

HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: SOCIAL CARE ADULTS AND HEALTH

CABINET

13TH JULY, 2006

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.

Recommendations

THAT Cabinet notes the update and receives two further quarterly reports during this year on progress and developments in homelessness prevention services and the work of the Homelessness & 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 Ltd, which have led to an improving position around homelessness prevention in Herefordshire.

Considerations

1. The spend to save fund has enabled 240 successful homelessness prevention payments to be made since the fund became active in October 2005, and this trend has continued into the new financial year. The total value of homelessness prevention payments made since the fund was created is £46,000. In the past, the majority of these 240 applicants would have been placed in temporary accommodation, potentially costing well in excess of £1 Million.
2. Mediation services continue to be provided by Herefordshire Mediation, which has enabled young people to stay at home where appropriate, and strengthened working practices around youth homelessness are being developed with partner agencies around the county. Closer working with the Aftercare team continues to produce improved outcomes for some care leavers in housing need. Additional units of accommodation have been secured in partnership with a local Registered Social Landlord to support young people leaving care.

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

3. The number of new families booked into bed and breakfast accommodation has continued to fall steadily, and we are now averaging less than four new families into B&B per month. B&B use has fallen by 60% since the start of 2006, and we currently have 17 families in B&B, 12 of whom have been there for longer than 6 weeks. We have therefore set ourselves a target of ceasing any routine use of B&B in Herefordshire by the end of this financial year. Achieving this will depend upon retaining the prevention team in its current format, together with continued stability in terms of the demand for services.
4. While demand for homelessness and housing advice services shows no sign of slowing down, the number of homelessness applications and acceptances under the Housing Act 1996 has showed continued signs of increased stability in the last 6 months, due to early prevention activity. During the final quarter of 2005/06, the Council took 94 homelessness applications, resulting in 45 acceptances. This compares to 44 applications in this first quarter of 2006/07, and 22 acceptances. We expect this homelessness activity level to settle at around this latest first quarter figure from now on. Targets set for 417 homeless acceptances for 06/07 were met earlier than anticipated - within the 05/06 financial year this figure was 416.
5. The newly formed homelessness and housing advice steering group met in May 06 for the first time. Initial feedback on homelessness prevention has generally been positive, and the group have advised the Council should focus on producing published policies and procedures in this field as a matter of priority. Department for Communities and Local Government guidance has now been published which will help us to complete this task.
6. We have evidence that the emphasis on homelessness prevention is having a positive impact with those people for whom homelessness cannot be avoided. For example, Pomona Place, a hostel for single homeless people, reports a significantly increased move-on rate for single homeless people as a result of decreased pressure on the Home Point choice-based lettings register.
7. The historical accumulation of the number of families living in temporary accommodation still remains a challenge, although it is now decreasing more quickly than initially projected at the start of the financial year.

Risk Management

Despite the substantial progress made in reducing homeless acceptance rates and the associated use of B&B, the budget for bed and breakfast accommodation in 2006/07 may not be adequate, despite additional budget being allocated. The implications will be reported as part of the integrated performance report throughout the financial year, and every effort is being made to prevent an overspend occurring.

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.