

**REPORT TO: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING
13TH NOVEMBER 2007**

REPORT BY: HEAD OF COMMUNITY HOUSING

**REPORT WRITTEN BY: IVAN WESTERN, HOUSING OPTIONS
MANAGER**

SUBJECT: HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report explains the requirements for the council to publish a Homelessness Strategy and describes the arrangements that have been made to fulfil this requirement. Officers will also be in a position to provide a verbal update on the outcome of a consultation event with partners and stakeholders that is due to take place on 6th November.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The report is mainly for information but the Executive Member for Housing is asked to endorse the approach described.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Local authorities are required by the Homelessness Act 2002 to undertake a review of homelessness in their areas and to produce a strategy for action on the basis of this. The government expects such strategies to have a five-year life and this means that we now need to undertake a fresh review of homelessness and publish a revised strategy by July 2008.
- 3.2 Guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) makes it clear that local authorities are being expected to adopt a more comprehensive approach to homelessness than was the case in 2002-3. This means avoiding a narrow review of councils' statutory rehousing functions and instead carrying out a more comprehensive analysis of the range of different types of homelessness which exist, making connections with wider corporate policies to address social and financial exclusion.
- 3.3 Portsmouth's first homelessness strategy was primarily concerned with preventing statutory homelessness. Huge progress has been made in this area and this has resulted in our being able to reduce the number of statutory homelessness acceptances by 50% over the past three years – exceeding the Local Public Service Agreement Target for this over the three year period 2005-2008.

3.4 Although this emphasis on *prevention* will remain the key learning point emerging from our first strategy is of the importance of building in strong links to the plans of other partners. The practical benefits of identifying the wider corporate and wider strategic support for the strategy include:

- The ability to influence other policies which address social exclusion e.g. through action to improve advice services to offenders going into or out of prison or actions to reduce the incidence of domestic violence
- Encouraging a wide range of agencies from housing providers, faith groups, colleges and the private sector to consider ways in which they can help prevent homelessness
- Improving communication where referrals need to be made between agencies, or where problems need to be resolved.

4. KEY CHALLENGES

4.1 There are four specific challenges which the government expects councils to meet. It is worth briefly outlining these.

4.2 **Reducing the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010.** For Portsmouth, this means reducing the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation to a total of 65. Currently the figure is 125. The Department for Communities and Local Government is concerned that, despite reductions in homelessness acceptances, insufficient progress has been made in this area. Specifically their view is that too much reliance is made on Bed and Breakfast, which is of course the most expensive form of temporary accommodation. Relative to other authorities in the South East region Portsmouth is one of the highest users of B&B accommodation and although the vast majority of these placements are for short periods, this is an area where there is scope for improvement. Officers have assured the CLG that Portsmouth can fulfil the government target of reducing temporary accommodation, but at present plans to do this depend primarily on finding alternatives to the current arrangements through which some 60 households are accommodated in private sector leased properties. Whilst we are confident that this can be achieved this clearly will have 'knock on' effect in terms of the supply of accommodation for other groups.

4.3 **Ending the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for 16 & 17 year olds by 2010.** 43 placements of young single people aged 16 and 17 have been made so far this year. Although the average length of these placements was only 12 days it is clear that we need to find more suitable alternatives for young people. Perhaps more than any other area, this is not something that we can solve in Housing Options alone. Faced with a homeless young person without at 4.30 in the afternoon there is only a limited range of alternatives available to us. This is why the consultation event

planned described below is going to dwell to a significant extent on this area.

- 4.4 **Sustaining the virtual elimination of Bed and Breakfast use for families with children.** This is much less of an issue for Portsmouth given that the majority of households placed in B&B are single. Families are placed in B&B only for a very short term as an emergency where no satisfactory alternative exists. In no circumstances has this exceeded the government target of 42 nights.
- 4.5 **Sustaining the rough sleeper target.** Securing a reduction by two thirds of the number of people sleeping rough over the period 1998-2008 has been a central plank of government policy. The scale of rough sleeping in Portsmouth (where numbers of rough sleepers are generally accepted to be in single figures on any one night) has meant that the city has not been a priority for action. Notwithstanding this we have channelled a considerable amount of Homelessness grant funding towards Central Point who work with rough sleepers. Although this has been successful in many respects, rough sleeping and patterns of behaviour such as begging, which are linked to rough sleeping, remain an issue. As with youth homelessness, this is not an issue for which there is a straightforward 'housing solution' and cannot be solved other than through a partnership approach.

5 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 Given the importance of effective partnership working in this area it is important to make sure that the Portsmouth's homelessness strategy is not simply viewed as 'another council publication'. It needs common ownership across the range of agencies who are involved. To achieve this the strategy is being developed through a Focus Group which operates under the banner of the Local Strategic Partnership. The group is chaired by a representative of the EC Roberts Centre and includes members from the private, voluntary and statutory sectors. Whilst many of the actions contained in the strategy will be for the council to deliver, responsibility for framing the objectives and milestones requires a common vision.
- 5.2 To this end the Homelessness Focus Group will hold a one day consultation event to take place on 6th November to which a wide range of participants (including some elected members) have been invited. The event is designed to provide a hands on opportunity for front line workers as well as managers, from wide range of agencies to shape Portsmouth's homelessness strategy. Officers will be in a position report on the outcomes from this event at the meeting.

Background Papers:

Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives	ODPM
Evaluating Homelessness Prevention	DCLG
Homelessness Prevention: A guide to good practice	DCLG
Settled housing solutions in the private rented sector	ODPM
Homelessness Code of Guidance	DCLG

This report has been considered by the City Solicitor for legal issues

6. SIGNING OFF THE DOCUMENT

.....
Alan Cufley - Head of Community Housing

Dated.....

APPROVAL TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS.

The recommendations set out above was approved / approved as amended / deferred / rejected by the Executive Member for Housing. on.....

Signed

.....
Councillor Hugh Mason
Executive Member for Housing.