

DECISION-MAKER:	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE		
SUBJECT:	HOMELESSNESS IN SOUTHAMPTON		
DATE OF DECISION:	16 APRIL 2015		
REPORT OF:	CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND SUSTAINABILITY		
<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
AUTHOR:	Name:	Liz Slater	Tel: 023 8083 2582
	E-mail:	Liz.slater@southampton.gov.uk	
Director	Name:	Alison Elliott	Tel: 023 8083 2602
	E-mail:	Alison.elliott@southampton.gov.uk	

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY
N/A

BRIEF SUMMARY

The current Homelessness Prevention Strategy was completed in late 2013. The strategy restated the Council's "commitment to tackling and preventing homelessness in Southampton by continuing to develop best practice, working with partners and pooling city wide resources."

The Strategy identified a number of challenges. At that time the government had commenced a number of significant policy changes at national level, in particular its policy of Welfare Reform, which were predicted to cause uncertainties and potential pressures on homeless services. As a result a commitment was made to carry out an annual review of the strategy's priority actions based on trends in the pattern of homelessness in the City that would enable changes to be made in service delivery, and in the use of resources, in a responsive and flexible manner.

This report, and the attached appendices, provide the Committee with an update on homelessness in Southampton and outlines progress made in delivering the priority actions in the Homelessness Prevention Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION:

- (i) That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee discuss the issue of homelessness in Southampton with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainability.

REASON FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. At the request of the Chair of the Committee.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

2. None

DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)

3. Following the publication of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy in 2013 a data set of indicators was developed by the multi – agency Homelessness

Strategy Steering Group (HSSG) to help monitor trends in homelessness in the city, and to inform actions to address new issues as they arise.

4. The data set was established to reflect issues which were identified as being of concern and that could likely cause stress in families and amongst vulnerable single people leading to loss of their home. These are attached as Appendix 1.
5. A plan of strategy priority actions was also developed and is monitored by the HSSG. This has recently been updated to include the recommendations adopted by the Council following an extensive inquiry by the Health and Overview Scrutiny Panel into the [health outcomes of single homeless people](#). This is attached as Appendix 2.
6. A strategy workshop is currently being planned that will bring relevant agencies engaged in the city assisting households experiencing homelessness or who are threatened with homelessness due to issues such as debts and financial difficulty, health or substance misuse concerns. The workshop will be designed to better understand the trends in homelessness in Southampton from different perspectives and to find solutions and common approaches to help tackle and prevent further homelessness. This will then be developed into the new priority actions going forward in to next year.
7. Pre-empting that event, a few highlights identified by trend monitoring include:
 1. Statutory homelessness applications and acceptances remain at similar levels to previous years as a result of the focus on preventions, which remain high.
 2. The last quarter acceptance figures showing slight increase in numbers on the same period last year.
 3. Loss of home in the private rented sector is one of the main causes of homelessness amongst statutory cases (mainly families).
 4. Possession of owner occupied homes due to mortgage debt remains low.
 5. The introduction of the Benefit cap is affecting relatively low numbers of families predominantly in the private rented sector, but the impacts on individual households, (larger families), is significant.
 6. Use of B&B for homeless families is still low and average length of time they spend in the accommodation is also low.
 7. Rough sleeping remains a concern in the city with average numbers found on street outreach sessions remaining static.
 8. Numbers of evictions from council homes due to rent arrears is showing signs of increase but numbers of families evicted remain very low.
 9. Council tax debt cases are very high resulting in high numbers of summons.
 10. Claims for Discretionary Housing payments have been high which in part mitigates the impact of benefit cap and spare room subsidy impacts.

11. Applications for local welfare assistance have started to increase and use of food banks is significant.

8. Additional issues identified as new concerns include the following:

- Access to the private rented sector for households in need, who rely on benefit is becoming noticeably harder to achieve, in part due to demand from other client groups and in part as a reaction by landlords to changes in benefits and how rent is paid.
- The application of the new claimant commitment to job seekers has seen locally high numbers of applicants having sanctions applied reducing their weekly income and creating reliance on other welfare assistance. This has disproportionately impacted on single young people many of whom are or have been homeless. Southampton last month saw the introduction of Universal Credit for new single Job Seeker claimants, and will be extended to other claimants in the coming year/s.
- Funding for local welfare assistance that replaced crisis loans and community care grants, has been used to “bridge the gap” of other benefit restrictions and facilitate move on for homeless people into settled accommodation. This funding has not been identified for next financial year which means the schemes in operation have had to close to new referrals. Agencies in the city as well as national organisations such as the LGA have expressed concern about the impact on homelessness of this withdrawal.
- Since late last year there has been a noticeable increase in begging in the high streets of the city, especially in the period leading up to Christmas but has continued to the present time. Work with these individuals indicates that the majority are not rough sleepers but are already accommodated but who have multiple and complex needs. Some of these individuals can no longer access public funds or services through reason of new and existing rules on EU migrants. This is a changing situation due in the main to the complexity of these new rules.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital/Revenue

9. N/A

Property/Other

10. N/A

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

11. 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.

Other Legal Implications:

12. None.

POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

13. The Housing Strategy 2011 – 2015 includes the prevention of homelessness as a priority and identifies the challenges under welfare reform. The Housing Strategy has commitments to work with partners to implement the city’s homelessness strategy and to implement an action plan to further reduce homelessness and help minimise the impacts of welfare reform.

KEY DECISION? No

WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	
------------------------------------	--

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

1.	Homelessness Indicators
2.	Homelessness Prevention Strategy Priority Actions

Documents In Members’ Rooms

1.	None
----	------

Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out.	
--	--

Other Background Documents

Equality Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:

Title of Background Paper(s) N/A

1.	Cabinet response to Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel inquiry on the impact of homelessness on the health of single people. http://www.southampton.gov.uk/modernGov/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=783	
2.	Southampton’s Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2013-18 http://www.southampton.gov.uk/modernGov/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=669	