

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 07 April 2014

Portfolio:	Health & Housing
Subject:	Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2014-17
Report of:	Director of Community
Strategy/Policy:	Housing Strategy
Corporate Objective:	A Balanced Housing Market

Purpose:

To seek approval for the adoption of a revised Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy for the period 2014 – 2017.

Executive summary:

This report summarises the draft Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2014 -2017, which sets out the aims and objectives of the Housing Options Service for the next three years, following a review of homelessness in the Borough.

The 2014 – 2017 Strategy will be the fourth produced by Fareham since it became a statutory requirement under the Homelessness Act 2002.

The draft strategy was considered by the Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel on 13 March 2014 and was recommended for approval and adoption.

Recommendation/Recommended Option:

That the Executive approves the draft Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy for Fareham 2014 -2017 and Action Plan, attached as Appendix A to the report.

Reason:

To enable the Council to deliver its objective of providing a sensitive and responsive prevention based service which gives good quality advice, assistance and support to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and, where appropriate to secure good quality accommodation.

Cost of proposals:

The proposals, including the appointment of the temporary post of Tenancy Support Officer will be met from within existing budgets including the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) annual Homelessness Prevention Grant.

Appendices: A: Draft Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2014 -2017

Background papers:

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Executive Briefing Paper

Date: 07 April 2014

Subject: Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2014-17

Briefing by: Director of Community

Portfolio: Health & Housing

INTRODUCTION

1. All local housing authorities are required to have a Homelessness Strategy in place which sets out how the authority intends to prevent and deal with homelessness within its district. The strategy should be produced following a review of homelessness which establishes the extent, causes and effects along with the views of stakeholders, partners and service users.
2. The 2014 – 2017 Strategy will be the fourth produced by Fareham since it became a statutory requirement under the Homelessness Act 2002. Annual reviews of the Action Plans produced against each strategy are carried out and the actions updated accordingly.

CHANGES SINCE 2010

3. The main changes which the new strategy needs to take into account can be summarised as follows:
 - The Welfare Reform Act 2012 has introduced some major changes to the welfare benefits systems, some of which have already impacted upon the ability of the authority to secure accommodation in the private rented sector for homeless households. Future reforms such as the introduction of Universal Credit will impact further on the Council's relationship with landlords.
 - The reform of homelessness and allocations legislation through the Localism Act 2011
 - Comprehensive Spending Review, funding received by local authorities has been cut dramatically over the last 3 years and further public sector cuts can be expected.
 - The ending of the Supporting People Programme and the impact this will have on homelessness services.
 - Reductions in the number of new homes being built by developers and Housing

Associations

- The ending of the Mortgage Rescue Scheme in Spring 2014
- The national launch of No Second Night Out – reducing Rough Sleeping

ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2010

4. Officers have prepared annual reports for members on the progress in achieving tasks as set out in the Action Plan. Where tasks could not be achieved, the reasons why and the subsequent actions which were being proposed were reported to members and the Action Plan amended.
5. The main achievements since 2010 can be summarised as follows:
 - Successful bid to HCA Hostel Programme resulted in 2 additional rooms at 101 Gosport Road
 - Conducted a Rough Sleeper Count and agreed Severe Weather Protocol with Two Saints and Gosport BC
 - Review of temporary accommodation undertaken resulting in new initiatives to access the private rented sector being launched in 2014.
 - Money Adviser post extended to April 2015
 - Rough Sleepers Outreach Worker recruited Dec 2013.
 - Selling five mobile home units at Dibles Park used as temporary accommodation
 - Introduced a new database for the Supported Housing Panel
6. One of the key actions not achieved was to increase the number of prevention of homeless cases by 10% by 2013. This is due in part to the increasing challenges to access options to prevent homelessness and the way in which the team now deal with approaches for housing assistance.

PRIORITIES FOR 2014 - 2017

7. The main priority will be to launch the new initiatives, aimed at increasing our access to accommodation in the private rented sector. Combined with active management of all households in temporary accommodation, it is hoped that placements in Bed and Breakfast accommodation can be contained to emergencies only and for limited periods of time.
8. Other priorities can be summarised as follows:-
 - Prepare for the withdrawal/ reduction of Supporting People Funding
 - Following the creation of the Initiatives team, establish consistent and effective management of all units of temporary accommodation to achieve move on within agreed timescales.
 - Explore opportunities to continue funding for the Rough Sleepers Outreach Worker

- Aim to achieve the Gold Standard 10 Local Challenges

CONSULTATION

9. The draft strategy has been prepared in consultation with a wide range of statutory and independent agencies, through a Homelessness Event held in December 2013. Members of the Strategic Housing Division have been actively involved in the development of the strategy and assisted in determining the priorities within the Action Plan.
10. The draft strategy was considered by the Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel on 13 March 2014 and recommended for approval by the Executive.

RISK ASSESSMENT

11. The impact of Welfare Reform and the continuing economic climate has impacted upon the Council's ability to meet housing need through reducing access to accommodation in the private rented sector. As a result there is a risk there could be increased revenue expenditure and legal challenges if the Council fails to meet its statutory obligations to homeless households.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12. Many of the proposals in the strategy and Action Plan can be met from existing budgets or the DCLG annual Homelessness Prevent Grant. The continuation of the post of Tenancy Support Officer will be dependent upon the success of the new private rented initiatives being launched in 2014 and the revenue they are able to generate.

CONCLUSION

13. Since the production of the previous strategy, there have been significant changes in the local housing environment. The economic climate continues to have an impact upon the financial situation of many households and the Council's budgets. Measures introduced through the Welfare Reform Act 2012 have affected the Council's ability to access accommodation in the private rented sector and with further changes planned with the introduction of Universal Credit it is likely the Council will continue to face challenges. This report highlights the current homelessness situation and the priorities the Council intends to adopt in order to address these.

Reference Papers:

FBC Housing Strategy 2010-2015

FBC Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2010-2013