

# HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

## PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: SOCIAL CARE ADULTS AND HEALTH

CABINET

18TH JANUARY, 2007

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### Wards Affected

Countywide

### Purpose

To update Cabinet on progress made in relation to homelessness prevention in Herefordshire.

### Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

### Recommendation

- THAT: (a) the report be noted; and**
- (b) Cabinet receive one further quarterly report during 2007 on progress and developments in homelessness prevention services and the work of the Homelessness and Housing Advice Steering Group.**

### Reasons

In July 2005, Cabinet agreed a number of 'spend to save' initiatives to address the financial pressures created by the demand for homelessness services in Herefordshire. Since then, changes have been implemented, including the return in-house of homelessness and housing advice services from Herefordshire Housing Limited, which have led to an improving position around homelessness prevention in Herefordshire.

### Considerations

1. The spend to save fund has enabled nearly 300 successful homelessness prevention payments to be made since the fund became active in October 2005. The total value of homelessness prevention payments made since the fund was created is now in the region of £130k, which has impacted significantly on the use of temporary accommodation. For example, since last April, the fund has helped over 70 families access the private rented sector before becoming homeless – previously these same families would have stayed in Bed and Breakfast establishments whilst the authority determined whether it had a duty to re-house them.
2. Mediation services and Sanctuary interventions continue to form an important role in preventing family exclusions, and ensuring victims of domestic violence have the opportunity to remain in their own homes. In December 2006, the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) committed £9k to fund further

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from Derek Allen, Change Manager-  
Homelessness on 01432 261600

Sanctuary work in Herefordshire. On average, three families request Sanctuary interventions per month, and two families receive mediation services.

3. The number of new families booked into Bed and Breakfast accommodation has continued to fall, and the service is now averaging less than two new families into B&B per month. There are currently 4 families in B&B, only 2 of whom have been there for longer than 6 weeks. The service is therefore still on target to cease the routine use of B&B in Herefordshire by the end of this financial year. Achieving this continues to depend upon retaining the prevention team in its current format, together with continued stability in terms of the demand for services.
4. Demand for homelessness and housing advice services still shows little sign of slowing down, but the number of homelessness applications and acceptances under the Housing Act 1996 continues to remain stable at quarter three of 2006/07. The authority also accepted a request from the DCLG to host a 'Homelessness Prevention Masterclass', which took place in October, and was attended by housing colleagues from across the West Midlands.
5. The newly formed Homelessness and Housing Advice Steering Group has now met three times, helping to shape policy, procedure and local responses to homelessness. A Herefordshire Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group has also been established, and this met for the first time in December 2006. The second Homelessness Prevention Scrutiny Seminar, also took place in December and was well attended, and explored some of the future housing and homelessness challenges facing the Council and its partners.
6. The historical accumulation of the number of families living in temporary accommodation still remains a challenge, although it continues to decrease more quickly than initially projected at the start of the financial year.

## **Risk Management**

As a result of the substantial progress made in reducing homeless acceptance rates and the associated use of B&B, the budget for B&B accommodation in 2006/07 has proved adequate, and there are no longer concerns around an overspend for this financial year.

Continued use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families could result in judicial review proceedings being taken against the Council by families accommodated in Bed and Breakfast for longer than 6 weeks contrary to the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order (England) 2003.

## **Alternative Options**

Not applicable.

## **Consultees**

Not applicable

## **Background Papers**

Reports to Cabinet dated 19th May, 2005; 14th July, 2005; and 20th April, 2006