

## EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOMELESSNESS

Report By: Head of Strategic Housing

### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

1. To report on the response of the Cabinet Member (Social Care Adults and Health) to the Recommendations on Homelessness made by the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee.

### Financial Implications

2. None identified

### Background

3. Following a first event hosted by Adult Social Care and Scrutiny Committee in October 2005, the then Chairman of the Committee requested a second homelessness consultation event be held in December 2006. This event was to include representatives from relevant agencies across the County and was designed to build on the work that had taken place following the event in October 2005.
4. The event focussed on lessons learned in the last year in terms of tackling the main causes of homelessness in Herefordshire and explored opportunities for closer working arrangements in the future. A series of recommendations were agreed by Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee on 23rd March 2007. These recommendations have been reproduced below and have been considered by the Cabinet Member for Social Care Adults and Health. The Cabinet Member's response to each has been set out within this report together with an update of progress to date.
  - (a) **Recommendation** - the Committee notes the level of ongoing debt-related homelessness in Herefordshire, and that the Council considers ways of proactively tackling this issue

**Update** - Since March 2007, Strategic Housing and the Homelessness & Prevention team have proactively been tackling the issue of on-going debt-related homelessness in Herefordshire. The following details the work that has taken place: -

- The development and sign-up of a new RSL Homelessness Prevention protocol. The objective of this protocol is to reduce evictions in the County from rent arrears along with developing procedures and forming a forum group of housing and prevention officers to offer additional support to tenants in debt.

- The development of a 'fast tracking' relationship between Housing Benefit and Prevention Officers to reduce debt through rent arrears and problematic claims.
- The increased provision of intensive support offered through Shelter officers. This ensures a lengthy amount of support for clients with challenging issues including debt.
- Exploring the potential to use the CLG one-off payment to develop an intensive debt management service with Citizens Advice Bureau in Herefordshire.

**Cabinet Member Response** – That this recommendation is accepted and that the proactive work by the Homelessness Team outlined above should continue.

- (b) **Recommendation** - knowledge of options in the housing market could be increased, amongst the public, and amongst the agencies working with customers threatened with homelessness.

**Update** - Options and Prevention officers aim to increase the knowledge of housing options amongst the public and the agencies working with homeless clients. The following details some of the work that has taken place since March 2007: -

- The regular attendance of prevention officers at agency team meetings to increase awareness and understanding of options available to clients along with presentations to these staff.
- A 'Homelessness Training day' organised in July 07. Agency staff in the County were invited. The aim of the day was to discuss legislation, options available to their clients and a realistic picture of Homelessness in the County.
- A 'Mental Health Training day' was organised in July 07. Mental health staff in the County were invited. The aim of the day was to discuss legislation, options available to their clients and a realistic picture of Homelessness within the County.
- Prevention Officers deliver an 'advice sheet' to clients during every visit. This is personalised to the client and details the housing options available to them within the housing market.

**Cabinet Member Response** – That this recommendation is accepted and continues to be addressed and developed

- (c) **Recommendation** – agencies continue to work together to share information and further develop an 'early warning' approach to homelessness, building on good practice established during the last year

**Update** - Agencies have continued to work together to share information and further develop an 'early warning' approach to homelessness. The following details some of the work that has taken place: -

- The development of a new RSL Homelessness Prevention protocol to formalise the procedures in existence of early warning notices of oncoming evictions to the Homeless Prevention team. This work is expected to continue.

- The continued and improved working relationships with agencies such as SHYPP and Connexions to develop early warnings of young people becoming homeless.

**Cabinet Member Response** – That this recommendation is accepted and that further exploration of the potential role and funding of the Village Warden Scheme is considered.

- (d) **Recommendation** – mediation and sanctuary options have made an impact in reducing homelessness in Herefordshire and should continue to be considered with young people and victims of domestic violence whenever appropriate

**Update** - The Sanctuary Scheme and Mediation Schemes continue to be available in the County. The Sanctuary Scheme has increasing referrals. Good relationships with the Police, Fire Service, Women's Aid and the You @ Home agency have been developed with the Homelessness team. All agencies are working together to promote the service along with reducing homelessness amongst domestic abuse cases.

**Cabinet Member Response** – That this recommendation is accepted

- (e) **Recommendation** -That agencies should work closely with schools to prevent youth homelessness with the youth homelessness prevention programme being rolled out to all secondary schools in 2007/08 and further work is undertaken to develop further potential in the private sector housing market.

**Update** – The schools project has been extremely successful in its first year and SHYPP has aspirations to expand the project to target an increased volume of delivery to schools for 2007/08 and beyond. However, the financial implications of creating capacity to roll-out the scheme to all schools during 2007/08 would be considerable by comparison to currently supported costs. There is limited scope for increasing funding to this project following consultations with RSL's. However, the scheme continues and additional options will be explored with SHYPP and Children's Services to attract funding.

**Cabinet Member Response** – That this recommendation is accepted in principle and that officers will continue to work with SHYPP, Children's Services and other partners to try and identify alternative additional funding options that would enable an expansion of the project to cover all schools.

- (f) **Recommendation** – the Council continues to develop preventative and reconciliatory protocols in relation to homelessness in partnership with other agencies

**Update** - The Council continues to develop preventative and reconciliatory protocols in relation to homelessness in line with the Homelessness Strategy 2003. Since March 2007, the following are being developed or finalised: -

- The development of the Hospital Discharge protocol including Mental Health has begun and is in the mid stages of development.
- The Prison Leavers protocol is expected to be completed by March 08.
- RSL Homelessness Prevention protocol

- The development of a joint Housing and Social Services protocol for homeless 16 and 17 year olds is in the first stages of progression. Lead officers have been nominated.

**Cabinet Member Response** – That this recommendation is accepted and that work continues to develop and roll-out approaches to improve joint working with other agencies

- (g) **Recommendation** – the Council explores new ways of preventing homelessness for families who have experienced this in the past, and considers the support required to ensure these families do not become homeless in the future

**Update** – work has been progressing in this area as follows.

- The increased provision of support services in the County through the Shelter service, particularly working with families with these types of issues.
- The 'Move on Project' and the secondment of an officer to work with families and their moving out of temporary accommodation to long term supported accommodation.
- The role of the Homelessness Prevention Protocol will enable an early warning system to identify potential homelessness as early as possible enabling prevention activities to commence.

**Cabinet Member Response** – That this recommendation is accepted.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the response to the recommendations set out in this report be endorsed, subject to any comments the Committee wishes to make.**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- None Identified