

WIRRAL COUNCIL

DELEGATED AUTHORITY

25TH MARCH 2013

SUBJECT:	HOMELESS STRATEGY 2013 – 18
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	KEVIN ADDERLEY
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	GEORGE DAVIES
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- a) Provide members with an overview of the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 for Wirral.
- b) To seek approval for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 to be published for final wider consultation.

1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to adopt a strategic approach to homeless issues by completing a comprehensive review of all forms of homelessness in their area and publishing a Homeless Strategy at least every five years, ensuring this is taken into account when discharging its homeless function.

1.3 This new Homeless Strategy will assist in meeting one of the Council's Corporate Priorities to significantly 'prevent and alleviate homelessness' by focusing on the continuous evaluation and improvement of homeless services to meet local needs.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 Wirral Council has produced a Homelessness Strategy since 2003 and this third strategy is informed by the findings and recommendations of a comprehensive review of homeless services carried out during 2011/12, along with a review of the effectiveness of the previous Homeless Strategy.

2.2 The Homeless Review was conducted over a period of seven months and involved extensive engagement with service users and service providers. Engagement included customer and agency surveys, one to one discussion with people who have experienced homelessness in Wirral, discussions with staff from organisations who work to prevent or respond to homelessness or who commission services that contribute to these objectives, along with workshops for both service users and stakeholders.

2.3 The findings and recommendations of the Review have provided a clear direction for preventing and addressing homeless in Wirral, reflecting the factors we know will impact on homelessness in the future. These findings and recommendations have formed the basis for the development of the new five year Homeless Strategy.

3.0 WIRRAL'S DRAFT HOMELESS STRATEGY 2013 – 18

- 3.1 The strategy builds upon the successful work already achieved through the two previous homeless strategies along with the priorities identified in the 2011 – 26 overarching Housing Strategy for the borough. It sets the strategic framework for Wirral by bringing together policies and initiatives agreed by stakeholder partners in one document, providing a clear direction for preventing and reducing homelessness.
- 3.2 The vision for Wirral's Homeless Strategy is 'that no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality'. Although the main focus of the strategy is homeless prevention, it still acknowledges that there are instances particularly in the current economic climate where homelessness cannot be prevented and others where it is extremely difficult to address as in the case of entrenched rough sleepers with multiple and complex needs. It is therefore important that we work to ensure appropriate housing and support services are available to respond to this especially with changes being implemented relating to health, benefit and welfare reform.
- 3.3 In the Government report 'Making Every Contact Count: a joint approach to preventing homelessness' (August 2012), there is clear recognition that intervening earlier to prevent homelessness is key to the Government's ambitions on social justice. This is particularly central in terms of supporting the most disadvantaged individuals and families by tackling many of the underlying problems that if left unchecked, can contribute to homelessness.
- 3.4 Wirral's draft strategy recognises this, acknowledging that combating homelessness is not just about bricks and mortar and therefore there is need for real commitment from all local authority services and key partners to prevent and address homelessness.
- 3.5 The strategic priorities identified in this draft strategy, reflect local need and are clearly aligned with the challenges the Government has set out for local authorities to take forward both now and in future years.

4.0 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 4.1 As highlighted in 3.4 of this report, partnership working is a cross cutting theme which is fundamental to achieving Wirral's Homeless Strategy vision. The relationships between various teams and departments within the Council, key partners, stakeholders and the community and voluntary sector are critical to developing the true partnerships needed especially in the current challenging financial times. This will ensure services commissioned now and in the future and access to appropriate accommodation are targeted to meet those most vulnerable and in need.
- 4.2 The Homeless Strategy and the Strategic Homeless Action Plan will expand and develop those priority areas identified in both the Housing Strategy 2011 – 2026 Strategic Housing Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan. It will focus the work we need to take forward with our partners to prevent homelessness.
- 4.3 The following four strategic priorities have been developed to take forward this work:

Preventing homelessness through early intervention and better partnership working

Although we have significantly reduced homelessness in Wirral through prevention initiatives, demand for services is expected to increase as a result of welfare benefit reform and the general economic climate. At the same time access to accommodation is becoming more pressured and it is important therefore to continue to review and improve the existing support available to people who are at risk of becoming homeless.

The Government has been clear to prioritise homeless prevention and continues to take forward a range of reforms and investment to tackle homelessness such as the No Second Night Out model. There is a clear requirement and focus on continuing to work with our partners to ensure these opportunities are utilised.

Strengthening partnership working to ensure that the housing and support needs of more challenging clients are met when homelessness cannot be prevented, including working together to end rough sleeping

Where key challenges and gaps in services have been identified, we need to adopt a collective approach to strategically direct and co-ordinate services and resources on how we respond.

