

Agenda Item 9

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Communities

16 September 2009

JG/DB/EC



Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 – review of progress

Summary

We published our first Homelessness Strategy in July 2008. We agreed to provide Members with an annual update on implementation of the Strategy. The report outlines progress so far and other significant homeless issues.

Recommendation

Note progress on implementation of the EDDC Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013

a) Reasons for Recommendation

Legislation requires the publication of a new Homelessness Strategy every 5 years. Members agreed that they should receive an update report annually.

b) Alternative Options

None

c) Risk Considerations

None

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

None

e) Date for Review of Decision

An annual update report on the Homelessness Strategy

1. Homelessness Strategy Update

1.1 The Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 sets out the homelessness problem in East Devon and how we intend to address it. It is our second Homelessness Strategy. It forms part of a number of strategies that the Council has adopted for housing and fits within the objectives of our overarching Housing Strategy. An action plan was approved as part of the Homelessness Strategy.

1.2 A review group meet quarterly to review the Homelessness Strategy and the action plan. The group is made up of representatives from partner agencies working with homeless households, such as Young Devon, Homemaker South West, CAB, Community Housing Aid and Open Door Centre; and statutory bodies such as Probation, Children and Young Persons Service, Drug Action Team, Supporting People and the PCT; and housing providers such as DCHA and WCHA .

1.3 A copy of the updated action plan is enclosed at **Annex A** for information. The majority of actions have commenced and many have been completed or are ongoing. For example,

the targets set by Government to reduce the use of temporary accommodation to below 117 by December 2009 has been achieved – we had 82 homeless households in temporary accommodation as at July 2009. However, Members should note the following whose timescales for starting action have been missed.

- I. Action 1.1 - targets for housing development are not currently being met by the Council, mainly due to the current economic climate. Anticipate less opportunity to house vulnerable households over the next few years.
- II. Action 1.4 - the directory of services available to homeless people in East Devon is low priority and timescale is delayed until April 2010.
- III. Action 3.3 – requires significant capital and revenue funding from EDDC and Supporting People and is not a viable opportunity within the timescales of current strategy.
- IV. Action 3.10 – hoped to be funded by LPSA reward monies – not enough funding available – alternative options being considered by Childrens Trust Housing Steering Group.

1.4 Two other key issues that Members should note are:

- I. A recent House of Lords Judgment on the case R (G) v Southwark LB has led to a significant change in the way 16/17 year olds who are in need of housing and support are managed. Whilst this is a significant ruling and will challenge the way all agencies in East Devon work with this group of young people, we are in a strong position to implement any necessary changes. In recent years we have worked closely with other district councils and CYPS (Devon County Council) to reduce homelessness applications from this age group and a number of resources have been provided to support vulnerable 16/17 year olds in housing need. We see it as essential that we build on the success of our partnership and the challenges brought by this judgement, and continue to prevent homelessness among this group of young people. A briefing note on this issue is at **Annex B** for information.
- II. The government has recently published a new strategy to tackle rough sleeping – “NO ONE LEFT OUT – Communities ending rough sleeping”. This strategy sets a target of having no rough sleepers by 2012. A huge amount of work was done to reduce homelessness, reduce use of B&B and increase the quality of accommodation for homeless households. Lessons from this can be applied to reducing the numbers of rough sleepers. In order to achieve such a challenging target there is a recognition that all Local Authorities need to work in partnership to end rough sleeping, not just those Authorities with a visible problem, but their neighbouring Authorities as well.
- III. Another key element of the initiative is preventing the need for people to sleep rough in the first place. A joint approach across Devon by the Devon Housing Options Partnership, a sub group of the Devon Housing Strategic Partnership to tackle this issue is being developed. In East Devon we are beginning work with partner agencies to understand the problem of rough sleeping in our area and what opportunities/solutions are available. A county-wide co-ordinator has been funded by Government and Supporting People, and is funded initially until March 2010. The aim is to work across the districts including Plymouth and Torbay to agree some common aims amongst the districts that will form the basis of a County-wide Rough Sleeper Strategy; explore the feasibility of a county-wide data base recording approaches to agencies and housing advice by people who are non- priority homeless; carry out a Devon-Wide Street Needs Audit; and identify rough sleeping hotspots outside of the traditional areas (Exeter, Plymouth and North Devon), such as Exmouth. Members will be kept informed of developments.

