

BRIEFING PAPER

SUBJECT: SOUTHAMPTON'S HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY 2013 - 2018

DATE: 12TH SEPTEMBER 2013

RECIPIENT: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

THIS IS NOT A DECISION PAPER

SUMMARY:

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires the Local Authority to review all forms of homelessness in the city and produce a new Homelessness Strategy, based on the review findings, every five years.

For our last strategy period 2008/13, four objectives were clearly laid out, with a particular emphasis on preventing homelessness. In preparation for the new strategy there is clear evidence that extensive achievements against those objectives have been made.

The new strategy builds on these achievements by strengthening the focusing on prevention, rather than tackling the crisis of people losing their home. This is increasingly important in the current financial climate.

The Government's Welfare Reform agenda introduces unprecedented change which, along with the current economic conditions, has the potential to seriously impact on Southampton residents and result in increased homelessness.

The strategy considers the future challenges Southampton faces and the likely impacts on City's residents and services. The existing objectives are still considered to be relevant; however the recommendation is that we conduct an annual review to track trends in homelessness. These trends will help inform the response of the council's homeless service and its partner agencies and enable services to adapt to meet changing needs.

BACKGROUND and BRIEFING DETAILS:

1. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness every five years, and to use the findings to develop a strategy for preventing homelessness locally.
2. A new Homelessness Prevention Strategy for 2013 -18 has been developed and needs Cabinet approval prior to publication.
3. Southampton City Council has produced two previous strategies, in 2003 and 2008, outlining our prevention strategies and how we aimed to secure sufficient accommodation and support for all those who have or may become homeless. Since our first strategy was published in 2003 there have been noticeable improvements in our homelessness response including:
 - significant reductions in homelessness applications and acceptances year on year;
 - the use of temporary accommodation has been halved to meet government targets; and

BRIEFING PAPER

- levels of rough sleeping and the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) has remained low.
4. Implementation of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2008 – 2013 has been led by a multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Steering Group (HSSG) who have been instrumental in the review of homelessness and development of Southampton's Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2013-18.
 5. The review of homelessness and homelessness services in Southampton has since been completed, led by the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, consulting with key stakeholders using a client groups focus, key aspects of which are set out in the review document.

Consultation included:

- 12th July 2012 Homelessness Strategy Steering Group - Statistical Review of Homelessness, Welfare Reform Presentation.
 - October 2012- Questionnaire Homelessness & Young People
 - 22 October 2012 Workshop-Planning for Young People
 - January 2012-Questionnaires; Homelessness & Families, Homelessness & Single People
 - 4th February 2013 Workshop Planning for Families
 - 7th February 2013 Workshop Planning for Single People.
 - April 2013 Review of Services SCC Stakeholders.
 - 22nd May 2013 Homelessness Strategy Steering Group Consultation- Challenges and Priority actions
 - August 2013 Draft Strategy to Alison Elliot, Director of People
6. The workshops identified real concerns about shrinking resources and potential increasing demand for services from homeless clients. The groups, therefore, considered what they felt were the critical services for each of the client groups and agreed a series of commitments that the city should follow.
 7. As a result of the review key challenges and priorities were identified and consulted upon by the HSSG to inform the development of Southampton's Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2013-18.
 8. The 2013-18 Homelessness Prevention Strategy builds upon the achievements of our previous two strategies, and outlines the challenges we face in today's stark economic and social climate. This document sets out:
 - our aims and objectives for the next five years;
 - the local and national context;
 - our achievements to date including successful partnership working;
 - the results of the review that we conducted to help us produce the new Homeless Strategy; and
 - the challenges we face ahead and how we plan to work to continue to prevent homelessness in our city.

BRIEFING PAPER

9. The Challenges identified fall under 4 broad headings
 - The potential for more households to be evicted for rent arrears, following benefit cuts.
 - Increasing pressure on our finances due to tighter budgets and changes to the way homeless funding is allocated.
 - Instability and uncertainty in the voluntary and community sectors caused by budget restrictions.
 - The increasing reliance on the local private rented sector, and the need to increase good quality, affordable accommodation.
- 10 We have drawn on our experiences and achievements to produce our current Homelessness Prevention Strategy. It has also been developed in light of national policy and the rapidly changing environment, and as such we are committed to review it annually. This annual review will be carried out within the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, at which all relevant agencies are represented, so that the actions remain responsive to the realities on the ground.
- 11 The expected impacts on homelessness in Southampton are hard to predict in full at this stage, making a detailed action plan for the 5 year strategy period of limited value. In preference a set of Priority Actions has been developed against which more detailed actions can be developed.
- 12 It is proposed that the Priority Actions be reviewed annually as above by the HSSG, against the set of Priority Indicators developed to monitor the impact of change on homelessness within Southampton.
- 13 By keeping a close eye on progress we aim to ensure that services and statutory responsibilities continue to be met and that we maintain a clear focus on preventing homelessness in Southampton.
- 14 The Homelessness Prevention Strategy does not stand alone but is intrinsically related to and supportive of other key strategies which affect the city. In particular **Southampton's Housing Strategy** maximising homes for the city; improving homes and transforming neighbourhoods; and providing extra support for those that need it are the key priorities; **Southampton's Supporting People Strategy** which details the provision of supported accommodation as a progression to settled accommodation
- 15 The council has recently set its core priorities in its city plan 2013-16. This strategy will help us deliver our priority for keeping safe and improving the health of some of Southampton's most disadvantaged residents.

RESOURCE/POLICY/FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 16 Funding from central government in support of the Local Authority's homelessness strategy has changed. The previous strategy had an annual ring fenced grant of £365K to rely on from which to support initiatives that helped meet our objectives.

BRIEFING PAPER

- 17 In early 2011 the government announced an increase in funds for homelessness to the value of £634k for Southampton, but by removing the ring fence signalled that this was indicative only.
- 18 Smaller sums of one off funding from central government have also been received to support homelessness prevention in the form a repossession fund, money to fund the provision of a court desk advice service, and more recently a sum to assist the transition to new systems of housing benefit award.
- 19 Capital funding has been allocated within the HRA capital programme for the provision of improved Homelessness accommodation in the city.

OPTIONS and TIMESCALES:

- 20 Southampton City Council must publish a new Homelessness Strategy in 2013.
- 21 The Strategy is on the forward plan for a Cabinet decision on 15th October 2013

Appendices/Supporting Information:

Draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2013-18

Statistical review of Homelessness in Southampton 2013

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