

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMUNITY COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting: 10th November 2015

Report of: Cllr Harvey, Chair of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group

Title: Homelessness Task and Finish Group Interim Report.

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

To report interim findings and recommendations to the Scrutiny Community Committee in respect of the proposed Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.

2. Recommendations:

Interim recommendations can be simplified under two separate headings:-

(a) The proposed structure of the new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan:-

- i. To agree that the Homelessness Strategy should be developed across the Exeter and Teignbridge area to increase opportunities for local residents and reduce administrative burden on the services of developing two separate strategies for a combined service.
- ii. To agree that the Homelessness Strategy should primarily adopt the four key common themes of:-
 - Health and Protection;
 - Money Matters and Money and Employment;
 - Access to Services;
 - Accommodation Options and Private Rented Accommodation
- iii. That the Strategy should consider, amongst other responsibilities, how the Council should address homelessness in respect of ex-servicemen and women.

(b) Proposed Action Plan:-

- Regular review of the Action Plan and review meetings with agencies for the purposes of monitoring the Plan and altering where necessary to reflect any new challenges.
- A cross boundary list of available resources including properties spanning both Exeter and Teignbridge areas should be prepared and circulated.
- Access to information on cross boundary areas to be made available by each Authority.
- Identifying larger empty properties and working towards bringing these properties back into use in the context of tackling homelessness.

- Better signposting when enquiries are received - one information registration form to be used by both Exeter and Teignbridge so that the individual only has to give details once and they are passed to the relevant Authority for action immediately.
- Mapping of services and agencies on an ongoing basis to avoid duplication of work and avoid wasting resources.
- Mapping out different pathways to help people with different needs so that they are assisted quickly and effectively.
- Staff training with particular emphasis on “soft assessment” skills. For example, specialist training in how best to speak with and to obtain relevant information from ex-servicemen and women generally and to evaluate what type of properties would or would not be suitable.
- Monitor the impact of welfare reform on homelessness to allow for schemes to be developed to prevent homelessness or respond quickly when households have been impacted.
- Create a credit card size contact information card which can be placed with various agencies (letting agents and hospitals for instance) which individuals can easily keep and refer to.
- Better website information which is easily accessible for individuals in relation to where and how they can access help.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- To acknowledge the work carried out by this Task and Finish Group to date.
- To inform and update the Scrutiny Community Committee as to the progress made in respect of the new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan together with the proposed time frame for approval and implementation.
- To provide an opportunity for the Scrutiny Community Committee to comment upon the proposed key themes and content of the new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.
- To invite Member’s comments in respect of the proposed Consultation.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources:

The Homelessness Strategy will direct how financial resources such as the Homeless Prevention Grant and staff activities will respond to the issues of homelessness.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no financial implications contained within the report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

A Homelessness Strategy is a legal requirement. The Exeter Homelessness Strategy is currently out of date and the Teignbridge Housing Options Strategy ends this year. The Task and Finish Group has helped to shape the headline of the Strategy and the forthcoming stakeholder consultation will move this forward with more detail.

7. Monitoring officer Comments

This report raises no issues of concern.

8. Report Details:

Homelessness was identified as a high priority topic for Task and Finish Group investigation at the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme Meeting which took place in July 2015.

Membership of the Group consists of:-

Exeter City Council Members

Cllr Harvey (Chair of the Group)
Cllr Morris (Portfolio Holder for Customer Access)
Cllr Morse (Chair of Scrutiny Community Committee)
Cllr Bull
Cllr Lyons
Cllr Newby
Cllr Wardle
Cllr Prowse

Teignbridge District Council Members

Cllr Bullivant
Cllr Clemens

Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council Officers

Bindu Arjoon, Assistant Director, Customer Access (ECC)
Nicola Forsdyke, Joint Housing Needs Lead (ECC and Teignbridge)
Chris Stocks, Housing, Move on Officer (ECC)
Mark Jolly, Housing, Service Lead Performance (ECC)
Dr Jenny Barnett, Housing Policy Officer (ECC)
Anne-Marie Hawley, Scrutiny Programme Officer (ECC)
James Toler, Housing Strategy Officer (Teignbridge)

The Scope

Key Objectives:-

- To help shape and form the new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.
- To identify and establish a list of other service providers within Exeter – who does what?
- To obtain views from key service providers which may help the Council to shape the new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.
- To establish what funds are available.

Anticipated Value of Work/Outcome

- To update the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.
- To comply with legislative requirements to have such a Strategy in place (Homelessness Act 2002).
- To ensure that the new Strategy and Action Plan is fit for purpose in tackling the issue of homelessness within Exeter.

- To provide clarity in vision for the future of services for those in housing need.
- To encourage a cohesive approach between service providers and the Council towards the co-commissioning/design of services and approaches to available funding.

Progress to Date

The new joint Homelessness Strategy (combined between Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council) will primarily incorporate four key common themes but will also need to differentiate between issues which are unique to rural and urban areas.

The key common themes identified are:-

- a) Health and Protection.
- b) Money Matters and Money and Employment.
- c) Access to Services.
- d) Accommodation Options and Provision of Private Rented Accommodation.

This Task and Finish Group has considered each theme at separate meetings, hearing from both Officers and external guests, which presented Members with the opportunity to express their views directly to the officers responsible for drafting the Strategy and Action Plan as to what they would like to see included. External guests who were welcomed to the meetings included representatives from Devon Domestic Abuse Support Services (SPLITZ and SAFE), Community Housing Aid (Bay 6 Hospital Discharge Scheme and Offender Resettlement Service), Citizens Advice Bureau, and Plymouth Access to Housing (PATH).

The Group also visited the Homelessness Hub, which is due to open in March 2016, to further understand and to put into context the multi agency approach of the Hub and what it hopes to achieve. Members received a guided tour and presentation from both the Chairman of Exeter CVS (Exeter Council for Voluntary Service) and the architect responsible for the conversion of the building.

The purpose of this interim report is to detail findings and proposed interim recommendations as to what the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan should take into account or include from a Member's perspective.

The Timeline

A consultation with key stakeholders is due to take place sometime between November 2015 and January 2016. This will be an important step in developing a combined Strategy. The Consultation will take the form of workshops with specific providers to see how a more joined up and aligned multi agency approach may be taken concentrating on two or three key themes around supported accommodation in the City (what is and isn't working); money advice and links to employment and access to work.

Following the Consultation, the Task and Finish Group will reconvene to consider the results of the Consultation with a view to providing an update and further recommendations to Exeter City Council's Scrutiny Community Committee in January 2016. Following this, the Strategy and Action Plan will be finalised and submitted to Exeter City Council's Scrutiny Community Committee in March 2016 for approval with a view to implementation by 1st April 2016.

It is understood that Teignbridge District Council will also be submitting reports in relation to the draft Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan through its Committee system for approval.

9 What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, Economy safety and the environment?

It is anticipated that the new Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan should have a positive impact in so far as all of these areas are concerned.

Cllr Harvey, Chair of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None

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