

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 7 March 2016

Report Title: Homelessness Strategy

Report By: Andrew Palmer
Head of Housing and Development

Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the results on the 12 week public consultation on the draft Homelessness Strategy 2016-2018 and to share the final version of the strategy.

Recommendation(s)

1. That the Homelessness Strategy 2016-2018 is adopted by Cabinet

Reasons for Recommendations

Local Authorities are required to produce and consult on a Homelessness strategy for their areas. The Council's existing Homelessness Strategy covers the period 2013-2015 and therefore needs to be updated.

As such, we have now produced the Hastings and St Leonards Homelessness Strategy 2016-2018, which has been informed by a comprehensive Homelessness Review, ongoing partnership work, Government guidance and a 12 week public consultation.

The new strategy provides a framework for addressing the ongoing challenges resultant from the Localism and Welfare Reform Acts 2011 and 2012 combined with changes to homelessness legislation and new reforms proposed in the Government's 2015 Budget and Spending Review and the new Housing and Planning Bill.

Introduction

1. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities are required to carry out a homelessness review and produce a homelessness strategy, which is revised at least every 5 years. The Hastings and St Leonards Homelessness Strategy 2013-2015 was the borough's third homelessness strategy and has provided the framework from which we have been able to tackle a wide range of issues linked to homelessness.

2. Since the last strategy we have made significant progress in meeting strategic priorities and have:

Increased the number of people prevented from becoming homeless year on year and had the highest homelessness prevention rate of any Local Authority in England

Enabled greater access to the private rented sector, e.g. through the Letstart service, Social Lettings Agency and the provision of cash deposits

Exceeded targets for delivering alternative housing options and improved local housing stock through a range of initiatives, e.g. Coastal Space, the Empty Homes Project and YMCA's private leasing scheme

Improved property conditions and management standards through increased support to landlords and tenants, and targeted enforcement action when necessary

Improved the provision of housing advice and information through joined up working, updates to information resources and a review of the Housing Options service

3. The changes which have resulted from the Localism and Welfare Reform Acts 2011 and 2012 have increased pressure on the housing sector. In addition, changes which are forecast as a result of the Government's 2015 Budget and Spending Review alongside the new Housing and Planning Bill and changes to homelessness legislation will impact further on vulnerable people and resources.

4. It is therefore timely to develop a new Homelessness Strategy that will address the need to provide good quality housing and support services to meet an ever increasing demand from households facing homelessness. The new strategy will create a framework with which to monitor and address key challenges introduced by welfare reforms and the changes to housing legislation.

The draft strategy and action plan

5. The draft Homelessness Strategy 2016-2018 was informed by a full and detailed review of homelessness in Hastings over the last 3 years, which included input from a wide range of partners, including voluntary groups, statutory bodies, support agencies and users of the Home Works floating housing support service.

6. As a result of the feedback from partners and members, the intention has been to produce a short and concise strategy with a focus on an action plan which is at the heart of the strategy. The document sets out the approach to tackling homelessness in the changing housing and welfare climate and also demonstrates how we will meet the three strategic priorities identified in consultation with partners and service users:

Priority 1 – Prevent and minimise homelessness

Priority 2 – Improve access to good quality, well managed accommodation in the private rented sector

Priority 3 - Work in partnership to deliver quality housing and support services

Consultation and Final Strategy

7. The draft strategy and review document were made available for public consultation from 4th November 2015 to 28th January 2016 on the Council's website. Information on the consultation was also circulated to key partners, stakeholders and Council Officers.
8. Very few comments were received. However, the key issues raised by colleagues, partners and the public as part of the consultation were: the growing use of temporary accommodation; the increase in visible rough sleeping and the additional support needed for vulnerable people with complex needs.
9. Another source of concern amongst many respondents was the proposed reductions to the Adult Social Care budget from 2016-2019. While the proposals have recently been revised, especially in regards to the Supporting People Budget, there remains an anxiety that the proposed reductions to funding for the Seaview Project will impact on the lives of those with multiple and complex needs.
10. The overriding response from those consulted was positive and supports the direction of the strategy. The strategy has at its core a number of areas which respond to the concerns raised; these elements of the strategy deliver innovative partnership solutions to the impact and causes of homelessness and rough sleeping. The solutions which the homelessness strategy will deliver have been formed in partnership with key services in health, housing, social care and support services. This approach has ensured that the current strategy finds common solutions to the challenges faced between services, ensuring resources are targeted where they are needed most.
11. Throughout the period in which this consultation was undertaken the Housing and Planning Bill has been debated by both Houses of Parliament. The detail and likely impact of the Bill has become clearer during this period. The repercussions of the Bill in the reduction of affordable accommodation for rent will have an impact on the supply of affordable accommodation for rent and, therefore, homelessness. The Council's response to the impact of the Bill and the way in which affordable housing is delivered in the future is emerging and will require further creative responses formed in close consultation with partner agencies.

Policy Implications

12. Equalities and Community comprehensiveness: An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed prior to the draft strategy being made available for public consultation.
13. Economic and financial implications: Addressing homelessness is a statutory function and the Council allocates revenue and grant funding annually to meet the duties owed to presenting homeless households. This is outlined in detail in the strategy document. Risks to the borough of potential increasing demand for homelessness services and associated rising costs of meeting statutory homeless duties are considered in the strategy and will continue to be monitored.

Wards Affected

Ashdown, Baird, Braybrooke, Castle, Central St. Leonards, Conquest, Gensing, Hollington, Maze Hill, Old Hastings, Ore, Silverhill, St. Helens, Tressell, West St. Leonards, Wishing Tree

Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	No
Risk Management	No
Environmental Issues	No
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	No
Local People's Views	No
Anti-Poverty	No

Additional Information

Appendix 1 - Homelessness Strategy 2016-2018

Officer to Contact

Joe Powell
jpowell@hastings.gov.uk
01424 451314