

Housing Best Value Sub-Committee – 22 July 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Housing Best Value Sub-Committee** at a reconvened meeting held on **22 July 2003** when there were present:-

Cllr P F A Webster (Chairman)

Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr T Livings

Cllr P K Savill
Cllr Mrs M S Vince

OFFICERS PRESENT

G Woolhouse - Head of Housing, Health & Community Care
S Neville - Residential Services Unit Manager
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

12 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

The Sub-Committee proceeded to give page by page consideration to the draft Homelessness Strategy Action Plan, which formed the final part of the strategy document to be submitted to the next meeting of Full Council for approval. (A copy of the draft strategy as revised at this and the previous adjourned meeting is attached to the signed copy of these Minutes).

At the commencement of this item, the Residential Services Unit Manager tabled two guidance documents on eligibility under homeless legislation. Further information could be provided if considered appropriate.

It was noted that applicants for housing were asked for proof of identity. If a passport was not available other documentation was sought. Where adequate documentation could not be provided, officers liaised with other organisations such as the Police or Immigration Service as necessary.

Responding to Member questions on the Draft Action Plan, officers advised that:-

- The Council had not been notified that any of its bed and breakfast facilities were no longer available.
- One approach for developing more robust statistics on the number of rough sleepers within the District would be to work with organisations such as the Homeless Action Resource Project.
- The actions required under developing alternatives to the use of bed and breakfast for homeless people may be achievable from existing budgets.
- A rent deposit scheme had been used quite successfully in the past. In the context of costs associated with the provision of bed and breakfast facilities there was financial capacity to provide schemes which may be favourable to private sector landlords. The financial impact associated

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with working with housing associations may be greater, although associations had private sector leasing schemes whereby councils only paid management costs.

- It is legally possible to find that families with children are intentionally homeless. Councillors have in the past sometimes taken the view that compassionate reasons override strict legal considerations.
- Rules on cash incentive schemes had been loosened over recent years. Such schemes were one mechanism for providing a vacancy and, whilst amounts paid may seem high, they were not necessarily hugely attractive in the context of the size of mortgages required to enter the private sector. Officers would produce a paper on incentive schemes to enable a more detailed understanding. The paper would include information on figures over recent years.
- It would be possible to identify a number of options for improving the standard of the Council's hostel. Proposals would be brought into the Committee process. Occupants of hostels were expected to meet their gas, electricity and water costs.
- Reference to improving the provision for removal and storage of homeless applicants' possessions was included in the Best Value Action Plan and could be included as a bullet point within the Homelessness Strategy.
- Some cost reductions might be associated with the outcomes of the actions identified within the Action Plan. The Action Plan contained a number of initiatives which required further investigation and costing before decisions could be taken on whether they should be implemented. When proposals are brought forward it would be possible to identify the total spend and whether charges proposed would increase or decrease that spend.
- The Council made arrangements for vulnerable clients to receive support as appropriate. Parenting and life skill support schemes were available.
- In terms of supporting couple and family relationships, Relate South Essex had recently offered free mediation for a period. The Council had involvement with the Social Services children and family service. By the time the needs for this area were next reviewed, it would be possible to have a better idea of costs/ effectiveness.

Having completed the review of the draft Homelessness Strategy, Members concurred with the view of the Chairman that officers should be thanked for all their efforts in producing the document.

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The meeting commenced at 10.00am and closed at 11.12am.

Chairman

Date