

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
REPORT NO:	HHE/54/18
DATE:	11 December 2018
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor David Griffiths (Place – Housing)
CONTACT OFFICER:	Julie Francis (Tel: 315436)
SUBJECT:	Homelessness Strategy
WARD:	All

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek member approval for the adoption of both Wrexham County Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy and North Wales Regional Homelessness Strategy, and to note and approve the attached action plan as a means of monitoring progress in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Section 50 of Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a duty on all Local Authorities in Wales to have in place a Homelessness Strategy.
- 2.2 As part of this work, it is necessary to carry out a Homelessness Review, beforehand. The purpose of the review is to examine current systems and services that are in place to dealing with homelessness and to assess their effectiveness. The findings of the review are then used as the basis for the strategy document itself.
- 2.3 The Council commissioned consultants Arc⁴, to both carry out this review and assist in writing the Homelessness Strategy. It was felt that having an independent body to carry out this work would give a greater degree of objectivity.

- 2.4 In the meantime, senior officers representing the six North Wales local authorities had expressed a desire to produce a regional strategy. The main reasons for this, were a desire to identify and share good practice, and to gain an understanding of how other local authorities addressed similar issues.
- 2.5 The Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru facilitated this work, giving both advice and guidance. They also assisted with the type setting and production of the document.
- 2.6 Whilst the regional document will be a useful means to promote joint working between local authorities in tackling homelessness, officers felt that a document that was more specific to Wrexham was also needed. This document will give more focus to the homelessness issues in the county borough, whilst the accompanying action plan will be a means of monitoring progress in achieving strategic aims.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Executive Board agrees to adopt both the North Wales Regional Homelessness Strategy and Wrexham County Borough Homelessness Strategy and also notes and approves the action plan of the County Borough Homelessness Strategy as an effective means of measuring progress in achieving strategic aims.**

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 50 of Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires every local authority in Wales to have carried out a review of its homelessness services and to have produced a Homelessness Strategy by the end of 2018. By approving the attached draft documents, the Council will ensure that it meets its statutory obligations. In addition, it will enable the Council to set out how it will deal with homelessness and ensure that the services provided meet current and future challenges.

4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 4.1 Section 50 of Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and subsequent Code of Guidance for Allocations and Homelessness 2016, place a legal obligation on local authorities in Wales to carry out a review of homelessness services and the factors influencing homelessness in their area.
- 4.2 The findings of this review must form the basis of a subsequent Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan. According to the Act, the Homelessness Strategy must aim to achieve the following objectives in the local housing authority's area:
- a) the prevention of homelessness;
 - b) that suitable accommodation is and will be available for people who are or may become homeless; and
 - c) that satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless.

Homelessness Review

- 4.3 Every local authority in Wales must conduct a homeless review before producing a homelessness strategy.
- 4.4 The review is a means of assessing the services and systems that are currently available to help combat homelessness, examine the underlying causes of homelessness in the area and highlight areas that could be improved, or that are having a positive impact on homeless prevention.
- 4.5 Some of the main findings of the review, that helped to inform the direction of the Homelessness Strategy, were as follows:
- Affordability is a significant issue within parts of Wrexham in relation to owner occupation and privately renting. Low levels of income and reliance on benefits among households in housing need further exacerbates the problem.
 - The main causes of homelessness in Wrexham are: loss of rented or tied accommodation, leaving prison, parents and relatives no longer willing to accommodate, relationship breakdown, and domestic abuse.
 - There is a need to develop a range of prevention tools focused at preventing the main causes of homelessness.
 - The Housing Options service has had success in preventing homelessness by assisting households to access alternative accommodation. However, more work needs to be done to fully embed a proactive prevention approach, with a particular emphasis on enabling households to remain in their existing accommodation.
 - Information suggests that there is an increasing demand on the Housing Options service following the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, there is however a need to introduce an effective recording system in order to understand the true demand on the service.
 - There is a need to reduce the high numbers of people accessing the service at the point of crisis, to enable opportunities for effective prevention and early intervention to be maximised.
 - There is a need to continue to source more suitable temporary accommodation properties to avoid the use of Bed & Breakfast. Further work is needed to more fully understand the temporary accommodation requirements, and how these are best met.
 - Young people are over-represented in the homelessness statistics and Supporting People data, when compared with census data, indicating a lack of suitable and affordable housing options for young people. It also indicates that young people are at a greater risk of becoming homeless.
 - There is a need for a holistic approach that includes support around debt, money management, resilience and worklessness. This approach needs to commence at the assessment stage and carry through to the delivery of the Personal Housing Plans.
 - There are a very high number of complex cases, including both single people and families with multiple and challenging needs.

