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## **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY – EMERGING ISSUES**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report updates Members on progress with the development of the Council's homelessness strategy and the issues that are arising.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 At the meeting of this Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2002, Members considered a report on the implications of the Housing Act 2002. This Act made changes to the law in respect of homelessness and allocations and introduced a requirement on all Local Authorities to produce a homelessness strategy by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2003.
- 2.2 The Best Value Review of homelessness and housing advice services that was completed in January 2001 provides a good foundation for the homelessness strategy.

### **3 PROGRESS**

- 3.1 A small working group has been set up to draft the strategy. This group consists of Council Officers together with representatives of Social Services, the Castle Point & Rochford Primary Care Trust, the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Homelessness Action Resource Project (H.A.R.P.). The working group is also responsible for ensuring the strategy is implemented and that it is periodically reviewed.
- 3.2 The group has started the homelessness review but obtaining meaningful statistical information from the various agencies involved in homelessness work is proving difficult. The Government recognises that these agencies are likely to have different ways of gathering information and suggests that developing a common recording system may form part of the strategy.
- 3.3 In the circumstances the review will have to rely mainly on the statistical information that the Council collects in respect of its own activities. An interim summary has already been considered by the working group and it is intended to update this once the 2002/03 financial year has ended and provide it as an addendum to this report.
- 3.4 To assist with the review process the various agencies were invited to attend the second meeting of the working group. This meeting, which was attended by floating support providers, housing associations, Social Services, Health, Probation, the Connexions Service and the Womens Refuge was very successful. It not only provided an

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opportunity for the organisations to meet and find out what others were doing, but also to share the problems they were experiencing.

#### **4 EMERGING ISSUES**

4.1 The work completed so far has not revealed any particular trends in homelessness and many of the issues arising are the same as those identified in the Best Value Review. The prevention of homelessness is a key part of any strategy and the provision of timely advice is essential. In this respect it has already been established that the Council needs to review the way in which housing advice is provided. Other key issues are :

- There is a lack of suitable accommodation, particularly on an emergency basis, for particular groups including young people, dangerous offenders and those with drug and alcohol problems.
- The support available for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness needs to be improved.
- There is a shortage of social housing lettings available to homeless people. Options for increasing the overall amount of social housing need exploring further and the allocation policy needs to be kept under review to ensure that an appropriate numbers of lettings are made to people of homeless origins.
- There is a shortage of low cost housing either to buy or to rent in the district and this restricts the options available to people to solve their housing problems.
- There is an urgent need to find alternatives to the use of bed and breakfast accommodation especially for families.
- Reviews of homelessness decisions take too long to complete and the process needs to be reconsidered.

4.2 The Housing Best Value Sub-Committee is considering progress with the action plan arising from the pilot best value review of homelessness and housing advice services and it is, therefore, suggested that it would be appropriate for that sub-committee to oversee the drafting of the new statutory homelessness strategy.

#### **5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are strong linkages between homelessness and housing advice services and reducing crime and disorder. The homelessness strategy must be consistent with the crime and disorder strategy.

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**6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The resource implications of the homelessness strategy will depend on the strategy that the Council finally adopts.
- 6.2 The provision of advice services that prevent homelessness and developing alternatives to bed and breakfast accommodation will help reduce costs incurred in providing accommodation.

**7 RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1 It is proposed
- (1) That the Committee notes the progress being made on the development of the homelessness strategy.
  - (2) That the Housing Best Value Sub-Committee oversees the drafting of the homelessness strategy. (HHHCC)

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**Background Papers:**

Minutes of the Homelessness Strategy Working Group meetings held on 30/01/03 & 12/03/03

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