

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

5TH DECEMBER 2007

A HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY FOR WORCESTERSHIRE 2007 - 2011

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Cllr P. J. Whittaker
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Planning & Environment

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks to inform Members about the production of the Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy, outlining the key priorities and proposals for delivery.
- 1.2. The report seeks approval from the Executive Cabinet for this new Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy which will guide service development and delivery over the next 3 years.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That members approve the objectives within the Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy 2007 – 2011 and the targets set out within the county and local action plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A previous Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 was developed for Bromsgrove District Council in 2002 following changes to the Homelessness legislation making it a mandatory requirement of all councils to undertake a homeless review and write a strategy.
- 3.2 Although this Homelessness Strategy ran until 2008, the strategy and actions were incorporated and formed the content of the third priority (Addressing Homelessness) in the Council's Housing Strategy 2006 – 2011. As we have already achieved the majority of the homelessness strategy targets originally set we need a new strategy to set our direction of travel over forthcoming years.
- 3.3 In 2006, the Worcestershire Chief Housing Officers Group agreed the need to develop a more joined-up approach to homelessness within the county, building on the good working relationships which already existed. By working together with other District Councils and partner Registered Social Landlords, Social Care, Primary Care Trusts, Police, voluntary sector partners and others, it was clear that more outcomes

could be achieved for our customers and at a quicker pace. The Government Office for the West Midlands supported this approach and Government guidance supports the move to more sub regional homelessness strategies being developed.

- 3.4 The Worcestershire Chief Housing Officers Group consequently set up a consortium of officers called the County Homeless Strategy Group to develop a countywide homelessness strategy. The consortium consisted of representatives from each district council and one housing association. The officers attending had both strategic and operational roles and had a variety of experience in housing.
- 3.5 The group reviewed actions in previous strategies, feedback from the Government Office of the West Midlands (GOWM), researched secondary data about homelessness for the county, consulted widely with stakeholders and undertook a customer satisfaction survey. This information and feedback was used to shape the new Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy, helping to inform the action plans developed within the Strategy.
- 3.6 The key objectives of the County Homelessness Strategy are;
 - To better understand the needs of key client groups for the delivery of appropriate housing services
 - To develop a countywide methodology and system of data collection for homelessness information
 - To share good practice of the delivery of housing advice and homelessness prevention
 - To develop strategic working to improve the delivery of services
 - To empower customers to make a positive change to their lives
 - Support the development of appropriate temporary, permanent and move-on accommodation.
- 3.7 The county action plan has been developed to show key actions within each year to assist with the district council's service planning and a specific lead for each project has been provisionally identified.
- 3.8 The delivery of the action plan will be overseen by a Homelessness Strategy Steering Group that will include a range of statutory and voluntary agency representatives from the County in addition to the District Councils and these partners will also be involved in the implementation of the delivery plan.
- 3.9 The objectives set out in the Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy 2007 – 2011 will help us to work together to develop and deliver services that will assist a range of client groups in a more joined up and effective way.

4. HOW DOES THE NEW COUNTYWIDE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY DIFFER FROM THE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S EXISTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY?

4.1 Bromsgrove's existing Homelessness Strategy was written in 2003 essentially setting out the findings from the homelessness review that had just taken place and setting out an action plan to:

- Strengthen help available to the homeless
- Coordinate a strategic response to tackling homelessness
- Provide more choice, options and supply of accommodation for the homeless
- Improve the standard of facilities and services in temporary accommodation
- Provide better emergency access to temporary accommodation
- Prevent homelessness through improved advice and interaction with private sector housing
- Provide an accessible service to the homeless
- Minimise the use of B&B
- Monitor performance

4.2 The Bromsgrove Homelessness Strategy Steering Group was set up to monitor and oversee the implementation of the actions set. This group continues to meet and is now well represented by a range of voluntary and statutory agencies.