2. Performance and Achievements

- 2.1 Members have provided additional staff resources in the Housing Needs team in 2008/09, and in 2009/10 provided an additional £20,000 to part fund a worker with SmartMove – see below. The emphasis over the last 3 years has been to develop options and prevention measures for homeless households. A number of initiatives/measures, including funding workers with CAB, Young Devon and more recently Smartmove has achieved significant reductions in homelessness acceptances and the use of temporary accommodation, and improved the quality of our service provision. Key performance data is provided below.
- 2.2 Homeless acceptances in 2008/09 were 78 households compared with 108 households in 2007/08, and 113 households in 2006/07. A 28% reduction from 2007/08 to 2008/09.
- 2.3 Use of temporary accommodation has reduced to 96 households as at 31 March 2008 (Government target of 117 by December 2009 was set in 2005). This compares with 145 as at 31 March 2007, and 194 as at 31 March 2006. The reduction in acceptances and the use of temporary accommodation led to relinquishing the homeless hostel at the Kerans Hotel in 2008/09 at a cost of £99,372 per annum.
- 2.4 Our rent deposit/bond and rent in advance scheme has helped people access accommodation in the private rented sector. Financial help is in the form of a loan (actual money) or a bond (a guarantee by the Council to pay an agreed amount, if required). Some of these households are families or single people who would have been homeless, but are either non priority or intentionally homeless. However, without our financial support they potentially would have been 'sofa surfing' or rough sleeping or staying with relatives and overcrowding their accommodation. Most households using the scheme were homeless and in priority need and who without our help would have been accepted as homeless and placed in temporary accommodation until offered settled accommodation. A total of 242 loans have been made at a cost of £267,000. 35 loans (£34,000) have been repaid fully. There is £109,000 currently outstanding and the Council receives payments averaging £3,700 per month.

3. Smartmove

- 3.1 Members approved a 'growth' bid in 2009/10 of £20,000 to part fund a worker with Smartmove. This was a joint venture with Mid Devon. This has been a great success in helping to prevent homeless; reduce our use of temporary accommodation and reduce the number of our homeless acceptances. Our £20,000 buys us a caseworker for two and half days a week and allows us to refer up to 8 people a month for help to find private rented accommodation. Since April we have actually referred 58 households. 50% of these were non statutory homeless either non priority or intentionally homeless. The remaining households would have been considered homeless and in priority need and we would have had a duty to find them settled accommodation. 50% of our referrals do not get accepted by SmartMove due to being high risk, or not suitable, or have own resources and do not need help, or disengage/find own accommodation. Most of these are non statutory homeless. Some also refuse SmartMove help and are referred back to us.
- 3.2 Since April Smartmove has helped 19 households access private rented accommodation. In some of these cases we have provided the rent in advance loan because Smartmove were unable to access financial support from other sources. In addition, 10 cases have been referred to other agencies for help or they have accessed supported accommodation such as the Exeter Foyer, Alexandra House in Exmouth, Longragg Court in Axminster or relocated outside our area.

4. Quality Standard Framework/Enhanced Housing Options (QSF/EHO)

- 4.1 District Councils in Devon are working together to improve the quality of housing advice and to deliver comprehensive housing options to customers. Working together with Shelter we are adopting a uniform quality standard framework that gives clear guidance for the strategic development, planning, delivery, and monitoring of housing options and homelessness prevention activity.
- 4.2 The framework is a quality assurance system that reflects good practice and is a shared set of aspirational standards that each authority can strive to achieve at its own pace. It does not replace statutory provisions or government guidance, but has been designed to work within the context of relevant legislation and codes of guidance. It provides a 'standard' for working with partners; awareness and access; case management; support for staff; and monitoring of the service. We have started a joint benchmarking, audit and assessment and mystery shopping exercise that will identify strengths and weaknesses in these areas and provide guidance on meeting the standard.
- 4.3 Housing Services has applied the Systems Thinking approach to the provision of our housing advice and options service. We have also applied the QSF and EHO and adopted some good practice from other district councils. Changes have been made to our service and we are emphasising that our focus should be on gathering information to fully understand the clients housing issues; resolve issues at 'one stop'; focussing on homeless prevention; and proactively managing our casework. This should improve the quality of our service while maintaining the ongoing improvements in homeless performance and doing 'what matters' for the customer.

5. Repossession Prevention Fund

- 5.1 The Government recently provided additional grant funding of £47,500 to help prevent repossessions during the 'recession'. This is a one off payment that each local authority has received. It is expected to be used to help people who through no fault of their own are struggling with their mortgage or rental payments in the current climate and are at risk of becoming homeless through repossession or eviction. Loans or grants can be provided where the arrears are as a result of an income 'shock' caused by ill health; job loss; bankruptcy or relationship breakdown. Where loans are provided funding is expected to be repaid to the Council. This will allow the fund to be replenished and potentially be available for use in future years, albeit at a reduced level. What is not spent in 2009/10 is expected to be carried forward to subsequent years.

6. Summary

- 6.1 The actions approved in the Homelessness Strategy for East Devon 2008-2013 are being progressed and are being monitored quarterly by a multi agency review group. Overall the strategy is being implemented. However, the key action relating to the provision of social rented housing will not be met because of the current economic situation. We have made significant progress in tackling homelessness in the district by targeted investment and adopting a clear and effective plan of action.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications requiring comment.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications in the attached progress report.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

None.

Background Papers

EDDC Homelessness Strategy July 2008

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