

Cherwell District Council

Executive

4 November 2013

Housing Strategy Priority Five: Homelessness Prevention Action Plan

Report of Head of Regeneration and Housing

This report is public

Purpose of report

To introduce a new Homelessness Prevention Action Plan 2013 - 2015

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To approve the Homelessness Prevention Action Plan which has been produced as part of a review of Cherwell's overarching Housing Strategy in the context of achieving the Gold Standard set up by DCLG through the National Housing Advisory Service
- 1.2 To note continued ring-fencing of DCLG Grant for homelessness prevention and partnership working until March 2015

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The Housing Strategy 2012 sets out 'the journey' that Cherwell District Council and partners have taken to significantly reduce homelessness and the number of people in temporary accommodation in the past five years.

Chapter Five of the Strategy acts as the Council's Homelessness Strategy, thus fulfilling the statutory requirements of the 2002 Housing Act. Since the production of the Housing Strategy in 2012 the impact of proposed welfare reform has resulted in local authorities revisiting their strategies and ensuring they are robust to deal with the potential challenges ahead.

The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan attached to this Report adds the necessary focus and detail to the Actions set out in the Housing Strategy and ensure continued performance.

3.0 Report Details

3.1 Gold Standard

The Action Plan links into the 'Gold Standard Programme'

The Gold Standard challenge for homelessness services was issued by CLG to Local Authorities in April 2013. There are 10 challenges to be met to reach Gold Standard, which is achieved through self-assessment and peer review. Cherwell is forming a partnership with the other Districts across the County to achieve this standard

3.2 Partnership Working

The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan outlines the Council's approach to Homelessness Prevention. It takes a strong partnership approach as it is more important than ever that we co-operate with partners to deliver our joint aims without duplication to offer best value for money from limited resources and the potential for increased homelessness as a result of welfare reform changes. The plan adopts a creative approach to offer the best value solutions at a time of austerity. Homelessness Grant from central government is no longer ring fenced and members are asked to confirm its use for homelessness prevention actions, as a spend-to-save measure.

3.3 Changing context for Homelessness services

The national reform agenda led by the Coalition Government requires Local Authority Homelessness Services to provide services more efficiently and to adapt services to meet the potential increase in homelessness following welfare reforms such as the introduction of Universal Credit. The requirement to do this at a time when resources are being cut brings challenges to Homelessness teams.

The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan

- lists the legislative and policy context which affects the way in which we deliver homelessness services to the local community
- describes the way in which we will provide a creative service which reacts to policy changes and reflects local conditions

Maintaining low levels of homelessness remains a priority for the district, not only because of the high cost of not doing so, but because of the devastating effect homelessness has on individuals and communities.

3.4 Resources for Homelessness Prevention

Funding front line services for homelessness prevention is critical to supporting the most vulnerable households, and to ensuring that the Council is not required to make investment in expensive temporary accommodation.

The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan lists the way in which we will work with partners to provide value for money, prevent duplication and bring investment to the district.

Central Government provided grant funding to local authorities to undertake homelessness prevention activities. This money is now forwarded un-ringfenced within the council overall grant from DCLG. Grant Shapps' last directive as Housing Minister was to advise Local Authorities that this money should remain dedicated to homelessness prevention at least until the end of the current Parliament.

Cherwell's DCLG Grant funding is dedicated to external partnerships that have been subject to Service Level Agreements and monitoring to ensure their contribution to our strategic homelessness prevention aims and all have played a major role in Cherwell's success in homelessness prevention. They have been essential to our success in reducing the use of temporary accommodation and will continue to be so in meeting the Gold Standard Challenge.

Chapter Five of Cherwell's Housing Strategy sets out the range of partnerships which are in place all of which have been instrumental in Cherwell's performance. On many occasions a small grant from Cherwell District Council has been a catalyst to lever in additional external investment from other public, charitable and private sector sources. As set out in the Housing Strategy, an important action within the Action Plan is to review all partnerships and ensure the investment continues to deliver the very best outcomes. This funding is crucial and the importance of its continuation cannot be overstated in terms of maintaining performance and preventing any rising costs associated with temporary accommodation.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan highlights some elements of the work being done by the Council and its partners to prevent homelessness.
- 4.2 The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan is the result of a review of the actions in Chapter 5 of the Housing Strategy 2012 – 17 in the light of policy changes including Welfare Reforms and responds to local factors
- 4.3 Adopting the Homelessness Prevention Action Plan is an important step in the process of meeting the Gold Standard Challenge for homelessness services, demonstrating corporate commitment to the prevention of homelessness as well as the Councils' intention to work actively in partnership

5.0 Consultation

Public Consultation	The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan was available through the consultation portal. No public responses were received, however, the actions had previously been consulted on through the Housing Strategy consultation
Registered Providers operating in Cherwell District Council Statutory and Voluntary agencies offering services to vulnerable people	A consultation launch event was held on 17 July, attended by many of the organisations who work with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Other organisations were contacted by email, and members of the public had

	<p>the opportunity to contribute their views via the portal on the website. This was publicised in the local press and on the radio.</p> <p>As a result of consultation, the Action Plan has been changed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ to broaden the partners worked with to include GPs and Health Visitors ○ to include CAB resources ○ to include reference to outcomes ○ to take more account of services offered by Children and Families
Cherwell District Council Equality and Access to Services Panel	The plan has been reviewed by the Equality and Access to services panel

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: Not to adopt a Homelessness Prevention Action Plan

It is a legal requirement to have a Homelessness Strategy which is reviewed annually

Option 2: Not to accept the Gold Challenge for Homelessness services

The Gold Standard is a government initiative which enables the Council to continue its high levels of homelessness prevention and offers free resources

Option 3: Not to continue partnership working

A reduction in current partnership working will place the Council at risk of a rise in homelessness and increased costs for temporary accommodation

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

7.1 The action plan sets out the areas of funding which can be drawn upon to deliver the actions as set out. The delivery of the strategy will be kept under review and annual reports will be produced with effect from April 2015 which will address future resource implications. This report assumes the current arrangements will continue using the existing level of homelessness grant until March 2015 to deliver the existing aims of the strategy. The DCLG grant is an unring-fenced grant so the council has discretion over where it can apply that funding

Comments checked by: Tim Madden; Interim Head of Finance and Procurement
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Legal Implications

- 7.2 The Council is required to have a Homelessness Strategy, which is regularly reviewed. This action plan is the result of such a review and updates the actions currently in the Housing Strategy in the context of Welfare Reform and the Gold Standard Challenge.

Comments checked by: Kevin Lane, Head of Law and Governance, 0300 0030107
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Risk Implications

- 7.3 The Homelessness Prevention Action Plan has been written at a time when there is a great increase in risk of homelessness, due to the effects of Welfare Reform. This contains a health and wellbeing risk for individuals at risk of homelessness; a risk of increased use of all public services (evidence shows this is the case) including health, criminal justice systems, and housing and a risk in terms of increased demand in council services. The strategic importance of the Homelessness Prevention Action Plan is therefore wide ranging. It addresses the needs of the most vulnerable in our community and acts in increase access to services. The actions arise from the Housing Strategy which is subject to an equality impact assessment

Comments checked by: Claire Taylor; Corporate Performance Manager; 0300 0030113; Claire.taylor@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision No

Financial Threshold Met: no

Community Impact Threshold Met: no

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

This decision links to the following items in the corporate plan:-
A district of opportunity
An accessible, value for money council
A safe and healthy Cherwell

Lead Councillor

Councillor Debbie Pickford, Lead Member for Housing

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
1	Homelessness Prevention Action Plan
Background Papers	
None	
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