

HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING ADVICE – BEST VALUE REVIEW

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This is the final report resulting from the pilot review of homelessness and housing advice services.
- 1.2 It identifies an action plan for improvements.
- 1.3 The provision of homelessness services and advice about homelessness and its prevention are statutory services.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At the Committee meeting on 10 October 2000, Members considered an interim report on this review. Since that report, further work has been undertaken to consult with stakeholders and to identify possible service improvements and options for provision.

3 THE PROCESS OF BEST VALUE

- 3.1 As Councils review their services using Best Value principles, each service review is expected to incorporate the “four Cs”, namely:-
 - To challenge why and how a service is being provided.
 - To compare the services with the performance that others are achieving.
 - To consult on how the service can be improved.
 - To demonstrate competitiveness of the service's performance.
- 3.2 The internal Officer Review Group has looked at how the homelessness and housing advice services are currently provided, what they cost, what are their strengths and weaknesses and how they are performing, including by comparison with other organisations. The Review Group's report is appended.

4 THE WAY FORWARD

- 4.1 With the information from the review, Members now need to consider the future provision of these services.
- 4.2 A key question in every Best Value Review is “should we be providing the service at all?”

With homelessness, the Review Group concluded that this is a high risk, statutory duty and that there are currently no satisfactory alternative options for service provision, either internally or externally.

With housing advice, there may be longer term alternatives to in-house provision, and the Review Group recommends that these be explored further. A policy decision needs to be made about whether the Council wishes to develop a more proactive, comprehensive housing advice service, which will have greater costs than the present level of provision.

- 4.3 It became clear during the review that the services face considerable demand-led pressures and that there are difficulties in balancing workloads and demands for the services with the staffing, accommodation and other resources that are currently available.
- 4.4 The review also showed that there are areas where service quality improvements need to be made, particularly:
- Speeding up decision making on homelessness applications.
 - Securing a larger supply of suitable accommodation for homeless applicants – both interim accommodation for use whilst claims are being investigated, and temporary accommodation for housing applicants once they have received a favourable decision.
- 4.5 The Review Group recognised that the housing Green Paper “Quality and Choice – A Decent Home for All” issued in April 2000, and the very recent Government policy announcements, will bring greater demands on the services. These will need to be further evaluated as the details are published.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 These are outlined in the report.
- 5.2 The 2001/02 budget strategy includes £20,000 for additional staffing for homelessness work. From the further work that has now been carried out, it is felt that a total additional staffing cost of £46,000 is required if the service is to develop along the lines suggested in the accompanying Best Value review report. Given the budgetary position of the Authority, it is therefore proposed to develop the staffing resource initially in line with the £20,000 budget allocation and then monitor how the service is progressing, with a view to seeking the further additional resource at the half yearly budgetary review stage.

6 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Prevention of homelessness is an important factor in ensuring social inclusion.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee RESOLVES
- (1) That the homelessness service remains within the Housing, Health and Community Care Division.
 - (2) That the establishment of the homelessness and housing advice team be agreed, in principle, as comprising a Senior Homelessness and Housing Advice Officer, a Homelessness and Housing Advice Officer and an Administrative Assistant, and that the proposed budget allocation for 2001/02 be utilised to progress towards the establishment of this team, with a review of progress at the half yearly budget stage.
 - (3) That the provision of a comprehensive housing advice service be investigated in principle and that options for separating housing advice and homelessness services be further investigated, including joint working with other organisations.
 - (4) That subject to any amendment by Members, the list of issues to be included in the Improvement Plan be agreed in principle and that a draft plan including target dates and outcomes be brought to the next Committee Meeting.
 - (5) That Finance & General Purposes Committee be requested to agree the current arrangements for procurement of bed and breakfast accommodation.
 - (6) That the authority to determine homelessness reviews be delegated to Officers.
 - (7) That visits be arranged for those Members of the Committee who wish to see the bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation used for homeless persons. (HHHCC)

G Woolhouse

Head of Housing, Health & Community Care

Background Papers:

None

For further information please contact G Woolhouse on:-

Tel:- 01702 546366 (ext 3300)
E-Mail:- graham.woolhouse@rochford.gov.uk