Joint protocols will be developed where appropriate to ensure partners are aware of the expectations and roles they and the Council have to play in preventing homelessness, ensuring every contact partners make with vulnerable people and families really count. With Public Health now at the heart of the Council, it is crucial to ensure we continue to realise opportunities to work with health colleagues to improve outcomes for those who are at risk of becoming homeless and who are accessing health services.

Evaluating and realigning homelessness and prevention services to deliver value for money in a climate of increasing demand and reducing resources, recognising the wider costs of homelessness

Services need to be widely accessible across the borough and delivered in a way that ensures customers are at the heart of what we do. To achieve this in a climate of reduced resources, services will need to be focused, deliver value for money, ensuring that any duplication of existing services is removed.

Strong partnership working will enable us to recognise and promote the cost savings that early intervention and prevention can make for other services further down the line. This will inform the process for evaluating, recommissioning and realigning homelessness and prevention services where appropriate.

Increasing access to the private rented sector

The Council recognises the increased demand for appropriate, affordable housing to meet local need, acknowledging homelessness in the future will be driven by the challenging and changing economic climate and public expenditure savings.

Welfare reforms along with the requirement to meet needs of other priority groups and the understanding that homelessness cannot be an assumed route into a social tenancy for life, means that we must look to develop access to the private rented sector as a sustainable and affordable solution for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The introduction of legislation in November 2012, for Local Authorities to discharge into the Private Rented Sector is timely for Wirral's strategy, to grasp this opportunity to increase the accommodation options available to help local people.

5.0 WORK ALREADY UNDERWAY

5.1 The Homeless review highlighted a number of significant issues which the Council and its partners have already worked to address whilst the Homeless Strategy has been developed. This work has been detailed in the strategy as 'Our success so far' and includes the development of a range of initiatives such as:

- setting up a pilot Private Sector Leasing scheme which enables the team to place homeless clients to be placed into these properties instead of Bed and Breakfast type accommodation.
- Clarifying Registered Providers approach to rent arrears and enabling customers to be offered a tenancy. This has been reflected in the allocations policy.
- The Council now provides more readily available housing options to prevent people from rough sleeping, sofa surfing or drifting into hostels when they have no support needs through bonds, discretionary housing payments and personalised solutions.
- Regular training and access to current information keeps One Stop Shop staff up to date with changes to services and eligibilities ensuring that the correct advice is given to people who need advice and assistance.
- The Council has identified a housing Armed Forces Champion who represents the needs of current and former Armed Forces personnel and their families and is able to influence decisions which impact on this client group.
- The Council's Finance Department have delivered awareness sessions to a number of external organisations and all front line staff on the Welfare Reform Act 2011 changes and a regular newsletter is also produced to help keep staff up to date. The team will continue to update staff as the Welfare Reform Act is rolled out to ensure accurate and consistent advice is given.
- A joint protocol between Housing and Children and Young People's Department on dealing with 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless has been signed and launched.
- Wirral Church Ark project (The Ark) has worked with Birkenhead YMCA (BYMCA), Arch Initiatives and the Council to submit a bid for Homeless Transition Funding which has secured funding, in line with the Council's strategic priorities, to ensure services available for both new and entrenched rough sleepers are available 24 hours per day to increase the level of intervention and support available to get them off the streets. The Council has provided match funding for this initiative. BYMCA has employed a worker to engage with people using the night shelter to increase their connection with services.
- The Ark and Wirral Partnership Homes are working in partnership to enable homeless service users to repair and refurnish empty properties for their own future use.

5.3 This successful work clearly demonstrates the commitment the Council and its partners has in place to respond to Wirral's vision for addressing homelessness in the borough **'that no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality'**.

6.0 MONITORING THE STRATEGY

- 6.1 The Homeless Strategy and Strategic Homeless Action Plan clearly needs to be supported by partner commitment to reduce and tackle homelessness. Stakeholders and partners have been engaged in the whole review process and it is proposed they will be engaged through further consultation on the development of the strategic homeless action plan.
- 6.2 The progress of the strategy and action plan will be monitored by Wirral's' Homeless Forum and reviewed annually in order that it can be responsive to emerging need.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Without a Homeless Strategy and Strategic Homeless Action Plan, there is an increased risk of:
- a) a breach of the Homelessness Act 2002 which places a statutory duty on local authorities to produce and publish a Homeless Strategy at least every five years, ensuring this is taken into account when discharging its homeless function.
 - b) the number of people becoming homeless increasing significantly as a result of the impact of issues such as welfare reform and the current economic climate.
 - c) the Council and its partners not taking full advantage of new housing policy and investment opportunities to respond to homelessness in Wirral.
 - d) key partners and stakeholders not being clear on the Council's strategic priorities and responsive actions to support these and therefore that key opportunities for investment and joint working are missed and the risk that uncoordinated services will lead to duplication and poor value for money.

8.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 There were no other options considered.