- There is a very high level of rough sleeping in Wrexham, concentrated within the town centre; there is a strong correlation between rough sleeping and the congregational use of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS).
- There is a need to carry out a comprehensive review of rough sleeping, to understand in more detail the issues in relation to rough sleeping within Wrexham, and to assess existing provision against best practice. This will help Wrexham County Borough Council to identify what, if any, changes are required to significantly reduce rough sleeping.
- There are high levels of demand for Supported Accommodation. Move on from Supported Housing can be problematic, with many single people struggling to find affordable and suitable move on accommodation.

Regional Homelessness Strategy

- 4.6 Senior Officers across all North Wales local authorities decided to pool knowledge and experience to produce a regional homelessness strategy. Officers from all six authorities worked in cooperation with the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, to produce a regional document. This identifies the common issues that are contributing to homeless across North Wales. Each local authority has then produced an action plan that sets out how these issues will be addressed. A copy of this document is attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.5 This piece of work was informed by the homelessness reviews that each local authority carried out.
- 4.6 As some local authorities had already engaged consultants ARC⁴ to carry out the homelessness review, other partners felt that by using the same consultants there would be a degree of consistency.
- 4.7 The main themes of this strategy are:
- People – Tackling youth homelessness and rough sleeping
 - Homes – Housing First, Improving access to accommodation and the provision of temporary accommodation; and
 - Services – Homelessness prevention and working to try to mitigate the effects of welfare reform.
- 4.8 Whilst the regional strategy has highlighted issues present in Wrexham County Borough, which can be addressed by working with other local authorities and by sharing good practice, it was felt that there was a need for a greater degree of detail and local focus. This would enable the Council to be able to address the issues surrounding homelessness and rough sleeping that are particular to the county borough.
- 4.9 Similarly, as each local authority has to produce an action plan that is unique to their area, setting out how homelessness will be addressed, it was decided that commissioning a local strategy would act as a sound evidence base for taking forward the Housing Options service in the county borough.

Wrexham County Borough's Homelessness Strategy

- 4.10 Officers commissioned consultants Arc⁴ to produce this piece of work. A copy of the document and associated action plan, is attached as Appendix 2. They worked in collaboration with council officers, third sector service providers and key statutory services, such as the Department for Work and Pensions and the Probation Service.
- 4.11 A Steering Group was established, consisting of officers and representatives from partner organisations. Its remit was to establish the priorities within the County Borough and to agree the vision and approach that the local authority should take to tackle homelessness. This group will continue to meet after the strategy has been implemented to ensure that its aims are being met and that it is providing an effective response to local homelessness issues.

The vision of the strategy

- 4.12 The overall vision is,
"To work in partnership to prevent and reduce homelessness, and end the need for anyone to sleep rough."
- 4.13 In order to deliver this vision, the strategy has been based around the following objectives:
- prevent homelessness by offering high quality, timely, realistic advice and support together with practical help;
 - develop a best practice approach to eliminate the need to sleep rough;
 - identify and address the underlying causes of homelessness;
 - where homelessness does occur, provide support and assistance to find and sustain suitable homes;
 - building upon the strengths and assets of our clients, empower individuals and build resilience, whilst promoting choice and a person centred approach; and
 - continuously monitor and evaluate our performance to ensure high quality service delivery.
- 4.14 In addition, the following aims are priorities for addressing homelessness in Wrexham County Borough. These are to:
- ensure that no one should have to sleep rough in Wrexham;
 - deliver a first class Housing Options Service;
 - reduce crisis presentations;
 - ensure that homelessness is prevented wherever possible through the delivery of bespoke personal housing plans and access to affordable and sustainable accommodation;
 - reduce the number of households residing in temporary accommodation;
 - seek to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for all homeless households;
 - ensure that housing related support services are able to meet the diverse and complex needs of our homeless population;
 - increase the provision and range of accommodation options available to single homeless people;

Monitoring

- 4.15 The action plan that, accompanies the Homelessness Strategy, will be the principal method of measuring success. The action plan itself, is a fluid document that will have clear governance, in order to monitor progress and ensure that there is clearly defined responsibility for achieving each action.
- 4.16 At a local level, this will be the role of the Steering Group. It will review on-going progress and ensure that all partner organisations are playing their part in ensuring the success of the strategy.
- 4.17 At a Council level, it is anticipated that the Homes and Environment Scrutiny Committee will play a key role in monitoring success in meeting the aims of the Homelessness Strategy and assessing whether the actions contained within the strategy action plan are being achieved.
- 4.18 Similarly, it will be an opportunity to discuss any concerns or issues that are identified by Committee Members and officers.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Policy Framework: Why are we doing this?

