

Meeting date: 27 March 2019
Report to: Cabinet Member for Environment and Housing
Subject/report title: Homelessness Review and Strategy 2019
Report from: Assistant Director Stronger Communities
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present a draft of the 2019 Homelessness Review and Strategy for approval, to provide notification of a Government consultation on partnership arrangements for homelessness and to recommend arrangements for managing reviews of homelessness decisions.

2. Decision(s) recommended

- 2.1 To approve the draft Homelessness Strategy for 2019
2.2 To note the government consultation on partnership arrangements for homelessness
2.3 To approve the recommendation for management of reviews of homelessness decisions

3. What is the issue?

- 3.1 The Council is required to publish and keep up to date a Review of homelessness in its area and a Strategy which sets out how it will seek to prevent homelessness and deal with it when it occurs. The draft Review is attached at Appendix A and the draft Strategy at Appendix B.
3.2 The Health and Wellbeing Board received the draft Review and Strategy at its meeting on 11 March 2019 and its views and recommendations will be reported to your meeting.
3.3 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has issued a consultation on how partnership working and accountability in homelessness services may be improved and whether government should introduce Homelessness Reduction Boards.
3.4 The draft Strategy notes the creation of a new strategic group on a pilot basis earlier this year

and recommends its continuation in 2019. This may be a useful basis for any new Board but it is proposed to consult widely with current partners, including the Health and Wellbeing Board, to establish whether and how a formal new entity will add value and complement existing arrangements. The consultation closes on 16 May 2019.

3.5 The current arrangements for the review of homelessness decisions are due for renewal and you are recommended to approve arrangements for the procurement of a new contract with a suitably qualified external provider for a period of two years with an additional two 12-month extension periods.

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

4.1 It is common for homelessness strategies to have a span of three years but in this case a one year strategy is proposed.

4.2 This is because in August 2018 the MHCLG issued a Rough Sleeping Strategy which requires local authorities to prepare 'Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Strategies' from 'winter' 2019. Fresh statutory Guidance is expected at some point in 2019 to allow for the preparation of the new strategies.

4.3 For this present strategy the most recent Guidance, published in February 2018, has been followed.

4.4 A detailed Action Plan will be developed with partners once the strategy is approved.

4.5 Monitoring of progress in implementing the strategy will be reported at various levels to the multi-agency homelessness forum (MAHF), to a proposed new homelessness strategic and delivery group, the Solihull Together Board and to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Housing.

4.6 Specific aspects of the strategy will be monitored by the Solihull Youth Hub Steering Group, through monitoring of the Outreach and Support contract and the Council / SCH Quarterly Monitoring Board.

4.7 The alternative method for reviewing homelessness decisions is in-house provision (by SCH or the Council). This is permissible under the legislation as long as the review is completed by a person who is senior to the officer who made the original decision.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

5.1 The draft Strategy is recommended as a basis for joint work with partners to extend and improve knowledge of homelessness and its implications, extend, improve and co-ordinate services to prevent and relieve homelessness and to support vulnerable people at all stages.

5.2 Its preparation has been informed by the updating of the Homelessness Review and various consultations as summarised at 6.3 below.

5.3 A link between the Homelessness Strategy and wider considerations of housing supply to meet local needs will be provided by the Strategic Housing Framework and the forthcoming review of the Council's housing allocations scheme.

5.4 The one-year span of the strategy will enable the Council and partners to focus on shorter term priorities while remaining flexible to respond to any new expectations or requirements which may be set out in the forthcoming guidance on Rough Sleeping and Homelessness strategies, including partnership arrangements as noted at 3.3 to 3.5 above.

- 5.5 Contracting homelessness reviews to an external provider is recommended because this option ensures that the decision is made by the independent housing expert.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 Delivery of key themes in the Council Plan:

How will the options/proposals in this report contribute to the delivery of the key themes in the Council Plan?

- ☒ Securing inclusive economic growth – (i) the Homelessness Review and Strategy will be a component of the Strategic Housing Framework, providing demand data for the analysis of Solihull's housing needs which informs the priorities for additional affordable homes; (ii) the strategy is concerned with helping people to stabilise and progress after being homeless, therefore the link to the provision of targeted support to help people train and find work is increasingly important.
- ☒ Managing demand and expectation for public services – homelessness is relevant to several areas of 'creating the conditions for communities to thrive' and should be considered when new approaches to enabling people to 'start and live well', tackling loneliness and social isolation and locality working are being developed.
- ☒ Developing and delivering our approach to services for adults and children with complex needs – (i) the implications of homelessness for many areas of policy has been recognised by the Solihull Together Board, and to ensure that all opportunities are taken for prevention and early intervention joint planning across several service areas, such as mental health and hospital discharge, will continue through 2019. The outcome of this will be refinement of the customer 'pathways' which bring together information, advice and assistance for defined customer groups. The draft strategy also proposes cross-agency plans to tackle the most common causes of homelessness; (ii) homelessness and insecurity of accommodation will be a consideration in the development of housing options for both younger and older adults.

