

WEST KENT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Council - 21 November 2017

Report of	Chief Officer, Communities & Business
Status	For Consideration
Also considered by	Housing & Health Advisory Committee - 10 October 2017 Cabinet - 9 November 2017
Key Decision	No

Executive Summary: A West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2016-21 has been developed and stakeholders have been consulted. Members are asked to recommend that this Strategy is adopted.

This report supports the Key Aims of the Community Plan in providing the right support at the right time, reducing health inequalities and improving health and wellbeing for all.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Michelle Lowe

Contact Officer Hayley Brooks, Ext. 7272

Recommendation to Housing & Health Advisory Committee: That Members recommend approval of the West Kent Homelessness Strategy to Cabinet

Recommendation to Cabinet: That, subject to comments from Housing and Health Advisory Committee, Members recommend approval of the West Kent Homelessness Strategy to Full Council

Recommendation to Full Council: That Members approve the West Kent Homelessness Strategy as a District Council policy.

Reason for recommendation: The Council has a legal requirement to produce a Homelessness Strategy every five years. This Strategy identifies the homelessness priorities of this Council and supports the Sevenoaks District Housing Strategy.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Deregulation Act 2015 removed the need for local authorities to have a Housing Strategy. However, there is still a legal requirement for local authorities to have a Homelessness Strategy.

- 2 A joint West Kent Homelessness Strategy has been in place from 2011-2016 developed jointly by Sevenoaks District, Tonbridge & Malling Borough and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils. Many of the housing and homelessness issues facing local authorities are shared across West Kent and the three local authority areas have similarities in terms of housing stock and homelessness demand.
- 3 Under Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities have a legal duty to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy every five years. With increasing numbers of households contacting the Council for homelessness advice and assistance every year and an ongoing lack of affordable private and social rented houses, there is a need for a strategy that sets out objectives and actions to prevent homelessness.
- 4 This joint Strategy will help the three Councils work together to address and prevent homelessness, share good practice and pool resources where appropriate. This Council has decided to deliver its own separate Sevenoaks District Housing Strategy which sets out the housing priorities for this District.
- 5 The West Kent Homelessness Strategy is set out at Appendix A and the evidence data to support this work at Appendix B.

Summary of the Strategy

- 6 The Strategy sets out the actions being taken by West Kent councils on homelessness and providing affordable housing options. This work aims to prevent homelessness at the earliest stage, to increase the availability of good quality affordable homes for purchase and rent and support those most at risk of homelessness with improving their health, wellbeing and quality of life.
- 7 The Strategy provides four key objectives for the Housing Advice Teams at each council to focus on over the next five years:
 - Improving the availability of accommodation for all and preventing homelessness;
 - Improving housing supply;
 - Improving housing standards;
 - Improving health and wellbeing.
- 8 A six week consultation period for the draft Strategy ran from 16 June to 28 July 2017. Responses were invited from all our partner organisations, residents and other housing colleagues across Kent. Five consultation responses were received and the full responses are set out at Appendix B of this report. A summary of the responses are below, with the amendments made to the draft Strategy in light of these comments:

Name/ Organisation	Summary of response	Response to comments and amendments to draft Strategy
West Kent Housing Association	Stated it was an ‘interesting document with good information and the use of case studies was informative and useful. Actions from the strategy appear realistic and deliverable.’	Comments noted, no amendments required
Andrew MacDonald, Kent County Council 18+ Care leaver Service and Nick Crick, Kent County Council, Specialist Children’s Services	Asked for information on Care Leavers and the role local housing authorities have to play in assisting KCC with rehousing care leavers to be included in the Strategy.	<p>The following paragraph has been added to page 26 of the Strategy:</p> <p><i>Care leavers, of which Kent has a disproportionately large number, are a particularly vulnerable group. Kent County Council has duties under the Leaving Care Act 2000 towards eligible, relevant and former relevant children and young people and has a statutory duty to ensure that all such young people who meet the criteria for services as care leavers are placed in suitable accommodation when leaving care, transitioning to adulthood.</i></p> <p><i>In response to this, we will work in partnership with Kent County Council’s 18+ Care Leaver Service to find the best solutions for Care Leavers. This may require exploring more creative options including shared accommodation where suitable and appropriate.</i></p>
M Booker, Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum	This response set out a number of recommendations for the three West Kent councils, including:	
	To lobby for political changes so housing need can be addressed more effectively	Noted
	The West Kent councils exploring building and renting affordable housing themselves via an arm's	This will be explored as an