9.0 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 The new Homeless Strategy is informed by a comprehensive review of homelessness in Wirral, which was undertaken by an independent consultant over a period of seven months which concluded in 2012.
- 9.2 The review process was informed by an intensive process of active engagement with service users and service providers. Engagement included customer and agency surveys, one to one discussion with people who have experienced homelessness in Wirral, discussions with staff from organisations who work to prevent or respond to homelessness or who commission services that contribute to these objectives, along with workshops for both service users and stakeholders.
- 9.3 The draft findings and recommendations identified through the review process were discussed and agreed in detail with all those who participated in the review. This ensures partner commitment to addressing and preventing homelessness.

- 9.4 Further discussions have taken place with members of the Homeless Forum, internal Council teams and external stakeholders, to identify the key priorities and recommendations which should be focused upon.
- 9.5 If members approve the draft strategy for publication, further consultation will take place with stakeholders and service users over a period of three weeks, with the findings of this consultation informing the finalised strategy. The finalised strategy will be subject of a final report to Members following the consultation.

10.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 10.1 As the Government has prioritised homeless prevention, it continues to take forward a range of reforms and provides opportunities to access investment to tackle homelessness. Examples of this include initiatives such as the Homeless Transition Fund and the Crisis Private Rented Sector Access Fund which have been made available specifically to the community and voluntary sector, to proactively target vulnerable people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- 10.2 These opportunities are likely to continue in the future and therefore it is important that community and voluntary groups are encouraged to take up these opportunities and support the Council in addressing homelessness.
- 10.3 Some services which are commissioned by the Local Authority may be provided by the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector. Any changes to services or commissioning will be the subject of a separate consultation process as part of any contractual arrangements which may be in place.

11.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 11.1 There are no direct financial implications at this stage in respect of the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18. Any future requirements and actions arising from the development of the Strategic Homeless Action Plan that have any financial implications, would be subject to further consideration by members prior to implementation.

12.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

13.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 seeks to address homelessness and those who are vulnerable and subject to social exclusion and equalities issues.

(a) Yes and impact review is attached –

14.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

15.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

16.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

16.1 Members approve the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 to be published for further consultation.

17.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

17.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to adopt a strategic approach to homeless issues by completing a comprehensive review of all forms of homelessness in their area and publishing a Homeless Strategy at least every five years, ensuring this is taken into account when discharging its homeless function.

17.2 This report provides members with an overview of the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 and seeks approval for its publication to enable further consultation to take place to develop the Strategic Homeless Action plan which supports the strategy.

REPORT AUTHOR: Sue Hooper
Deputy Manager – Housing Strategy Team
telephone: (0151) 691 8245
email: suehooper@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

REFERENCE MATERIAL

(Include background information referred to or relied upon when drafting this report, together with details of where the information can be found. There is no need to refer to publicly available material: e.g. Acts of Parliament or Government guidance.)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet – Review of Homeless Services in Wirral	23 rd June 2011
Cabinet - Appointment of consultants for Review of Homeless Services in Wirral	3 rd November 2011

Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit (from May 2012)**Section 1: Your details****EIA lead Officer:** Sue Hooper**Email address:** suehooper@wirral.gov.uk**Head of Section:** Ian Platt**Chief Officer:** Kevin Adderley**Department:** Regeneration, Housing and Planning**Date:** 10th December 2012.**Section 2: What Council proposal is being assessed?**

2013 – 18 Homeless Strategy and Strategic Homeless Plan

Section 2b: Will this EIA be submitted to a Cabinet or Overview & Scrutiny Committee?**Yes / No** If 'yes' please state which meeting and what date7th February 2013Please add hyperlink to where your EIA is/will be published on the Council's website (**see your Departmental Equality Group Chair for appropriate hyperlink**)**Section 3: Does the proposal have the potential to affect..... (please tick relevant boxes)** **Services** **The workforce** **Communities**

Other (please state eg: Partners, Private Sector, Voluntary & Community Sector)

Voluntary and Community Sector

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 4.

None (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 4: Does the proposal have the potential to maintain or enhance the way the Council (please tick relevant boxes)

Eliminates unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation

Advances equality of opportunity

Fosters good relations between groups of people

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 5.

No (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 5:

Could the proposal have a positive or negative impact on any of the protected groups (race, gender, disability, gender reassignment, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership)?

You may also want to consider socio-economic status of individuals.

Please list in the table below and include actions required to mitigate any potential negative impact.

