

REPORT TO: Environment & Urban Renewal Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 26th March 2014

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Communities

PORTFOLIO: Physical Environment

SUBJECT: Halton Homelessness Strategy 2013 - 2018

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to present Halton's Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 to members of the Environment & Urban Renewal Policy & Performance Board.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Members of the Board note and comment on the Strategy.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 In accordance with Homelessness Act 2002 the local authority has conducted a full Strategic Review of Homelessness within the area and formulated a Homelessness Strategy for the next five year period.

3.1.1 The Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 is based upon the findings and recommendations of two other documents, one being a comprehensive review of the current homelessness services which was conducted over a nine month period during 2012 -2013. The other being the previous Homelessness Strategy 2009-2013, which involved active engagement with service users, providers and members.

3.1.2 The Strategic Review of Homelessness involved active engagement with service users, service providers and all partner agencies and Elected Members. The draft findings were discussed and agreed with all key stakeholders prior to the report being finalised.

3.1.3 The Review provided clear direction for preventing and addressing homelessness in Halton and reflects the factors known to affect future homelessness. It also forms the basis of this new Homelessness Strategy for Halton over the next five years.

3.1.4 During 2012/13 a Homelessness Scrutiny Review was conducted by

Members to review supported accommodation services within the district. A number of recommendations were made and were incorporated within the Strategic Review of Homelessness in 2012 and form part of the Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 Halton is experiencing a gradual increase in homelessness presentations and statutory homelessness acceptances. The main causes of homelessness are due to family exclusions, relationship breakdown and the loss of private rented accommodation.

3.2.2 There are a number of client groups that do not meet the statutory homelessness criteria, but have a pressing housing need. Concerted efforts are being made by the Housing Solutions Team to assist these client groups, offering temporary accommodation for a limited period and facilitating a more efficient and accessible move on process.

3.2.3 The Scrutiny Review highlighted the high vacancy levels across all the supported hostel accommodation schemes. Due consideration was given towards reducing capacity and a number of recommendations were proposed to address the changing homelessness culture and reliance upon supported housing provision.

3.2.4 The Housing Solutions Team is more accessible and community focused, with emphasis placed upon Prevention. The team strive to reduce the levels of homelessness within the district and fully utilise the prevention options and services available to vulnerable clients.

3.3 Legislation

3.3.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced many changes to homelessness and allocations legislation. In November 2012, the Localism Act 2011 brought into force provisions that allow local authorities to end the main housing duty to a homeless applicant by means of a private rented sector offer, i.e. a fixed term assured shorthold tenancy for a minimum of 12 months. The authority should consider the new allocated powers, which will impact upon future homelessness and service delivery.

3.3.2 Furthermore, it was determined that the council would be able to reduce the length of stay for households in temporary accommodation and the associated costs. Additionally, it will help the council to avoid future use of B&B accommodation

3.3.3 Welfare reforms affecting single people and couples aged 18-35 have put significant pressures on local housing providers, as suitable accommodation is in short supply. It is therefore anticipated

that welfare reform and recent legislative changes will result in a further increase in levels of homelessness across the district.

3.3.4 The Homelessness Strategy identifies the gaps in provision and the need to improve communication between partner agencies. An integrated approach will enable the authority to address both the social and health care issues, reduce homelessness and encourage lifestyle change.

3.3.5 Halton is fully committed and focused upon health care and service provision for homeless people. The integration of CCG, Public Health and Homelessness will enable the authority to develop a new holistic approach. The aim would be to improve health care for vulnerable people, offering a more flexible and accessible service to achieve positive and sustainable outcomes for service users.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Localism Act 2011 will have future policy implications and will impact upon future housing provision and allocation of accommodation within the private rented sector.

The Homelessness Strategic Action Plan identifies a task to develop a Private Rented Sector Offer policy to ensure the Authority is fully compliant with its statutory housing duty, in accordance with Part 7, Housing Act 1996. It is recommended that future consideration be given to develop a PRSO policy and implement the option to adopt the power to end the homelessness duty within the private rented sector.

4.2 The following sections within the primary legislation represent the recent history of the new powers arising from the Localism Act 2011. The policy will fully comply with the following legal requirements:

- Housing Act 1996
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Localism Act 2011
- Equality Act 2010
- Suitability of Accommodation Order 2012
- Homelessness Code of Guidance 2006
- Localism Act 2011

The policy will reflect the priorities and rules shown within the authority's local documents and would be implemented and administered by the Housing Solutions Team.

4.3 Upon considering the policy option, weight was given to the fact that the local Homelessness Strategy already promotes the use of private rented accommodation to prevent homelessness.

The Housing Solutions Team have successfully helped numerous households who may be threatened with homelessness to obtain accommodation from a private landlord, fully utilising various incentives, such as rent deposit, Bond Guarantee and Discretionary Housing Payments.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The financial implications of delivering the Homelessness Strategy are outlined in the Action Plan.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

Homelessness can have an adverse impact on the wellbeing of children and young people with educational attainment being affected by adverse residential mobility. The prevention focus of the Strategy will ensure that families with children are assisted swiftly to ensure minimal disruption. In addition, the Strategy recognises that homelessness amongst young people in Halton is challenging and therefore includes priorities to strengthen joint working to ensure this group is provided with the most appropriate support by the relevant agencies.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The lack of a settled home can adversely impact an individual's ability to find and sustain employment – the Strategy's focus on homelessness prevention allows people to remain in their homes wherever possible.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The Homelessness Strategy places emphasis on the links between health and homelessness and one of the strategy objectives is specifically focussed on this issue. Therefore, implementation of actions contained within the strategy will have positive implications for the health and wellbeing of those experiencing homelessness.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

Criminal activity can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness and homeless prisoners are more likely to re-offend following release than those who have settled accommodation. Therefore, the Strategy includes a priority to improve joint working with the police and probation service to address the growing housing need for offenders.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

The presence of rough sleeping can have a negative impact on the

environment and the Strategy seeks to continue to ensure that this does not pose an issue for Halton through the 'No Second Night Out' initiative.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The Communities and Local Government Homelessness Grant funding makes an important contribution to the delivery of a range of homelessness services in Halton. This fund is currently frozen and arrangements for distribution of the grant for the financial years 2014/15 are unclear. If the homelessness grant funding were to be reduced or ceased completely, it would adversely affect the ability of the Housing Solutions Team to offer a range of housing options and would impact upon performance and service delivery.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The Strategy includes priorities targeted at providing support for those who are vulnerable or have complex needs and other marginalised groups such as young people and offenders.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

There are no background papers within the meaning of the Act.