



## AGENDA ITEM:

### SUMMARY

<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>17<sup>TH</sup> July 2013</b>
<b>PART:</b>	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY REPORT</b>
Contact:	<p>Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing</p> <p>Julia Hedger – Strategic Housing Group Manager</p> <p>Isabel Connolly – Strategy, Policy and Private Sector Housing Team Leader</p>
Purpose of report:	To update Members on the new draft Homelessness Strategy 2013 - 2018 (Appendix 1). Feedback and views will be considered prior to a draft being presented to Cabinet, and the consultation period commencing at the end of July 2013.
Recommendations	For Members to consider the content of the new draft strategy document and give their feedback.
Corporate objectives:	Affordable Housing
Implications:	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>The actions committed to in the draft Homelessness Strategy can be implemented in the first year within existing budgets. Some actions may identify future budgetary implications, and influence future financial planning through the Council's annual budget setting processes.</p> <p>Revenue streams into the department include rent and Housing Benefit collected for temporary accommodation properties. Welfare Reform by central government has raised a question mark over whether Housing Benefit can be considered a reliable income stream into the future. It is</p>

	<p>expected that the Council will need to apply flexibility in looking at the totality of resources rather than looking at each area of budget spend in isolation.</p> <p>Given the rise in homelessness acceptances, and the resulting increases in emergency and temporary accommodation costs, the Council recognises that there is a financial risk to 'doing-nothing' and that some actions are expected to identify opportunities to invest-to-save.</p> <p><u>Value for money</u></p> <p>Since the previous strategy was adopted in 2008, rising homelessness has caused the Council's emergency and temporary accommodation costs to increase rapidly. Additional accommodation has been procured, and additional staff have been recruited, to ensure that the Council can continue to meet its legal requirements to provide housing assistance and accommodation to homeless households.</p> <p>This new draft strategy now provides the opportunity for the Council to plan its homelessness service for the next five years so that resources can be planned to achieve the Council's strategic prevention objectives. This is underpinned by an overarching value-for-money objective that recognises that a strategic, planned approach is necessary to counter the pull on resources from responding to crises.</p> <p><u>Legal</u></p> <p>This strategy meets the duty placed on housing authorities in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by 2002 Homelessness Act) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out a review of homelessness in their areas;</li> <li>• Formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on this review;</li> <li>• Consult other local or public authorities, or voluntary organisations before adopting or modifying the strategy; and</li> <li>• Keep the strategy under review.</li> </ul>
<p>Risk Implications</p>	<p><u>Further rapid increases in homelessness</u></p> <p>A further rapid increase in homelessness acceptances could stretch the Council's capacity to meet its legal requirements to provide housing assistance and accommodation to homeless households. This would increase the cost of the service, while also presenting a challenge to the Council in meeting the strategic prevention objectives in the strategy.</p> <p>This risk can be mediated by 'acting now' to develop a preventative service that can meet the strategic objectives the Council has set.</p>



<p>Consultees:</p>	<p>Tenants and Leaseholders' Committee</p> <p>Mark Gaynor – Corporate Director Housing and Regeneration</p> <p>Elliott Brooks – Assistant Director Housing</p> <p>Andy Vincent – Group Manager for Tenants and Leaseholders</p> <p>Natasha Brathwaite – Housing Advice and Homelessness Team Leader</p> <p>Teresa Wood – Housing Options Team Leader</p> <p>Jack Burnham – Development Manager</p>
<p>Background papers:</p>	<p>The Housing Allocations Policy April 2013</p> <p>Draft Housing Strategy 2013 - 2018</p> <p>Localism Act 2011</p> <p>Section 193 (Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996)</p> <p>The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012</p>
<p>Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:</p>	<p>H&amp;C OSC – Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>TLC – Tenants and Leaseholder Committee</p>

