

Cherwell District Council

Executive

2 July 2018

Homelessness Strategy 2018 -2020

Report of Director: Wellbeing

This report is public

Purpose of report

To consider the priorities and actions set out in the new Homelessness Strategy 2018-20 and Action Plan and approve these documents for implementation.

It is a statutory requirement to have a Homelessness Strategy and to have carried out a review of homelessness in the council area.

The strategic priorities identified for Cherwell are:

- Prevent and relieve homelessness in the district
- Prevent single homelessness
- Ensure vulnerable people can access appropriate help and support
- Ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary and permanent accommodation

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To approve the Homelessness Strategy 2018-2020 and Action Plan which are based on a review of homelessness in the district in order to ensure that the Council meets statutory requirements and is able to respond effectively to the needs of homeless households.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The previous Homelessness Strategy for Cherwell District Council was published in 2012 as part of its Housing and Homelessness Strategy, covering the period 2012-2017. This Homelessness Strategy is a stand-alone document and will help to underpin the strategic framework within which housing services and other related services operate.
- 2.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced the requirement on all local housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their district and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results at least every five years.

2.3 Homelessness strategies must deal with all homelessness, not just where there is a statutory duty.

3.0 Report Details

3.1 Since our previous strategy was produced in 2015 there have been some major changes in legislation. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was implemented in April 2018 and introduces new duties for local housing authorities relating to homelessness. Councils are now required to help all eligible households at risk of losing accommodation where they are threatened within homelessness within 56 days and have a duty to help those who are homeless to secure suitable accommodation regardless of whether they are intentionally homeless or in priority need.

3.2 Alongside the changes in homelessness legislation further welfare reform measures have been introduced including:

- Reduction in the benefit cap cutting the total amount of benefits available for those living outside of London to £20,000 (£384.62 per week) for couples and families and £13,400 (£257.69 per week) for single adults.
- Working age benefits frozen from April 2016 until 5 April 2020.
- Eligibility for Child Tax Credits limited to 2 children from April 2017
- Changes to the way the management of temporary accommodation is funded. The management fee that was paid by the Department for Work and Pensions to local authorities on a per household basis ended in March 2017 and has been replaced by an annual allocation of funding (Flexible Homeless Support Grant).
- Universal Credit (UC), the benefit that is gradually replacing the 6 main working age benefits/tax credits, will be fully implemented throughout the district by November 2018. Also similar to Child Tax Credit the child element of UC is limited to 2 children.

3.3 The changing policy landscape presents a number of threats and opportunities to our Homelessness Strategy. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act means we need to think differently about how we tackle homelessness and to continue strengthening our focus on preventing homelessness wherever possible.

3.4 The Homelessness Strategy 2018–2020 is underpinned by a Homelessness Review which sets out the evidence base, current trends and the context of homelessness in the district. It includes information about interventions and services that we are using to respond effectively to homeless households.

Key Facts – Homelessness Review

3.5 Homelessness Levels – The number of homeless applications has fluctuated throughout the period. They increased in early 2016, with a correlating increase throughout the year in the duty to provide temporary accommodation, but fell in 2017. However, the number of accepted duties as a percentage of applications was higher in 2017 than in the two previous years.

3.6 Causes of homelessness locally - The main reasons for homelessness are:

- Ending of assured shorthold tenancy

- Family/friends no longer willing or able to accommodate and
- Relationship breakdown, including 'violent relationship breakdown'

3.7 Priority need of accepted households - The overwhelming reason that we accept a duty to accommodate homeless households is because they have dependent children or are pregnant. Other priority need reasons vary e.g. single adults with complex needs or significant health issues.

3.8 Homelessness preventions - The key prevention tools that we use to assist a household to remain in their existing home are debt advice and resolving rent arrears, provided by the in-house Money Advice Service, and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) administered by the Revenues and Benefits Team. By far our most effective tool in assisting households to move to alternative accommodation is the Housing Register, via an offer of accommodation.

Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2020 – The Priorities

3.9 The Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2020 identifies 4 main priorities and proposed actions to address them. A copy of the full Strategy and Action Plan can be found at Appendix A.

PRIORITY 1: Prevent and relieve homelessness in the district

We aim to:

- Demonstrate a corporate commitment to homelessness prevention
- Prevent homelessness, whenever possible, through timely advice and information
- Focus homelessness prevention activity on anticipating and tackling the common causes of homelessness locally
- Continue the development of effective partnerships with other departments within the council and statutory, voluntary and other agencies to prevent and relieve homelessness
- Focus on early identification of households at risk of homelessness
- Continue to improve collection and analysis of information about local trends in homelessness to enable intelligence led service delivery

PRIORITY 2: Prevent Single Homelessness

We aim to:

- Ensure services are available to meet the needs of local single homeless people and those who sleep rough in Cherwell
- Better understand the needs of people who sleep rough in Cherwell

PRIORITY 3: Ensure vulnerable people can access appropriate help and support

We aim to:

- Ensure households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness can access appropriate help and support through partnership working
- Ensure future commissioning of support and help services is evidenced by robust data collection
- Provide help and support services for households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

PRIORITY 4: Ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary and permanent accommodation

We aim to:

- Ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary and permanent accommodation in the social housing sector
- Enable homeless households to access permanent accommodation in the social housing sector
- Enable homeless households to access permanent accommodation in the private rented sector
- Ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary accommodation, minimising the use of bed and breakfast accommodation
- Ensure people experiencing domestic abuse can access suitable accommodation

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 Under homelessness legislation local housing authorities are required to carry out a review of homelessness in their district and to then formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on its results. Therefore Members are recommended to approve the Homelessness Strategy to ensure the Council meets its statutory requirements and is able to respond effectively to the needs of homeless households.

5.0 Consultation

February 2018

Homelessness Review Stakeholder Event. Consultation event with partners discussing the findings of the review and agreeing initial priorities for the strategy.

Feb – June 2018

Ongoing consultation with partners as the strategy was being developed. Specific partners have also been consulted, contributed data and verified findings as relevant.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To not approve the Homelessness Strategy 2018-2020 and Action Plan but this would mean the Council would not be meeting its statutory requirements. Also the Council would not have a strategic approach for responding effectively to the needs of homeless households in the district.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 The Council has made preparation for the introduction of the new Homelessness Reduction Act legislation and anticipated expenditure is contained within existing budgets.

Comments checked by:

Kelly Wheeler Principal Accountant, 01327 32230,
kelly.wheeler@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

Legal Implications

- 7.2 Under the Homelessness Act 2002, the Council, as the local housing authority, must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in its district. The strategy must be renewed at least every 5 years. The strategy must set out the Council's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are or will be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so. The County Council, as the local social services authority, must provide reasonable assistance.

Comments checked by:

Richard Hawtin, Team Leader – Non-contentious, Tel 01295 221695 Email
richard.hawtin@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: Yes

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Protected, Clean & Green: Maintain the District as a low crime area (including incidents of rough sleeping)

Thriving Communities & Wellbeing: Prevent homelessness; Safeguard the vulnerable; Deliver affordable housing & work with private sector landlords; Deliver the welfare reform agenda.

District of Opportunity & Growth: Deliver innovative and effective housing schemes

Lead Councillor

Councillor John Donaldson, Lead Member for Housing

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
A	Homelessness Strategy 2018-20
B	Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2018-20
Background Papers	
CDC Review of Homelessness Executive Summary – CDC Homelessness Review	
Report Author	Jo Barrett, Joint Housing Manager Gillian Spencer, Team Leader Housing Strategy & Partnerships
Contact Information	Jo Barrett, 01327 322369 Joanne.barrett@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk Gillian Spencer, 01327 322161 Gillian.spencer@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk