

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

24 April 2018

TITLE:	Homelessness Strategy
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor M Bowen - Portfolio Holder for Communities, Leisure, Sport, Parks, Countryside and Housing
CONTACT OFFICER:	Mary Walker – Head of Customer Services
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendices Attached - Appendix A – Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2018- 2022

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to submit the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan for approval.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To approve the Alliance wide Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan at Appendix A.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Council has a requirement under the Homelessness Act 2002 to ensure it takes a strategic approach in dealing with the issue of homelessness. The Alliance wide review of homelessness considers; national and local context, implications of Welfare Reforms and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, local housing markets and prevention toolkit.
- 3.2 The review consequently identifies the following strategic priorities;
- To prevent homelessness through a comprehensive range of services
 - Ensure suitable accommodation is available to address and prevent homelessness
 - Improve the Private Rented Sector Offer
 - Ensure sufficient support is available to address and prevent homelessness

- 3.3 The causes of homelessness are complex, however the main reason associated with those accepted as homeless is predominantly the loss of a private sector tenancy. Other major drivers of homelessness include exclusion by parents/ family/ friends and violent or non-violent relationship breakdown.
- 3.4 The timing of this strategy is particularly relevant with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 recently enacted 3rd April 2018. There are new legal duties to ensure meaningful support to prevent homelessness and secure accommodation for everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness, regardless of priority need.
- 3.5 The overall aims of this strategy are to identify how the Council will:
- Provide timely, quality advice and assistance to anyone who may potentially be threatened with homelessness
 - Work proactively with relevant stakeholders and housing providers to provide a coordinated approach to tackling and preventing homelessness.
 - Continue to develop innovative and responsive approaches to support people who have concerns about the stability of their current home, with prevention a core principle.

4. **How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The strategy contributes to the Corporate Plan 2015-19 aim of helping to create a safer and healthier environment for our residents to live and work.

5. **Options and Analysis**

- 5.1 Option 1- Proceed with the recommendation to approve the attached Homelessness Strategy, that has been developed in relation to appropriate legislation and consultation with a range of stakeholders (preferred option)

Option 2- Reject the recommendations and not recommend to Executive adoption of the Strategy. (Not recommended)

6. **Implications**

- 6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)
There are no specific implications with this report
- 6.2 Workforce
There are no specific implications with this report
- 6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment
The report has been prepared in line with Council policies

- 6.4 Financial Considerations
Delivery of the Homelessness Strategy is via a mixture of the council's core budget, supplementary funding from partner organisations and Communities and Local Government. Full financial details can be found at s.5 in Appendix A
- 6.5 Legal
The Homelessness Strategy has been developed in line with the appropriate legislation and there are no specific legal implications to this report. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 makes substantial amendments to existing legislation (summarised in report s7.5)
- 6.6 Sustainability
There are no specific implications with this report
- 6.7 Internal and External Consultation
Consultation has been undertaken in relation to the development of the Homelessness Strategy. The draft has been made available on the council's web-site and circulated amongst a wide variety of stakeholders.
- 6.8 Risk Assessment
There are no current significant risks to this report.

Mary Walker
Head of Customer Services

**Web Links and
Background Papers**

Homelessness Review
available
<https://www.highpeak.gov.uk/article/1348/Housing-Strategy>
and
<https://www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/article/1349/Housing-Strategy>

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7. Background and Detail

- 7.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area, and use those findings to develop and publish a strategy to prevent homelessness, in consultation with local partners and stakeholders. The review identifies local trends and challenges, so that the homelessness strategy contains key priorities and associated actions that will address challenges and set out a proactive approach to address and prevent homelessness.
- 7.2 Understanding the causes of homelessness is important in order to target

support at those areas to increase prevention. The major causes of statutory homelessness are; loss of private rented accommodation, exclusion by parents/ family/ friends and violent or non-violent relationship breakdown. The loss of a private tenancy represents the biggest single cause of homelessness and also offers a valuable option to preventing homelessness.

- 7.3 Poor financial situations can place households at risk of homelessness. Positive action to mitigate the ongoing impact of welfare reforms, in particular Universal Credit is required in order to prevent homelessness.
- 7.4 Homelessness applications and duties are predicted to increase, as access to private rented accommodation remains difficult and the supply of social housing is insufficient to meet need.
- 7.5 Prior to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, local authorities were required to establish whether households were eligible for assistance, homeless or threatened with homelessness, and in priority need. If also unintentionally homeless and with a local connection, households were consequently owed the 'main housing duty', a duty to secure accommodation. However non priority need households, most likely to be single people without children or childless couples, were owed a general 'advice and assistance' duty only. Under the new Act there is greater emphasis on prevention activity with new legal duties to provide meaningful help to secure accommodation to everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness, regardless of priority need. Summary of key measures within the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017;
- **Definition of homelessness/ threatened with homelessness** (extended from 28 to 56 days to facilitate earlier prevention)
 - **Duty to provide advisory services** (general duty expanded to include specific and targeted information and advice for particular groups, who are at increased risk of becoming homeless)
 - **New duties to undertake Assessments and Personal Housing Plans (PHPs)** (An Assessment considers homelessness circumstances, housing and support needs. A 'Personalised Housing Plan' develops actions to be undertaken by customers and the council to try and ensure accommodation is retained and/or secured to prevent or relieve homelessness).
 - **The new prevention duty** (If a household is eligible and threatened with homelessness within 56 days, we must during this time take reasonable steps to help to retain or secure alternative accommodation)
 - **The new duty to relieve homelessness** (If homelessness occurs there is duty to 'relieve' homelessness for a further 56 days)
 - **Right to Review** (additional review stages)
 - **Public duty 'to refer'** (Specified public authorities from 1st October 2018 will have a new legal duty to notify local authorities if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless)
- 7.6 The effectiveness of partnership work with statutory, voluntary and third sector agencies is considered key to the delivery of new duties, to ensure households' needs are met and that they are assisted as they work through

Personalised Housing Plans. The strategy reflects the new duties and informs the best use of available resources.

7.7 The strategy sets out the strategic direction and priorities to address and prevent homelessness across the Alliance over the next 5 years. The key strategic priorities and associated aims are;

1. To prevent homelessness through a comprehensive range of services

- Ensure all households understand the housing options that are available to them by providing high quality service
- Implement the Homelessness Reduction Act
- Develop positive housing pathways for young people and vulnerable adults with complex needs
- Continuously improve the homelessness prevention toolkit. There will be focus on enhancing partnership work through the development of agreements that set out and facilitate agreed best practice and exploring funding opportunities in order to maintain and enhance services. There will be also be focus on addressing the main causes of homelessness; helping households remain together where it is safe with mediation and supporting access to appropriate services, support and accommodation for those experiencing domestic abuse.

2. Ensure suitable accommodation is available to address and prevent homelessness

- Increase the supply of affordable housing and maximise the use of existing housing
- Ensure that repossession is the last resort
- Minimise use of temporary accommodation
- Consider options for single people (including those aged under 35 years) and seek to address the gap in relation to young persons supported accommodation in the Staffordshire Moorlands through alternatives such as Nightstop.
- Maintain supported accommodation options and consider the impact of changing funding arrangements for supported accommodation.
- Ensure vulnerable and homeless households are appropriately prioritised on the housing registers

3. Improve the Private Rented Sector Offer

In order to achieve this we will provide advice and initiatives to support both tenants and landlords;

- Deliver a 'call before you serve' early intervention landlord service pilot
- Improve property & management standards through Landlord Accreditation Schemes, actively enforcing, establishing Landlord Forums consulting with landlords and building staff capacity to address illegal eviction
- Improve access to the private sector by commissioning services relating to both the Access to the Private Rented Sector and Single Persons Housing Projects, to secure provision of pre-tenancy training and tenancy support.

- Review policies and procedures relating to Rent Deposit Bond Schemes and Prevention Funds
- Explore schemes that facilitate affordable shared accommodation

4. Ensure sufficient support is available to address and prevent homelessness

- Reduce rough sleeping
- Mitigate the impacts of welfare reforms including Universal Credit through money, debt and budgeting support, digital assistance, stronger links with Credit Unions and work with agencies to increase access and options for employment opportunities.
- Ensure that vulnerable people can access support around various issues where it may impact upon the ability to maintain a home. This will include work to address the gap in tenancy support and access to furniture and white goods within the Staffordshire Moorlands.
- Improve support needs data collection, from Assessments and HCLIC monitoring, which can inform understanding and service commissioning

7.8 To ensure that the strategy remains effective the action plan will be flexible to change and will be reviewed and developed with the Homelessness Forums.