4.3 In the Spring of 2006, the Council launched its new Housing Strategy, an all encompassing document covering the 4 key priority areas for housing in Bromsgrove:

- I. Addressing the shortage of affordable Housing
- II. Improving the quality and availability of private sector housing
- III. Addressing Homelessness
- IV. Assisting Vulnerable groups to live independently

By this time progress had been made against a number of the actions set out in the original 2003 Homelessness Strategy and therefore an updated action plan was included in the new Housing Strategy 2006 – 2011 under priority iii.

4.4 Like our own homelessness strategy, the Countywide Homelessness Strategy identifies the local issues and local action plans relevant to each of the six districts within the county. The Bromsgrove summary and action plan is set out at pages 58 to 67. These local actions are an updated version of those in the 2006 -11 Housing Strategy Document as progress is constantly being reviewed and actions modified or increased.

4.5 Unlike our own homelessness strategy, the Countywide strategy promotes joined up working and brings together the issues being

experienced across the county (primarily the common problem of affordability caused by high house prices and the difficulty in meeting demand from newly forming households.) and identifies the client groups most likely to experience homelessness and the causes of homelessness. From this process, the Countywide Homelessness Strategy presents an overarching set of countywide actions to help improve the understanding of client groups, promote better data collation, share good practice, encourage joint working and promote the development of appropriate types of accommodation and support services.

- 4.6 This more joined up approach to the identification of needs and development of services to address and prevent homelessness will have an important role to play in future years in raising awareness when government funding for homelessness could well be channelled through Local Area Agreements.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy 2007 – 2011 contains countywide actions and local actions.

The resource implications relating to the Countywide Actions relate only to officer time and the application of County Supporting People funds. The only exception to this is the first action which relates to £3,000 per district for funding of the SHMA research into Gypsy and Traveller needs, this expenditure is already budgeted and paid for by this authority.

The resource implications of the actions within the local (Bromsgrove) action plan are able to be funded from the CLG Homelessness Grant allocated to this authority. We are advised that this source of grant funding is to be ongoing and a 3 year (2008-2011) allocation is to be made instead of the annual announcements previously given.

- 5.2 The strategy is a multi agency strategy that encourages a range of organisations to work together to assist in meeting the needs of the homeless without direct commitment to specific funding.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 It is a statutory requirement to have a Homelessness Strategy in place. The Council's existing Homelessness Strategy runs until March 2008, however the actions have now been achieved and the new Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy is needed to help guide service improvement over the next 3 years.

7. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

- 7.1 Objective 1 – Regeneration (Town Centre, Longbridge and Housing)
Improved standards of housing for homeless people and possible opportunities to bring back into use empty accommodation over shops.
- 7.2 Objective 2 – Improvement (Customer Service, Reputation and Performance)
Improved service to customers by the ability to provide better options for homeless clients.
- 7.3 Objective 3 – Sense of Community and Wellbeing (Community Influence and Community Events)
Improved forms of temporary accommodation may influence health and wellbeing.
- 7.4 Priority 4 – Environment – Clean District and Planning
Dispersal of homelessness younger people into the community may support better neighbourhood integration and therefore reduce any possibility of negative impact upon the environment.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 If a decision was made not to be included in the Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy 2007 – 2011 this would be contrary to guidance from the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) who is encouraging a cross-authority approach.
- 8.2 Failure to have a current Homelessness Strategy in place would not be in accordance with statutory requirements.

9. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 How the recommendations will impact on internal/external customers. How/when will the recommendations be communicated to the customer. Will staff be briefed on any possible problems arising as a result of the recommendations.

10. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 This Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy was developed in partnership and was informed by a rigorous consultation process

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Procurement Issues
None
Personnel Implications
None

Governance/Performance Management Better service to homeless people.
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Improved support services and dispersal of homelessness younger people into the community may support better neighbourhood integration and therefore reduce any possibility of negative impact upon the environment.
Policy None
Environmental None

12. **OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	Yes
Corporate Director (Services)	Yes
Assistant Chief Executive	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	Yes
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	Yes
Head of Organisational Development & HR	Yes
Corporate Procurement Team	No

13. **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy including County and local action plan.

14. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The papers used in the preparation of the report should be listed (you do not need to list background papers if the report includes exempt information and any document which has been published does not need to be referred to as a background paper).

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