

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY 3 JUNE 2008

**EXECUTIVE
17 JUNE 2008**

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2008-2013

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Members' endorsement of the content of the revised Homelessness Strategy.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) requires all local authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy. As the existing strategy expires at the end of July 2008 a new strategy is required to take us forward.
- 2.2 The new strategy is an opportunity to include key action points which are particularly timely with the LAA priorities being finalised; the undertaking of a strategic review of the Homelessness Sector by Supporting People and the CLG's increasing focus on Housing Options and tackling worklessness. The CLG target for local authorities to halve the number of clients residing in temporary accommodation by 2010 is significant and whilst we are making good progress towards the target a refocusing through the new strategy will help to ensure the target is met.
- 2.3 A copy of the revised Homelessness Strategy document is available on the web-site and in the Members' room.

3. CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Public consultation was conducted on our behalf by a voluntary sector organisation. A client consultation exercise was undertaken with a wide range of over 200 service users. A questionnaire was developed and six focus groups convened to discuss a number of relevant issues. The results and recommendations from this consultation can be found in the background papers.
- 3.2 Consultation with partner agencies was based upon a questionnaire and 2 consultation events held across two days. The draft of the strategy has also been placed on the website for further comment. Council staff were also invited to take part in the consultation.
- 3.3 A Homelessness Strategy Review Working Group including Council officers and relevant partners has been meeting regularly to oversee the progress of the strategy and the associated action plan.
- 3.4 Consultation results showed client need for better access to supported housing, co-location of key services and the need for early intervention in preventing homelessness. The partners' responses suggested an expansion of support to secure and maintain private rented accommodation and a willingness to provide a joint approach to moving a client on through accommodation by offering a range of housing options for clients leaving supported accommodation, rather than just social housing.

3.5 An Equalities Impact Assessment of the Homelessness Strategy has been carried out as part of the review. As a result the revised Strategy places more emphasis upon diversity, equality and accessibility.

4. KEY PROPOSALS

- To see a greater priority, and therefore emphasis, given to those households who are threatened with homelessness in preference to those households already in temporary accommodation.
- To streamline the route through supported / temporary accommodation to create a 'pathway' for clients with the opportunity and intention to move from high to low support rather than the one-off jump into independent living.
- To increase the options for clients leaving supported accommodation to include viable private rented options and also to link in with training and employment opportunities
- To create and implement a housing need client focus group, involving representatives from various stages of the housing need process to consult on the development of the Homelessness Strategy.
- To work with Devon-wide partners to create access to accommodation across the county of all tenures and employment / training opportunities through the proposed Devon Home Choice Scheme.
- To produce in collaboration with the Housing Corporation and our partner RSLs a joint homelessness action plan to prevent and tackle homelessness as a partnership. This would be the first example of such a scheme outside of London.
- To improve inter-agency working by inviting social services, community mental health teams and other statutory agencies to join the assessment panels for moves into and out of supported accommodation.
- To make better use of existing supported accommodation in the city which is not at present accessible by Exeter City Council by offering rights to move on in exchange for referral opportunities.
- To secure the LPSA (local public service agreement) reward money earned by Exeter's good performance from Devon County Council and see it reinvested into a mediation scheme targeted at young people leaving the family home and into emergency 'cooling off' accommodation for young people leaving home.
- To reappraise Council's, the housing advice service and look at the opportunity to move more in line with central government's drive for an enhanced housing options approach by including employment / training advice as part of a housing needs assessment.

5. RECOMMENDED

That Scrutiny Committee – Community supports and Executive agrees:

- 1) to adopt the revised Homelessness Strategy document 2008-2013.
- 2) That an annual report is submitted outlining progress against the strategy's action plan

HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:

Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008

Homelessness Strategy Draft Paper 2008-2013

Homeless Collaboration Report on the views of Homeless and Vulnerably Housed People in Exeter

Housing Strategy 2008-2013