

2 September 2015		ITEM: 6
Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee		
Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2010-15		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Dawn Shepherd, Housing Strategy Manager, Housing		
Accountable Head of Service: Dermot Moloney, Strategic Lead, Housing		
Accountable Director: Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

There is a statutory duty on every Local Authority to have a Homelessness Strategy which sets out the local authority'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 local authority must ensure that all organisations whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people are involved in the strategy.

The last strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2010.

A new homelessness prevention strategy is required which takes into account current homelessness in the borough, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and opportunities for preventing homelessness.

A review of current homelessness, its impacts and anticipated needs for prevention of homelessness in the future has recently been undertaken – this includes a full public consultation. The review findings are presented at **Appendix A**.

Subsequently, actions and timescales for addressing the findings have been developed into an action plan at **Appendix B**.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the board approves Thurrock Homelessness Review 2015 document - Appendix A.

1.2 That the board approves the Thurrock Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2015-20 - Appendix B.

1.3 That the board approves an annual review of the Action Plan – to be presented by officers at September O & S meetings.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Every Local Authority must have a Homelessness Strategy which sets out the local authority'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.

2.2 The local authority must ensure that all organisations whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people are involved in the strategy.

2.3 Thurrock Council last implemented a homelessness strategy in 2010. Since then there have been many changes which have impacted homelessness including welfare reform, the Localism Act, a new housing allocations scheme, a new tenancy policy, recession and funding changes.

2.4 The new strategy will have an emphasis on prevention and will identify actions to address the main causes of homelessness in the borough.

2.5 To inform the new strategy a two stage consultation was implemented:

- Stage 1: Between February and April 2015 an initial consultation was undertaken, which included:
 - Face to face consultation sessions with Council staff and partner agencies (both Housing and non-Housing);
 - An online survey was sent to 850 recent service users;
 - A statistical analysis of local, national and regional data was undertaken in order to inform the review.

Subsequently a draft review document and draft action plan was written.

- Stage 2: Between April and July 2015 a further consultation using the draft documents was undertaken, which included:
 - Presentations to senior managers and directors of Children's and Adult's services;
 - Presentations to the Health & Wellbeing scrutiny board and the Youth Cabinet;

- 10 face to face consultations with staff, partner agencies, providers of temporary and supported accommodation in the Borough, Members, and Registered Providers;
- Face to face consultation session with representatives from BME groups;
- An online public consultation – advertised on the Council and the Thurrock Choice Homes websites and within the Thurrock Enquirer.

2.6 The finalised review document and strategy action plan are completed and presented to the Housing O & S Committee - **Appendix A and Appendix B.**

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Consultation and statistical analysis identified the following key issues, which the action plan will seek to specifically address:

- There are four main causes of homelessness in Thurrock:
 - Eviction by parents, family or friend;
 - The ending of an Assured Short hold tenancy;
 - Violence or harassment;
 - Mortgage or rent arrears.
- Non priority groups, i.e. those without children or vulnerabilities who would not be accommodated by the Council under a statutory duty if homeless, have few housing options:
 - Home ownership is beyond the reach of many;
 - Low cost home ownership is a more viable option for working residents;
 - Private renting can be expensive with increasingly rising rents;
 - Non-working residents in receipt of Housing Benefit may struggle to obtain good quality affordable rented accommodation since there is an increasing shortfall between Local Housing Allowances (the subsidy paid under benefit rules) and actual market rents.
- The impact of recent and future welfare reforms could make rehousing for clients more difficult - particularly the introduction of Universal Credit and the non-payment of Housing Benefit to young people under the age of 25 since there are reports of local landlords who previously let to people in receipt of Housing Benefit but are now refusing to take tenants in receipt of Universal Credit, due to concerns over potential non-payment;
- A number of London boroughs have purchased or rented property in the borough, as a means of accommodating people to whom they owe a duty to house. The impact is that landlords are asking for higher rents which

widen the gap between Local Housing Allowance and actual market rent. This means fewer properties are available for Thurrock residents;

- Anecdotally, a number of people have been moved into the borough with complex needs which are not being supported and there has been no pass over of services – this requires further investigation;
- Debt and poor money management is a key factor to homelessness with rent and mortgage arrears as one of the top four reasons

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Council has a statutory duty to consult on and implement a five year homelessness strategy in order to set out the Local Authority'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.
- 4.2 It is good practice to review the strategy action plan annually to ensure that it continues to meet the local needs.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 A two stage consultation was undertaken between February and July 2015 – full details and the results are outlined in **Appendix C**.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The Strategy Action Plan dovetails with the Housing Strategy 2015-20, incorporating and expanding on a number of the actions identified within that plan.
- 6.2 It also identifies specific areas for future work which address the corporate priorities of building pride, responsibility and respect within the home and improving health and wellbeing by preventing homelessness which can have an adverse impact.
- 6.3 During the consultation the impact of proposed actions was considered as part of the equality assessment. Specific face to face sessions with representatives of BME groups and the vulnerable were held. A community and equality impact assessment was completed.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Finance Manager

This strategy will formalise the objectives for the service; it is hoped an increase emphasis on prevention will help reduce costs and reduce homelessness in the long term.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Martin Hall**
Housing Solicitor / Housing Team Leader

The Homelessness act 2002, s1 (3) requires a Local Authority to review homelessness in its area and to produce a strategy. Section 1(4) requires that the strategy is reviewed and updated at least every 5 years.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development & Equalities manager

A community and equality impact assessment was conducted as part of the consultation process to assess the impact of the proposed strategy. Actions identified through this will inform the strategy and action plan – for example, the establishment of a homelessness forum with partners to support key issues and to support a regular review of the CEIA.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

Not applicable.

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix A - Thurrock Homelessness Review 2015
- Appendix B - Thurrock Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2015-20
- Appendix C - Consultation on Homelessness Prevention Strategy - February to August 2015
- Appendix 1 - Online Survey of Service Users
- Appendix 2 - 2nd Report - Online Survey Homelessness Strategy

Report Author:

Dawn Shepherd

Housing Strategy Manager

Housing, Business Development