Ensuring effective monitoring of levels of homelessness throughout the life of the strategy

The Council's total budgeted expenditure on Homelessness, excluding internal recharges is £354.7k in 2008-09 (£272.4k net of income), rising to £373.7k (£289.4k net of income) by 2010-11.

### **3.0 Details of Consultation**

- 3.1 The development of the Homelessness Review included widespread consultation with a range of agencies and service users. This is summarised in the Strategy. The draft Strategy itself has been produced by the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, chaired by Cllr John Gilbert. The Group includes representation from Health, County Council, Probation and the voluntary sector as well as City Council officers.

The draft was formally consulted upon during May 2008. A presentation on the draft was given to the Homelessness Forum (a group convened by the City Council and with representation from both statutory and voluntary sectors): a press release was issued about the consultation and people were invited to respond either directly to the relevant council officer or through Consultationmaster on the Council's website.

Only one response was received through Consultationmaster. A further 8 were received by the Neighbourhood Task Force. Responses were broadly favourable. The Steering Group have considered all of the responses and made amendments to the draft where proposals were accepted. The remaining contentious areas are:

- CAB would like the action plan to include commissioning specialist housing advice, paid for through an SLA, and the Steering Group do not support this
- The implementation of this proposal would have implications in terms of either reductions
  - a) in other aspects of the service, or
  - b) additional payments to providers under SLA's

and this would have to be addressed within the 2009-10 budget round.

- Lancaster and District Homeless Action Service and Signposts both opposed the proposal that the City Council should not form service level agreements with voluntary sector agencies that provide free food. The Steering Group has amended

the proposal so that the City Council would not form service level agreements with agencies that provide free food for those in tenancies. This continues to be opposed.

#### **4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)**

##### **4.1 Cabinet could approve the Strategy recommended by the Steering Group.**

This would allow the Council to meet the requirement to produce a Strategy by the end of July 2008 and implementation could commence. CAB would be free to tender for advice and support services.

##### **4.2 Cabinet could approve the Strategy subject to one or both of the following**

1. Add commissioning specialist housing advice
2. Delete the reference to free food for people in tenancies (so the current practice of free food for both the homeless and those in tenancies would remain)

OR

Revert to the original Steering Group proposal that no free food at all should be on offer from those with Service Level Agreements

This would allow the Council to meet the requirement to produce a Strategy by July 2008 and implementation could commence.

**Commissioning specialist housing advice** - the action plan includes tendering contracts for Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with voluntary organisations : the total budget for such SLAs is £85,600 in 2008/9 (this does not include the funding for Portland St which comes from a separate and time limited stream of funding, though administered through an SLA with YMCA). There is no planned provision for increasing the SLA budget.

If specialist housing advice was to be commissioned, as proposed by CAB, then this will have to be addressed within the tendering exercise. As noted above, the implication is for either a reduction in other aspects of the service, or an increase in costs. The following points should be noted

- The specialist housing advice that CAB propose providing is already provided by them to those on low enough incomes to qualify for Legal Aid. CAB receive funding from the Legal Services Commission (LSC) to provide this service.
- Those on slightly higher incomes are ruled out by the LSC.
- CAB see this specialist advice as particularly assisting those struggling with mortgage arrears.
- Less money would be available for the provision of general housing advice and support services through other SLAs – the current SLA contracts cover services such as helping people access private sector accommodation which prevents homelessness.
- There are also no other local organisations that could compete for the specialist work that CAB propose.

**Free food** - the reference to free food for those in tenancies could be deleted. The following points should be noted

- Council Housing Services are experiencing problems with tenants housed from Homeless Action Service's Edward St centre when the link with the centre is maintained. This causes problems for neighbours, particularly in sheltered schemes, or when the tenant is vulnerable and unable to control the behaviour of their visitors from the Centre. Floating support is available to tenants and those from Edward St should be accessing this to learn independence.
- Similar problems have been experienced in RSL supported housing schemes (hostels) such as Carr Gomm and Stonham. In addition, those living in this type of accommodation have support available to them to learn how to be independent and it is difficult to get residents to engage if the option of free food is available.
- A counter argument from the Homeless Action Service is that the continued contact helps people get through a transitional stage.
- It is also argued that the provision of free food helps substance misusers to remain healthier than they would otherwise be: they would not otherwise spend their benefit money on food.
- The City Council do not directly fund the free food service, which is provided through donations of money and in kind from shops and harvest festivals.
- If free food is provided to those who are homeless but not when housed, this may act as a disincentive to rough sleepers to move into accommodation – this argument can be used to either argue for continuing with free food for those in tenancies, or an argument for why no free food at all should be on offer.

4.3 Cabinet could approve the Strategy subject to further amendments required by Members

4.4 Cabinet could reject the Strategy

The City Council has a statutory requirement to produce a Strategy by the end of July 2008. There is a further Cabinet meeting at the end of July and a revised Strategy could be put to that meeting.

## **5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)**

5.1 That Cabinet approve the Strategy recommended by the Steering Group.

The specialist housing advice that CAB propose providing is already provided by them to those on low enough incomes to qualify for Legal Aid. CAB receive funding from the Legal Services Commission to provide this service. Those on slightly higher incomes are ruled out by the LSC. There may be an argument that the Legal Aid rules need to be changed, but it is not sensible for the City Council to pick up these costs when this group (ie those in employment but on low incomes) do not feature heavily amongst those presenting as homeless.

The thrust of the whole Strategy is about preventing homelessness and providing free food acts as a positive disincentive for people to engage with the other forms of help on offer. Resettlement work is heavily emphasised in the Strategy and ensuring that people keep tenancies is a high priority. Continuing to lead a rough sleepers lifestyle when no longer homeless causes major problems for neighbours and can contribute towards losing a tenancy.

## 6.0 Conclusion

6.1 The Strategy attached is recommended for approval.

### **RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The Strategy takes into account government policies, the Lancaster District Housing Strategy and LAA priorities. The Homelessness Review on which it is based lays out the strategic links.

### **CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

The implementation of the Strategy should help those who are vulnerable and socially excluded. It contains actions to address the needs of specific disadvantaged groups. It also addresses community safety issues and should contribute towards ensuring social cohesion. The Homelessness Review considered rural proofing in its consultation and did not find that there were specific rural issues to address.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The approach recommended by the report represents in the main a continuation of existing service levels and as such has no direct financial implications beyond existing budgetary provision. Paragraph 3.1 (and the attached proposed Strategy) draws attention to the fact that the adoption of certain variant options or proposed developments may have implications which would have to be addressed within the 2009-10 budget round, although this would probably be in the context of the redeployment of resources within homelessness budgets rather than as a growth item. In any event, appropriate approvals would need to be gained prior to progressing any items that are not currently included within approved budgets (including items that may be subject to external funding bids).

### **SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The s151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Legal Services are to advise and assist with clearly documenting the housing options process to clients and introducing a review process

### **MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and her comments incorporated in the report

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**2008 Homelessness Review  
Homelessness Strategy file**

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