

COUNCIL –18 OCTOBER 2011

WEST KENT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2011-16

Report of the: Director of Community and Planning Services

Also considered by: Cabinet – 15 September 2011

Status: For Decision

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Key Aim of:

- (a) The Vision for Balanced Communities;
- (b) The Sustainable Community Action Plan; and
- (c) Housing Strategy.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Mrs Carol Clark

Head of Service Head of Housing and Communications – Mrs. Pat Smith

Recommendation: That it be RESOLVED that Members adopt the WKHS as District Council policy.

Reason for recommendation: to form the strategic document to guide the direction of the District Council's homelessness service and to minimise homelessness in the Sevenoaks District and across West Kent.

Introduction

- 1 The Homelessness Act 2002 granted new provisions and powers for local authorities relating to homelessness and prevention. It also imposed a duty on local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and to formulate and publish a strategy for the future based on the results of that review, outlining how the local authority and their partners would work to prevent homelessness and ensure accommodation and support for those who were at risk of homelessness.
- 2 Disapplication legislation followed in 2005 and removed the duty to provide a strategy for those having achieved 'excellent' status. However, Communities and Local Government (CLG) recommends that local authorities still produce a strategy.

- 3 The draft WKHS (Appendix A), which is an update of the Joint Homelessness Strategy 2007, has been developed in consultation with a wide range of service users and partners across sectors.
- 4 Key themes emerging from consultation include a desire for more commonality in how the three West Kent local authorities (Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) work. This includes: a need for more shared services, more innovation and sharing of knowledge, information and good practice; and opportunities to streamline services, processes and information.
- 5 The draft WKHS provides the national, regional and local policy context, methods of consultation, and what the main findings were. The main section of the document covers five key objectives before a conclusion is drawn and an explanation of how the strategy will be monitored and reviewed over the next five-year period.
- 6 The five key priorities of the draft WKHS, are to:
 - I. Maximise homelessness prevention through the provision of appropriate housing options and choices;
 - II. Maximise resources across West Kent, becoming more efficient and effective;
 - III. Work effectively with private sector landlords;
 - IV. Create strong partnerships to tackle homelessness; and
 - V. Meet the needs of the diverse range of people affected by homelessness.
- 7 Members are referred to Appendix A for the full draft WKHS which includes further details of the strategy process, proposed work plan, and intended outcomes.
- 8 The draft WKHS has now been adopted as council policy by both Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells borough councils.

Key Implications

Financial

The WKHS will be delivered using existing resources and as such there will be no additional financial implications.

Community Impact and Outcomes

The draft WKHS aims to minimise homelessness by providing a wide range of housing solutions to prevent or remedy homelessness. The draft WKHS supports a range of other housing solutions which in turn support wider Sustainable Community Action Plan outcomes, such as employment and training.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

The recommendations are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and are not likely to result in any Human Rights Act implications.

Resource (non-financial)

The WKHS will be delivered using existing resources and as such there will be no additional non-financial implications.

Value For Money and Asset Management

- The WKHS and sub-regional working arrangements provides opportunities to reduce the impact on the District Council's assets and may create savings.
- Working across local authority boundaries and with cross-sector partners, there is less consequent requirement for office space.
- The WKHS will not have a negative environmental impact; impact would be positive, though negligible.

Equality Impacts

The WKHS aims to assist those in need and improve life chances. It is need-based and equalises opportunities. The WKHS adheres to the District Council's equality policies.

Sustainability Checklist

Completed and available by request.

Conclusions

That the draft WKHS would be an effective District Council policy to address homelessness and related issues.

Risk Assessment Statement

There are a number of risks associated with not adopting the WKHS.

If the District Council did not adopt the WKHS as District Council policy, this would result in:-

- It not having an up-to-date homelessness strategy and clearly defining objectives and targets to reduce homelessness and to sustain home ownership and tenancies.
- Not having a strategic document setting the way forward to reduce and minimise homelessness in the District and across West Kent;

- A missed opportunity to partner with organisations across sectors to deliver services together - improving delivery and reducing resource requirements;
- A failure to demonstrate to the community and beyond that the District Council is actively working towards Sustainable Community Plan and Housing Strategy outcomes; and
- A risk of an increase in homelessness.

Attached Documents

Appendix A - Draft West Kent Homelessness Strategy (2011-16)

Background Papers:

Joint Homelessness Strategy (2007)

Sustainable Community Action Plan (2010-13)

West Kent Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2009)

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