



## AGENDA ITEM: 9

### SUMMARY

Report for:	<b>Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of meeting:	<b>16 March 2016</b>
PART:	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	<b>VULNERABLE PERSONS' HOUSING STRATEGY 2014 - 2017</b>
Contact:	Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing  Andy Vincent – Tenant and Leaseholder Group Manager  Isabel Connolly – Policy and Participation Team Leader
Purpose of report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To bring to the Committee the reviewed Vulnerable Persons' Housing Strategy 2014 - 2017 (Appendix 1) for feedback.</li> </ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For the Committee to consider the content of the reviewed draft strategy document and give their feedback.</li> </ul>
Corporate objectives:	Affordable Housing
Implications:	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>There are no new financial commitments made in the strategy that impact existing budgets, and there have been no significant changes to the strategy that was originally adopted. The majority of the strategy relates to focusing, targeting, and maximising benefits from existing resources.</p> <p>The need to support vulnerable people has presented the Council with new challenges, and the strategy has been</p>

	<p>amended to make an explicit commitment to taking a proactive approach to identifying new funding sources that will help the Council to be innovative and achieve the positive outcomes for tenancy sustainment it is seeking.</p> <p><u>Value for Money</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct costs to the Council</li> </ul> <p>This strategy recognises that vulnerable people are currently presenting a direct cost to the Council due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low personal resilience during periods of housing need or homelessness;</li> <li>- Difficulties sustaining council tenancies and likelihood of having rent arrears; and</li> <li>- Age and health related problems preventing independent living.</li> </ul> <p>The strategy has been amended to be explicit that the Housing Service may have to be flexible and innovative in allocating its resources, particularly in certain teams, in order to target factors associated with these costs. Improved ways of working could produce a savings benefit to the Council in terms of improved income collection rates and a reduction in situations arising that require a costly crisis management response.</p> <p>This sits within a wider context of trying to use evidence to focus resources on preventable causes of costs, as part of a move to make the housing service more proactive, flexible, and sophisticated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Wider economic costs</u></li> </ul> <p>The Council recognises that, if unmet, the needs of vulnerable people can draw resources from the local economy. Homelessness, worklessness, and avoidable health conditions all present a significant cost to local services.</p> <p>Value for money savings can therefore be achieved through recognition of the needs of vulnerable people, having effective programmes in place to tackle these, and focusing resources effectively.</p>
<p>Risk Implications</p>	<p>There are both direct cost and wider economic risks to the Council if it does not respond to needs of vulnerable people and their capacity to resolve their housing need and sustain tenancies within Dacorum.</p> <p>There is a financial risk to 'doing-nothing' and this strategy identifies how the Council can make use of its resources to invest-to-save.</p>
<p>Equalities Implications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out in July 2014 when the strategy was originally adopted.</li> </ul>

Health And Safety Implications	Through day-to-day operations, and to meet the commitments of this strategy, officers in the housing service frequently visit the homes of vulnerable people. There is a Lone Worker Policy in place, with regular training arranged for new starters and to give refreshers to existing officers.
Consultees:	<p>Cllr Margaret Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing</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 – Group Manager for Strategic Housing</p> <p>Service users (focus group of tenants held in 2015)</p> <p>The Council’s Homeless Forum (a quarterly meeting multi-agency forum)</p>
Background papers:	<p>Housing Strategy 2013 - 2018</p> <p>Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018</p> <p>Vulnerable Persons’ Strategy 2014 - 17</p> <p>Older Persons’ Housing Strategy 2014 - 2020</p> <p>Housing Allocations Policy 2015</p> <p>Localism Act 2011</p> <p>The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011)</p>
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 This strategy covers the Council's full housing offer (managing homelessness and providing temporary accommodation, managing the housing register, and the management of tenancies and assets as a landlord).  
[NB: This does not include the Environmental Health role in enforcement of conditions in the private rented sector].
- 1.2 Since this strategy was first adopted the housing service has re-structured to create a new Tenancy Sustainment team. The work of this team has focused on supporting 'complex cases' in the Council's tenant population, and has brought together expertise in tenancy management with technical property expertise. This approach is in recognition that there are a number of 'complex cases' where problems managing the tenancy co-exist with problems maintaining the home, and that long-term positive outcomes are more likely if the household's problems are looked at in a holistic way.
- 1.3 Since the strategy was adopted the service has also been successful in bidding for public health funding, and this will be used to add officer resource to identify and support tenants who have needs that fall below the current threshold for referral to the Tenancy Sustainment team. The bid submission demonstrated that the housing service could be adding benefit to the lives of many more vulnerable people by using funds to deliver a 'guiding hand' model of low-level support. Tenants qualifying will be assisted to find solutions to problems and prevent small events becoming triggers for crisis.
- 1.4 This review of the strategy recognises that the housing service must become pro-active in seeking additional funding opportunities, as these will be key to allowing flexible and innovative use of resources in the overall response to vulnerable people.
- 1.5 There are clear links between this strategy and the Young Persons' Housing Strategy presented to the Committee in November 2015. Younger people (18 – 24 year olds in particular) are disproportionately represented in the numbers of people approaching the Council in housing need or homeless, and are more likely to have arrears and face potential eviction from a stable home. This strategy however covers vulnerabilities more broadly and also addresses the challenges facing the Council from its ageing population and problems associated with older age groups maintaining independence in their home.
- 1.6 Preventing crises occurring for vulnerable people of all ages across the whole housing service will produce savings to the Council in terms of direct costs and wider economic benefits. The risks of 'doing nothing' are significant.

## **2. The objectives**

- 2.1 This review has not changed the strategy's key objectives, which are.
  - To provide a responsive service for people who are homeless or in housing need, which operates within the legislative framework, while protecting and reaching out to those who may be least able to protect themselves.
  - To provide a joined-up welfare and tenancy sustainment package, triggered by assessment either at the point of a homeless application or

commencement of a new tenancy, to prevent vulnerable people losing a tenancy in the first year.

- To build officer confidence in responding to existing tenants and leaseholders who may be vulnerable, to increase identification and reporting, and to provide a joined-up, enhanced housing service in response to identified needs.
- To develop housing related support services for older people that promote independent living and encourage planning about future housing options.

### **3. Consultation**

- 3.1 The Council held a focus group in 2015 during which officers received detailed feedback from tenants who had experienced the new service provided by the Tenancy Sustainment Team. This focus group provided a very informative insight into the complex factors affecting some of the Council's most vulnerable people and how they had been helped to manage these. The Council is committed to repeating this consultation in order to improve and maintain its understanding of the very challenging needs facing this group.

### **4. Amendments**

Please see Appendix 1 where additions to the document have been highlighted on pages 3, 7, 15, and 20.

### **5. Recommendation**

- 4.1 For the Committee to consider the content of the reviewed strategy document and give their feedback.