

## WIRRAL COUNCIL

### CABINET

11<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2013

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013 – 18</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT</b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>GEORGE DAVIES</b>
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	<b>YES</b>

#### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval and endorsement of Wirral's Homelessness Strategy 2013-18 following public consultation with stakeholders and service users. The Homelessness Strategy is a statutory requirement of the Homelessness Act 2002 which 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 Homelessness Strategy at least every five years, ensuring this is taken into account when discharging its homeless function.
- 1.2 This new Homelessness Strategy will support one of the Council's Corporate Plan 2013 – 2016 focuses which is to '*Protect the vulnerable people in our borough*'.

#### 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 Homelessness 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 homelessness 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 Homelessness Strategy which has been produced.

#### 3.0 WIRRALS DRAFT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013 – 18 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 The draft strategy was approved under delegated authority on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2013 for publication and public consultation. This consultation took place over a period of four weeks between 10<sup>th</sup> May 2013 and 7<sup>th</sup> June 2013. The consultation questionnaire was posted on the Council's website, was publicised directly to all stakeholders via email, in

the local press and via social media to ensure as wide an audience as possible was able to comment.

- 3.2 The questionnaire consisted of four key questions relating to the vision, the strategic priorities, the Strategic Homeless Action Plan and the role respondents could play in addressing homelessness.
- 3.3 In total 25 respondents took part in the consultation although not all responded to every question. Of those 41.2% (7) were service providers, 41.2% (7) were members of the public, 11.8% (2) were social landlords, 5.9% (1) was a service user. The remaining eight did not indicate their interest or role in relation to homelessness .
- 3.4 No adverse comments were received regarding the strategy with overall the majority of responses being very positive and supportive, acknowledging the focus of the strategy and strategic priorities as important in addressing and preventing homelessness in Wirral. These positive comments which reinforced the detail in the strategy ranged from acknowledging the scale of the challenge faced in light of Welfare Reform along with the difficulties in securing accommodation for more vulnerable people, to acknowledging the lack of security of tenure in the Private Rented Sector and general lack of support available for tenants.
- 3.5 Linking in with the comment made acknowledging the lack of security of tenure in the Private Rented Sector, a suggestion was made for the Council to take responsibility for the empty properties in the borough and manage the rental of them. Members will be aware that Wirral Council transferred the remainder of its housing stock in 2005 and therefore no longer has a structure in place to cover housing management functions which would be required if this was to be considered. As a result, this suggestion was not considered feasible to take forward, however the strategy is clear on the importance of developing the private rented sector as an additional solution to address the increased need in the borough for appropriate, affordable housing. It also acknowledges the well established Landlord Accreditation scheme in place which ensures accredited properties and landlords meet all required regulations as well as the need to continue to build on the relationships already established with landlords as a key contributing factor to developing the use of good quality private rented sector stock. Through this continued work, the concerns raised regarding the private rented sector will continue to be addressed by the Council and its partners, ensuring that opportunities, as they arise which could impact on this, are maximised.
- 3.6 Only one issue was raised through the consultation process which required the strategy to be amended and this related to Council Tax. A concern was raised that the *'strategy did not take into account the change in legislation whereby a reduction in Council Tax Support will require a significant contribution for some low income households and therefore may have an impact on homelessness in the borough'*. It is important to stress that the strategy already identifies Welfare Reform as key to impacting on homelessness in Wirral however no specific reference was originally made to the impact of the changes from Council Tax Benefit to Council Tax Support. The strategy has therefore been amended to reflect this, highlighting the key difference between the old Council Tax Benefit Scheme and the new Council Tax Support Scheme along with detail on the type of households and how many will be affected by this. This amendment is addressed in the 'Key Messages' section on page two of the Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018 (Appendix Two of this report)

3.7 The revised Homeless Strategy with the amendment detailed above is within Appendix Two.

#### **4.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

4.1 Without a Homelessness 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 Homelessness 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 strategic priorities and responsive actions to support these, that the Council is focusing on and therefore key opportunities for investment and joint working are missed.

#### **5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

5.1 Publishing a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years is a statutory requirement of the Homelessness Act 2002 and therefore no other options were considered.

#### **6.0 CONSULTATION**

6.1 The draft Homelessness 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 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 was done to ensure partner commitment to addressing and preventing homelessness.

6.4 Further discussions have taken place with both members of the Homeless Forum, internal Council teams and external stakeholders, to identify the key priorities and recommendations which should be focused upon in the draft strategy and strategic Homelessness Action Plan.

6.5 An initial draft Homelessness Strategy was approved under delegated authority to enable some further consultation work to be undertaken with key stakeholders. The action taken in response to the issues raised from this consultation is set out in section three of this report.

## **7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

- 7.1 The Government has identified homeless prevention as a priority to be addressed and continues to take forward a range of reforms providing 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.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 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.

## **8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications at this stage in respect of the draft Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 18. Any future requirements and actions that have any financial implications, would be subject to further consideration by members prior to implementation.

## **9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The legal implications are set out in the main body of this report.

## **10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The Homelessness 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 located –

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/regeneration-housing-planning>

## **11.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

## **12.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

## **13.0 RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 13.1 That Cabinet approve the Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 18 detailed in Appendix Two to this report.

## 14.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

14.1 The recommendation is key to the publication of a Homelessness Strategy. 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 Homelessness Strategy at least every five years, ensuring this is taken into account when discharging its homeless function.

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## APPENDICES

*Appendix One – Consultation summary on Wirral’s Homelessness Strategy 2013 - 18*  
*Appendix Two – Homelessness Strategy 2013-18*

## REFERENCE MATERIAL

### SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Cabinet</b> – Review of Homeless Services in Wirral	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2011
<b>Cabinet</b> - Appointment of consultants for Review of Homeless Services in Wirral	3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2011
<b>Cabinet (delegated approval)</b> – Approval for draft strategy to be publicised for consultation	12 <sup>th</sup> April 2013