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HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
21 JANUARY 2013
“MAKING EVERY CONTACT COUNT: A JOINT APPROACH TO PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS”

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report on the Council’s position in relation to the ten local challenges for preventing homelessness set in the August 2012 Government report “Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness”.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Housing Policy Development Committee note the contents of this report.
- 2.2 That following a review of the temporary emergency shared accommodation scheme for single people at the Moss Road Estate, the future demand for this type of accommodation is assessed.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 In August 2012 the Government published a report “Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness”. This identifies a number of common themes which have emerged from good practice across the Country that should form part of a local strategic response to homelessness issues. The report concludes by setting out ten local challenges which the Government consider should lead to all homelessness authorities delivering what the Government believe to be a gold standard service.
- 3.2 This report sets out the Council’s progress against the ten local challenges:
 - 1) Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has “buy in” across all local authority services;
 - 2) Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs;

- 3) Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients;
 - 4) Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative;
 - 5) Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support;
 - 6) Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords;
 - 7) Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme;
 - 8) Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs;
 - 9) Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation;
 - 10) Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.
- 3.3 The majority of these challenges are already statutory requirements as stated in the Housing Act 1996 Part VII or the Homelessness Act 2002, and reinforced by the DCLG Homelessness Code of Guidance (July 2006). As a result, the Council already meets most of the ten local challenges and has done so for a number of years.
- 3.4 The only new challenge is Challenge 4 – “Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative”. Due to the lack of temporary accommodation in the District a local alternative is in place. The Council aims to ensure that no rough sleeper should have to spend a second night sleeping rough in the District – as such homelessness procedures are in place to provide temporary emergency accommodation whilst the household’s need is fully assessed.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

4.1 This report supports the Council’s Corporate Priorities as follows:

(i) PEOPLE:

In performing the actions recommended in the Government’s ten point plan the Council contributes to the “People” corporate priority by supporting vulnerable people from losing their home or to get a roof over their heads – ultimately this meets the corporate aim of helping vulnerable people to live in their own homes.

5 Report Detail

5.1 In July 2010 the Government set up a ministerial working group to bring Government departments together to tackle homelessness. Their first report “*Vision to end rough sleeping: No second night out nationwide*” was published in July 2011. It focused on the most visible end of homelessness – those coming

onto the streets, often facing advanced and overlapping problems such as offending, drug and alcohol addiction or mental health problems.

- 5.2 The Ministerial Working Group published their second report *“Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness”* in August 2012. *“Making every contact count”* focuses on how services can be managed in a way that prevents all households, regardless of whether they are families, couples, or single people, from reaching a crisis point where they are faced with homelessness. It aims to prevent homelessness by ensuring that every contact local agencies make with vulnerable people and families “really counts”.
- 5.3 The report finds that although there are some excellent services across the country not all local authorities have established the right frameworks beyond the housing department to encourage the change in public services needed. The report goes on to identify the following themes which local authorities and their partners should seek to address:
- (i) Joint service working to target those at risk of homelessness;
 - (ii) Identifying and tackling the underlying causes of homelessness, as part of housing needs assessments, by referring vulnerable clients into support services where necessary;
 - (iii) Co-ordinating access to services for vulnerable people and multi-agency action to address them;
 - (iv) Making private rented accommodation work by supporting people to remain in their homes, and increasing access to the private rented sector is essential to manage demand;
 - (v) A focus on youth homelessness is key to preventing homelessness in the longer term.
- 5.4 Drawing on the above themes, Government has developed ten local challenges which the Government consider should lead to all homelessness authorities delivering what the Government consider a gold standard service and “aspiring to the achievements of the best”.
- 5.5 This report sets out the progress by the Council for each of the ten local challenges in turn.
- 1) *Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy-in across all local authority services;***
- 5.6 The Council is committed to reducing the levels of homelessness in the District. High priority is placed on both the prevention of homelessness and ensuring effective procedures and support services are in place for those who do become homeless. Homelessness may not just be a housing problem but a symptom of broader issues. Becoming homeless can have an impact in many ways, including personal health, education attainment and access to, or sustainment of, employment. The reasons for homelessness are often complex and necessitate a wide range of support needs.
- 5.7 There is no one solution to preventing homelessness and there is no one service that can deliver all of the accommodation and support provision that is needed.