Name/ Organisation	Summary of response	Response to comments and amendments to draft Strategy
	length development company	action with the Sevenoaks District Housing Strategy, using affordable housing contributions.
	Make greater use of 'No Use Empty'	SDC currently works with KCC on the 'No Use Empty' scheme and has already brought 16 homes back into use in 2016/17. This work will continue within the Housing Strategy Action Plan
	Explore Build to rent schemes	This action has been included within the Housing Strategy action plan to be explored further.
	Provide assistance with down-sizing	'Small is Beautiful' scheme is a partnership initiative with WKHA to incentivise residents to down-size. We will consider a private sector version.
	Lobby for legislative changes for assured shorthold tenancies to provide greater security of tenure	Noted
	<p>Explore how planning system may be used to prevent houses with shared accommodation being converted to family homes</p> <p>It also highlighted the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordability of housing • Decline in one bed housing stock 	<p>Noted. This forms part of the Housing Strategy Action Plan and the new Local Plan to:</p> <p>Work with Planning Services to ensure that affordable housing policies provide for a range of housing sizes and types to meet specific housing needs including social rent, HMOs for single people, move on accommodation, special needs housing and housing for older people. HAs will only convert if there is no longer a need</p>

Name/ Organisation	Summary of response	Response to comments and amendments to draft Strategy
Elizabeth Akenhead, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, Kent Branch	The Councils need to do much more to ensure that sufficient affordable and social housing is provided, including building properties themselves.	Ambition 2 includes objectives to improve the housing supply including affordable housing. This will be taken forward within the Housing Strategy Action Plan.
	Within the new housing targets, raising the achievement of affordable housing would save hundreds of acres of greenfield land, thus helping to protect the countryside in a Borough where most of the countryside is in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Metropolitan Green Belt.	Noted.

Key Implications

Financial

In 2017/18 this Council receives a Flexible Homelessness Support Grant from Government to deliver targeted homelessness prevention services. It is recognised that the Homelessness Reduction Act will put additional burdens on the Council's Homelessness team. Further New Burdens funding may be available from Government in early 2018 to support Councils with the transition and implementation of new duties as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act from April 2018.

This Council successfully bid for £94,000 for 2017/18 and 2018/19 from the DCLG Trailblazer funding to deliver targeted outreach HERO advice services to prevent homelessness and address health and wellbeing issues for vulnerable families across the District.

All actions and services delivered as part of the West Kent Homelessness Strategy are funded through external funding or existing Council housing budgets as part of this Council's duties as a local housing authority.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

Under Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002, this Council has a legal duty to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy every five years. No other legal implications have been identified.

Equality Assessment

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and does not vary between groups of people. The results of this analysis are set out immediately below.

The strategy will provide assistance to all residents at risk of homelessness. The Equalities Impact Assessment is set out at Appendix D.

Resource (non financial)

Work and actions within the West Kent Homelessness Strategy will be delivered from existing resources as form part of the Action Plan within the Sevenoaks District Housing Strategy.

Conclusions

A new West Kent Homelessness Strategy has been developed by the three West Kent Councils and Members are asked to adopt the Strategy following a consultation period.

Appendices	Appendix A - West Kent Homelessness Strategy Appendix B -West Kent Homelessness Evidence Data Appendix C - Consultation responses Appendix D - Equalities Impact Assessment
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Background Papers	None
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Lesley Bowles

Chief Officer Communities & Business