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The last Homelessness Strategy covered the period 2008 - 2013. Since its adoption the national picture for homelessness has changed significantly. The financial year 2009/10 saw an increase in homelessness acceptances by local authorities of 10%, representing the first financial year increase since 2003/04. This trend has since continued and has triggered a number of national and local responses.
- 1.2 The number of homeless applicants who have become homeless due to termination of an assured shorthold tenancy has been increasing, and this is now one of the main causes of homelessness. Nationally and locally over half of homeless acceptances are caused by either, termination of an assured shorthold tenancy, or eviction by family or friends (each making up between 20 and 30 percent of acceptances).
- 1.3 The level of housing need in the Borough is very high, and the increasing demand cannot be met by allocations through the housing register. In June 2013 the housing register had 5802 home-seekers, 1599 transfer applicants, and 77 homeless applicants. There were 599 allocations made in 2012/13, of which 172 were to sheltered housing accommodation, when the majority of homeless households require family homes. In April 2013 the Council approved a new Housing Allocations Policy, to be implemented in autumn 2013 once the necessary computer system changes are in place. This policy aims to assist the Council in managing its housing register by introducing a deferred register for those applicants who do not meet a number of criteria, including tests of local connection and housing need.
- 1.4 The average private rent in Dacorum has gone up from £886 per month in 2011 to £1,003 in the first quarter of 2013. A high proportion of evictions have been to lone parent households, often on low incomes and reliant at least partially on benefits for payment of rent. Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates restrict the amount a household can claim for rent and this has discouraged many landlords from continuing tenancies. This presents a real challenge to the Council to work with the private rented sector and develop the skills to mediate with landlords to prevent unnecessary evictions.
- 1.5 However, the private rented sector is the main sector that the Council and its partners must look to in order to expand the housing options available to low income households. The private rented sector provides the Council with its main preventative option against homelessness, and this has been delivered as a Deposit Guarantee Scheme, allowing households to access private rented properties without needing a cash deposit. Central government has also provided local authorities with the power to discharge the full homelessness duty by offering a tenancy in the private rented sector, which should allow local authorities to make more flexible use of their local Council and Housing Association stock.

## **2. The strategy**

- 2.1 In April this year, the Housing Minister announced a new Gold Standard for local homelessness services, containing Ten Local Challenges. The Council has pledged to strive to meet these challenges.

- 2.2 The Council has reviewed its service to identify key areas for improvement and investment. These key areas have been discussed with the Council's partners, and from this work the Council has committed to four key strategic objectives:
- To make every contact count in the primary prevention of homelessness
  - To secure suitable and affordable accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
  - To provide support to prevent repeat homelessness and improve outcomes for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
  - To tackle the root causes of homelessness through much earlier intervention and prevention through education.
- 2.3 Each key strategic objective has a number of actions, which together make up the Homelessness Strategy action plan. This action plan shows the required team and financial resources, timescales and responsible officers for each action.
- 1.5 The proposed time line for the Council's new Homelessness Strategy is as follows:
- May 2013
    - Strategic direction and ideas for service delivery discussed with partners at the Council's multi-agency event 'Making it Happen'.
  - June 2013
    - Strategy sessions carried out with teams within Strategic Housing to gather feedback and develop the strategic direction further
  - July 2013
    - Presentation to TLC on 1 July on the background and key strategic objectives
    - Draft strategy presented to H&C OSC on 17 July and Cabinet on 23 July
    - Public consultation will begin on the new draft strategy
  - August 2013
    - Consultation session with the TLC
    - Consultation session with the Council's Homeless Forum
  - September 2013
    - Consultation at the tenants and leaseholders annual conference
  - November 2013
    - An update on the consultation responses, and any strategy amendments, to be provided to H&C OSC
    - The amended draft strategy will be recommended for Cabinet approval with a summary of consultation responses.
  - December 2013
    - Recommendation to full Council to adopt the new strategy with immediate effect.

**3. Consultation**

- 3.1 The proposed consultation period will commence in July 2013 and run for 12 weeks. All comments and feedback will then be considered before the strategy comes back to Cabinet in November for approval. It is proposed that the policy will then be taken to full Council for adoption in December 2013.
- 3.2 **The recommendation of this report is for Members to consider the content of the new draft strategy document and give their feedback.**