There is a legal obligation for the Council to have a long-term plan in place to help to prevent and address homelessness. In addition, as a local authority, this strategy will set out the commitment and steps that will be taken to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

- 5.2 There is a legal obligation, contained in section 50 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, which requires every local authority in Wales to have a Homelessness Strategy in place by the end of 2018. It also sets out the main priorities that must be addressed, when producing it. These are:

- the prevention of homelessness;
- that suitable accommodation is and will be available for people who are or may become homeless; and
- that satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless.

- 5.3 Having a Homeless Strategy in place will support the delivery of the following Council Plan priorities;

Pe3 Safeguarding those who are vulnerable

PL1: Promoting good quality homes and regeneration

Wrexham's Well Being Plan – All people have access to good quality, appropriate homes throughout their lives.

- 5.4 **Budget:** There will be a potential for budgetary increase, if the additional services that are proposed as part of the implementation of the strategy are fully adopted.

5.5 **Legal:** Approval of the draft Wrexham County Borough Homelessness Strategy and the Regional Homelessness Strategy will ensure that the council fulfils its legal obligations as set in the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

5.6 **Staffing:** There are no staffing implications relating directly to this report.

5.7 **Equalities/Human Rights:** Members are advised of their duty to consider the full Equality Impact Assessment which is available at <http://vmwinsqld/equalityisalive/Menu.aspx> report number (HE/EIA00173/2018).

Members of the public can request a copy of the full Equality Impact Assessment from the Contact Officer named in the header box of this report.

A summary of the Equality Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix 3.

5.8 **Risks:**

There are a number of risks associated with homelessness. These are;

- The Homelessness review identified a need to address the issue of rough sleeping in the County Borough. It is, therefore, necessary to have in place a strategy for dealing with this problem, recognising the effects that rough sleeping can have on physical health, mental health and personal safety if left unaddressed.
- By not having a robust method of preventing homelessness, there is an increased risk of having to place families and individuals in temporary accommodation. This can lead to financial pressures on the Housing Options Service and have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of families.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 Consultation has been carried out through a variety of methods:

- a workshop was held 20th November, to inform Local Members of the draft strategy and to gain feedback;
- a Homelessness Steering Group, consisting of third sector organisations, partner RSLs and statutory bodies such as DWP and the Probation Service was set up to inform the priorities of the Council regarding homelessness and to monitor future progress against identified actions;
- a Homelessness Forum was also established consisting of organisations that provide relevant support services in the County Borough and internal partners such as Adult Social Care. This group gave feedback on the current issues that they are facing and their perceptions of what the main issues are regarding homelessness;
- hard copy questionnaires were given to service providers both for their staff to complete and to give to their clients for feedback;
- an online questionnaire was produced for service users to complete;
- telephone questionnaires were carried out with a random sample of people who had approached Housing Options for housing advice and assistance, in order to gauge levels of satisfaction and to understand their experiences of the service;
- staff focus groups were held in order to understand the main issues that Estate Management and Housing Options services faced when rehousing via the homelessness route;

- 6.2 The following methods of consultation will also be carried out as part of the ongoing process to monitor the effectiveness of the strategy and to ensure that key actions are being achieved:
- progress reporting to Homes and Environment Scrutiny Committee on a six monthly basis;
 - meetings with Homelessness Steering Group partners, at a frequency to be decided to ensure that our identified strategic priorities reflect those on the ground;
 - meetings with Review Group partners, at a frequency to be decided, to identify any issues in achieving goals or good practice that could be adopted by all partners.

8. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE COMMENTS

- 8.1 Not considered by Scrutiny Committee. A Local Member Workshop was held 20th November to gain views and comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS	LOCATION	WEBSITE INFO
	SAM	
	SAM	
Equality Impact Assessment	EIA Number: 00173/2018	http://vmwinsqld/equalitysalive/Menu.aspx