

THE EFFECT OF HOMELESSNESS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN HEREFORDSHIRE

Report By: SUE FIENNES, DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To advise on the work-in-progress to improve the experience of young people and families requiring suitable housing.

Financial Implications

2. The resources available to provide suitable housing are stretched. Council capital and revenue resources are being targeted to improve the position and prevent homelessness. The Supporting People programme of housing support is also being prioritised to assist.

Considerations

3. An important issue for young people in Herefordshire is the lack of affordable housing and associated homelessness. Average house prices within the County, associated with national market trends and inward migration of older affluent households, have continued to rise at a faster rate than regional and national house price averages and local wage levels.
4. Homelessness in Herefordshire has therefore been rising at an alarming rate leading to an increasing reliance on the use of temporary accommodation including Bed and Breakfast accommodation both for young people and families with children. Similarly, move-on opportunities for vulnerable young people including Care Leavers have been limited thereby compromising the Council's ability to ensure the best possible housing outcomes for children in all instances. This theme was reflected in the Joint Area Review Report, leading to an associated recommendation around improving access to housing for young people and families.
5. Whilst national housing market and economic trends will continue to limit the ability of local authorities to respond to the challenge of providing sufficient affordable housing, progress in tackling the levels of homelessness in Herefordshire has been dramatic in recent months. Furthermore, a great deal is being done to improve the housing chances of vulnerable young people and families with children in responding to the specific challenges identified within the JAR.
6. Homelessness and Housing Advice Services returned in-house from contracted-out arrangements in April 2006 and an associated shift in focus towards homelessness prevention has led to a reduction in homelessness application levels and a reduction in the number of cases where a full homelessness duty was accepted. Indeed, the employment of prevention officers prior to April 1st 2006 led to the

number of homelessness acceptance levels dropping from and out-turn of 510 in 04/05 to 416 in 05/06.

7. Associated with this trend, the number of families occupying temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation has fallen from a high of 55 in January 2006 to 30 at the end of May 2006.
8. There remains a shortage of single-person accommodation within the County and it is estimated that the average length of stay in temporary accommodation for young people is twice that of adults and families. However, a great deal is being done to improve the housing opportunities of vulnerable young people, including Care Leavers, much of which is reflected within the JAR Performance Improvement Action Plan and some of which started before the review.
 - Home Point allocation policies now enable Priority Status to be given to Care Leavers at the earliest possible stage thereby improving re-housing chances upon leaving care.
 - Mediation Services have been developed to help tackle the issue of parental evictions leading to young homelessness. Out of 13 cases referred to mediation services, 9 have led to young people being kept out of Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
 - A new Social Housing Agreement has been drafted which emphasises the need for single-person accommodation to be prioritised within new affordable housing development commissioned by Strategic Housing
 - £500k Capital investment has led to the purchase of 4 houses for young people leaving care in partnership between Childrens Services, Strategic Housing and a local Registered Social Landlord.
 - A further 2 units of accommodation are to be provided through conversion works under a partnership between a local Registered Social Landlord and Strategic Housing. Plans are also in development to create 4 accommodation units through the conversion of a former hostel to provide housing for vulnerable young people aligned with housing-related support services from the Supported Housing for Young Persons Project (SHYPP).
 - Floating support services to Care Leavers and other vulnerable young people are being expanded through additional funding from the Supporting People programme.
 - Protocols are currently under development to enable improved co-operation between Childrens Services and housing providers regarding the handling of families and young people where a tenancy or housing is at risk.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Committee note the report and advise on any further information required which would build on the scrutiny review by Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing and the Joint Area Review Improvement reporting.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None identified.