Which group(s) of people could be affected	Potential positive or negative impact	Action required to mitigate any potential negative impact	Lead person	Timescale	Resource implications
Race	The vision for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 is that ‘no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality’. The draft strategy 2013 – 18 is therefore fully inclusive regardless of race. The Strategic Action Plan that is further developed following public consultation will ensure key actions are targeted to respond to the strategic priorities developed in the strategy				
Gender	The vision for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 - 18 is that ‘no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality’. The draft strategy 2013 – 18 is therefore fully inclusive regardless of gender. The Strategic Action Plan that is further developed following public consultation will				

	ensure key actions are targeted to respond to the strategic priorities developed in the strategy				
Disability	<p>The vision for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 is that ‘no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality’.</p> <p>The draft strategy 2013 – 18 is therefore fully inclusive regardless of disability.</p> <p>The Strategic Action Plan that is further developed following public consultation will ensure key actions are targeted to respond to the strategic priorities developed in the strategy</p>				
Gender reassignment	<p>The vision for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 is that ‘no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality’.</p> <p>The draft strategy 2013 – 18 is therefore fully inclusive regardless of gender reassignment.</p> <p>The Strategic Action Plan that is further developed following public consultation will ensure key actions are targeted to respond to the strategic priorities developed in the strategy</p>				
Age	<p>The vision for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 is that ‘no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality’.</p> <p>The draft strategy 2013 – 18 is therefore fully inclusive regardless of age.</p> <p>The Strategic Action Plan that is further</p>				

	<p>developed following public consultation will ensure key actions are targeted to respond to the strategic priorities developed in the strategy</p>				
Pregnancy and maternity	<p>The vision for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 is that ‘no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality’.</p> <p>The draft strategy 2013 – 18 is therefore fully inclusive regardless of pregnancy and maternity.</p> <p>The Strategic Action Plan that is further developed following public consultation will ensure key actions are targeted to respond to the strategic priorities developed in the strategy</p>				
Religion and belief	<p>The vision for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 is that ‘no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality’.</p> <p>The draft strategy 2013 – 18 is therefore fully inclusive regardless of religion and belief.</p> <p>The Strategic Action Plan that is further developed following public consultation will ensure key actions are targeted to respond to the strategic priorities developed in the strategy</p>				
Sexual orientation	<p>The vision for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 is that ‘no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality’.</p> <p>The draft strategy 2013 – 18 is therefore fully</p>				

	<p>inclusive regardless of sexual orientation. The Strategic Action Plan that is further developed following public consultation will ensure key actions are targeted to respond to the strategic priorities developed in the strategy</p>				
Marriage and civil partnership	<p>The vision for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 is that ‘no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality’.</p> <p>The draft strategy 2013 – 18 is therefore fully inclusive regardless of marriage and civil partnership.</p> <p>The Strategic Action Plan that is further developed following public consultation will ensure key actions are targeted to respond to the strategic priorities developed in the strategy</p>				
Socio-economic status	<p>The vision for the draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 is that ‘no one needs to be homeless and partners will work together to make this a reality’.</p> <p>The draft strategy 2013 – 18 is therefore fully inclusive regardless of socio-economic status.</p> <p>The Strategic Action Plan that is further developed following public consultation will ensure key actions are targeted to respond to the strategic priorities developed in the strategy</p>				

Section 5a: Where and how will the above actions be monitored?

The Strategic Homeless Action Plan which will support the 2013 – 18 Homeless Strategy will be regularly monitored by the Homeless Forum and will be reviewed annually.

Section 5b: If you think there is no negative impact, what is your reasoning behind this?

The draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 and all the activities developed to respond to this which will be included in Strategic Homeless Action Plan will be focused around achieving positive results for people who are either at risk of or are already homeless.

Section 6: What research / data / information have you used in support of this process?

The draft Homeless Strategy 2013 – 18 and supporting Strategic Homeless Action plan developed have been informed by a comprehensive independent review of homelessness in Wirral, carried out by Gill Leng Housing Solutions during late 2011 and early 2012. The draft strategy is also informed by Wirral's overarching Housing Strategy 2011 – 26.

Section 7: Are you intending to carry out any consultation with regard to this Council proposal?

Yes

If 'yes' please continue to section 8.

If 'no' please state your reason(s) why:

(please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 8: How will consultation take place and by when?

Extensive consultation has already been undertaken as part of the Homeless Review process. It is these recommendations from the Review that have formed the basis of the strategy and action plan.

Further consultation will however take place with key stakeholders and service users in February / March 2013. This will be carried out using the web and by officers from the Strategic Housing Division of the Department of Regeneration, Housing and Planning

Before you complete your consultation, please email your preliminary EIA to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer in order for the Council to ensure it is meeting it's legal requirements. The EIA will be published with a note saying we are awaiting outcomes from a consultation exercise.

Once you have completed your consultation, please review your actions in section 5. Then email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for re-publishing.

Section 9: Have you remembered to:

- a) **Add appropriate departmental hyperlink to where your EIA is/will be published (section 2b)**
- b) **Include any potential positive impacts as well as negative impacts? (section 5)**
- c) **Send this EIA to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer?**
- d) **Review section 5 once consultation has taken place and sent your completed EIA to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer for re-publishing?**