

## HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

**Report By: Change Manager - Homelessness**

### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

1. To provide an update on progress to date with homelessness prevention in Herefordshire since the homelessness consultation event in October 2005.

### Financial Implications

2. To be considered as part of the implementation of the review recommendations and within the transfer and reshape of homelessness and housing advice services from Herefordshire Housing Ltd to Herefordshire Council.

### Background

3. The number of homelessness presentations and acceptances in Herefordshire has risen steadily since 2002, accompanied by a significant rise in spending on temporary accommodation. There were 510 homelessness acceptances in 2004/05.
4. Cabinet agreed a number of new financial and preventative measures to tackle homelessness in July 2005.
5. Since the homelessness consultation event in October 2005, commissioned by this Committee, a number of changes have been implemented which have led to an improving position around homelessness prevention in Herefordshire.

### Progress

6. Two full time equivalent homelessness prevention officers have dealt with over 100 homelessness cases since they took up post in January 2006. Less than 10% of these cases have gone onto become homelessness applications under the Housing Act 1996. These officers are also tackling some of the wider issues around homelessness prevention such as liaising with private landlords and setting up a programme of interventions in schools.
7. The spend to save fund has enabled 25 successful homelessness prevention payments to be made between January and March 2006. The total value of these payments is £5,000.

8. Successful mediation services are being provided by Herefordshire Mediation, and Womens Aid have ensured sanctuary options are being explored where appropriate, in cases of domestic violence.
9. The number of new families booked into bed and breakfast accommodation has fallen steadily from 24 in November 2005 to 7 in February 2006, leading to an improved out turn position in this particular budget. The financial implications are contained in a report elsewhere on the agenda of the Committee.
10. Arrangements are now in place for the transfer back in-house of homelessness and housing advice services by the end of March 2006. Staff will be located across a number of locations in Herefordshire. The prevention team continue to work productively with colleagues at Herefordshire Housing Ltd to develop “early warning approaches” to homelessness.
11. Meeting dates and terms of reference have been established for the newly-formed homelessness and housing advice steering group. The group includes representatives from Scrutiny Committee, and officers from across the Council and other key partners.
12. Negotiations with Shelter are taking place over re-specifying the Herefordshire project ‘Homeless to home’ service to give an increased homelessness prevention focus, to include co-location with Strategic Housing staff. These new arrangements are being trialled now.
13. The historical accumulation of the number of families living in temporary accommodation remains an issue, although this is reducing slowly. A new one-year secondment will be available within the homelessness team, designed to focus on monitoring temporary accommodation usage and encouraging active bidding patterns amongst homeless service users.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT (a) the update be noted,**

**and**

**(b) the Committee is kept informed of progress on developments in homelessness prevention services and the work of the Homelessness & Housing Advice Steering Group after these services are transferred back in-house**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- None identified