6.2 Implications for children and young people, vulnerable groups and particular communities:

- 6.2.1 Safeguarding adults – homeless adults, particularly those who sleep rough, are often particularly vulnerable so the Outreach and Support service seeks to find accommodation for those who wish to be accommodated and offers continuing support to those who do not.
- 6.2.2 Safeguarding children – the importance of this is recognised in legislation and policy, for example all households with dependent children will be in 'priority need' if homeless and the Solihull Youth Hub, which provides the service to single people up to age 25 works closely with Children's Services and Skills to ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are observed.
- 6.2.3 Corporate parent – The Council's responsibilities are recognised in the policies for homelessness assistance by both SCH and Solihull Youth Hub and in the housing allocations scheme.
- 6.2.4 Vulnerable individuals – the Strategy is also concerned with the many single people who are not in 'priority need' but who are nevertheless vulnerable due to an array of factors including mental health and substance abuse. The Solihull Youth Hub and the Outreach and Support service provided by SIAS have each increased the identification of vulnerability amongst single people and increased the amount and quality of assistance provided to them.

6.2.5 Vulnerable groups – families and single people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness can generally be considered vulnerable due to their circumstances. Where this is sufficient for the household to be classed as being in ‘priority need’ this can lead to the full housing duty being owed to them.

6.2.6 Communities – homelessness and the threat of homelessness can have negative impacts on communities, from the stress and uncertainty of having an insecure home or being in temporary accommodation or on the street to the dislocation of having to relocate when homelessness occurs with consequent issues for education and social networks.

6.3 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.3.1 Internal stakeholders –the draft strategy and review is relevant in particular to Children’s Services and Skills and Adult Care and Support, together with safeguarding boards for children and adults.

6.3.2 Partner organisations – Solihull Community Housing (SCH), St Basils, Solihull Integrated Addiction Service (SIAS), Fry Accord, Bromford Housing and others have contributed to the development of the draft strategy.

6.3.3 Community groups – Solihull Churches Action on Homelessness (SCAH) are actively involved in delivering assistance to homeless people and have indicated their interest in helping to develop aspects of the new strategy.

6.3.4 Service users – presently indirect input via service providers for some aspects of strategy such as outreach and support but the need for direct input by people with lived experience of homelessness has been flagged for development in the new strategy

6.3.5 Other local authorities – the strategies of several local authorities have been referred to in the development of this draft strategy.

6.3.6 Representative groups – publications by Crisis, Homeless Link and Shelter have been referred to in the development of the draft strategy

6.3.7 Scrutiny – the Health and Wellbeing Board considered the draft Review and Strategy at its meeting of 11 March. In endorsing the strategy the Board recommended that consideration is given to the ambition of the Council and its partners in changing outcomes over a period of time. This will be included in forthcoming work on improving data and forecasting which is referred to in the draft strategy. Feedback arrangements – responders to consultation will be provided with feedback on their suggestions and proposals.

6.4 Financial implications:

6.4.1 All of the proposals in the draft strategy are funded for 2019.

6.4.2 The proposed contract for the Homelessness Review Function is valued at approximately £50,000 over 4 years. This has been modelled on spend over the previous contract (approximately £10,000 per annum) and can be met from existing budgets.

6.5 Legal implications:

6.5.1 All legal requirements are met.

6.5.2 Extension of the contract with Housing Reviews Ltd will ensure that the Council has in place a reliable source for the review of decisions which is a statutory requirement. The Council's solicitor has been consulted and is in favour of the recommended option.

6.6 Risk implications:

6.6.1 The only recorded red risk is of harm to individuals who sleep rough as a result of failure of specific services or the co-ordination of services. Mitigating factors have been identified and applied but the indicator remains red due to the vulnerability of the customers.

6.7 Statutory Equality Duty:

6.7.1 The Fair Treatment Assessment for the 2018 strategy is being updated.

6.7.2 The statutory public sector equality duty to have 'due regard' under the Equality Act 2010 will be met by the individual services which will contribute to the implementation of the strategy.

7. List of appendices referred to:

A – Draft Homelessness Review

B – Draft Homelessness Strategy

8. Background papers used to compile this report

9. List of other relevant documents

9.1 MHCLG – Homelessness Code of Guidance, February 2018

9.2 MHCLG – 'Tackling Homelessness Together', February 2019.

9.3 Report to Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment and Housing, 23rd January 2018: 'Reviews of Homelessness Decisions'

9.2 Report to Health and Wellbeing Board, June 2018