As such, preventing homelessness requires “buy-in” from a range of local authority services and from a number of organisations across all sectors.

5.8 The Council demonstrates a corporate commitment to preventing homelessness through its Homelessness Strategy 2011-16, agreed by Council on 24 August 2011.

2) *Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs;*

5.9 A wide range of support provision is provided in the District which ensures households can attain and sustain accommodation in order to prevent homelessness. Support is available for an array of households with differing needs, ranging from accommodation provision, through to tenancy support, to general advice and signposting. The Council work in partnership with many organisations including:

Organisation	Service
Registered Providers (inc. Bromford, Adullam, Heantun)	Supported housing and floating support services.
HealthNet	Partnership project to raise awareness of health and wellbeing services.
Staffordshire Womens Aid	Various projects for Women and Children at risk of domestic violence.
Chase CVS	Charity offering a number of community support projects.
Cannock Chase Churches Housing Coalition	Charity offering assistance with rent advance and deposit guarantees.
Addaction	Drug Support Services.
Citizens Advice Bureau	General enquiries and money advice services.
Arch (North Staffs)	Male domestic violence support service
Rethink	Supported housing and floating support services for people with mental health support needs.

5.10 A homelessness prevention education project was commissioned in October 2012 which is to be delivered in secondary schools within the District during 2013. The overall aims of the project is to provide young people with information about the realities of homelessness and living independently, provide young people with the knowledge to seek advice and assistance if they need it, and enable them to make informed choices about their futures.

5.11 The Council, as part of the Chase Community Partnership, works in partnership with Chase Council for Voluntary Services to provide a service to support the employment and training needs of young people in Cannock Chase. 'Community Buddies' is designed to help tackle unemployment amongst young people across Cannock Chase District. The project focuses on young people who are either at risk of becoming, or who are already not in education, employment or

training and will also support their families by providing details of supporting agencies. This assists them in tackling the barriers which prevent them from moving forward.

- 5.12 The Chase Community Partnership are also funding a community support programme for the Blake area of Cannock Chase. Blake covers parts of Cannock East, Cannock North, Hednesford North and Hednesford Green Heath wards in the District of Cannock Chase. The programme will be working with local people to develop their community aspirations and identify and address local needs working with partner agencies and local voluntary organisations to achieve the long-term sustainability and improvements through the development of the Blake programme. The long term, sustainable improved outcomes for the community will go some way towards reducing incidents of homelessness and rough sleeping.

3) Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients;

- 5.12 The Council provide a comprehensive prevention service which aims not only to increase awareness of housing options but to provide information relating to other services within the District. The Housing Options Team provides impartial advice and information on a wide range of issues to help prevent homelessness, which include, but are not limited to:

- Housing opportunities – private rented, local authority and housing association;
- Details of landlords and letting agents in the District;
- Tenants and occupation rights;
- What to do about harassment and illegal eviction;
- How to deal with possession proceedings;
- Rights to Benefits;
- Current rent levels;
- Rent guarantee/deposit schemes;
- How to retrieve rent deposits;
- Rent and mortgage arrears;
- How to tackle debt;
- Homelessness legislation;
- Mediation;
- Referral to Chase Citizens Advice Bureau for Debt Advice;
- Referral to Partner agencies for support services which cover a variety of needs ranging from tenancy support to people who have mental health and or emotional needs, and particularly for young people who have a tenancy for the first time;
- Financial assistance via the Government homelessness prevention fund;
- Implementation of the Government Mortgage Rescue Scheme.

- 5.13 There is a duty upon the Authority under s.179 of the Housing Act 1996 to proactively assist in the prevention of homelessness and provide housing advice and assistance to anyone in the district. Information is available in a number of formats such as verbally via the telephone and face to face interviews, or in

written form via email, letter, fax, information on the Council's website and leaflets/posters. Information can also be conveyed in a number of languages or Braille on request.

- 5.14 As previously stated the Council work in partnership with a number of organisations that provide additional support services. The Housing Options team refer customers to partner agencies for additional advice and support, including counselling, mediation, medical assistance or other specialist help in a wide range of service areas in cases where the applicant is in crisis or suffering emotional difficulties. The Housing Options team also attend regular liaison meetings with partner agencies to share information, such as Citizens Advice Bureau Liaison and Bromford Tenancy Support meetings.

4) Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative;

- 5.15 The Government's "No Second Night Out" commitment aims to ensure that no rough sleeper should have to spend a second night sleeping rough.
- 5.16 In response to the findings of an independent study carried out in November 2011 into Rough Sleeping and the housing needs of young people in the Cannock Chase Area, a pilot project has been established which provides two units of temporary emergency and short term accommodation. The project is a partnership between the Council and Adullam Homes who have experience in the provision of supported accommodation for both adults and young people, often from a range of vulnerable groups. The project utilises two 2 bed flats that have been set aside on the Moss Road Estate. The properties are leased to Adullam Homes at a peppercorn rent, who undertake the role of managing agent.
- 5.17 The Council does not apply Part VII Housing Act 1996 criteria (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) that govern access to housing when deciding whether to assist a person sleeping rough. As a result the individual concerned will not be required to demonstrate eligibility for assistance (including whether they have any recourse to public funds), priority need, intentionality or local connection.
- 5.18 The Council works with partners to link rough sleepers with the services that can help them find a way off the streets and into settled accommodation. However many entrenched rough sleepers may be wary of services and less likely to engage. A refusal to accept assistance during this time may therefore provide grounds to trigger referrals to other services, such as mental health assessments.
- 5.19 If someone who has spent the previous night sleeping rough approaches the Council, then the Homelessness Officer will firstly make initial investigations to determine whether there are any alternative accommodation options for that person. If there are no other options and the applicant appears to be eligible for assistance, is *actually homeless* and is *in priority need*, the authority has a *duty* to provide interim accommodation until its enquiries are complete and a homeless application decision can be made. As this is provided on the basis of "*reason to believe*", local connection is not a consideration at this point. It does

however form part of the full assessment. The Housing Options team will arrange accommodation for the applicant using recognised Bed & Breakfast Service Providers – or, if vacant and appropriate, the temporary short term accommodation provision at Moss Road. The officer will arrange for the person/s to access the Housing Options Service prior to 12 noon the next working day for further assessment, completion of paperwork and the provision of further temporary accommodation if necessary.

- 5.20 In emergency situations, a Council officer is available for out of office hour's homelessness assistance. The Homelessness Rota consisting of six staff is coordinated by the Housing Options Team. The Officer on duty is contacted via the Council's *Emergency Out of Hours* Service and the calls are taken by a central control. Relevant enquiries will be passed to the Homelessness Officer who will assess the enquiry and determine if emergency accommodation is required and if the Council have a duty to provide it. If so, the Officer will arrange and accommodate the applicant.
- 5.21 The Council also has a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) in place for providing temporary accommodation during bad weather. Historically the SWEP has been triggered when temperatures have been forecast at zero degrees celsius or below for three consecutive nights. However, updated November 2012 advice recommends that any severe weather involving extreme cold, wind and rain should be taken into account when deciding to implement the SWEP provision. As a result, the SWEP provision is implemented if the following criteria applies:
- (i) The Meteorological Office gives a severe weather warning for the Cannock Chase area; and/or
 - (ii) The temperature is forecast to drop to freezing or below for more than 2 consecutive nights.
- 5.22 As soon as the protocol is triggered the Council's website is updated to inform partners and to provide contact details if the public comes across someone who is sleeping rough.
- 5) *Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support;***
- 5.23 The Council has a Move On Protocol for moving households from supported housing to alternative non-supported accommodation. There is a need to ensure that vulnerable adults, who have been supported to build their confidences and life skills can move-on in a timely way to the next stage of independent living and access more settled housing.
- 5.24 The following supported housing schemes are situated in Cannock Chase and all moves from such schemes are encompassed by the move on protocol. Scheme specific flow charts have been agreed with each provider to reflect the client group that they support. The table also includes partners who are signed up to the local move on protocol but do not have accommodation and require their clients to move on.

SCHEME	PROVIDER
Rugeley Foyer	YMCA
Heath Way Young Families Scheme	Bromford Support
Church Street Supported House for Offenders	Heantun HA
Avalon House Mental Health	Rethink
Rethink Floating Support project	Rethink
Non accommodation	
Care leavers	Staffordshire Through Care Team
Probation service (Offender protocol)	Probation Service
Youth Offending Team (Offender protocol)	Youth Offending Team
ADS Drug support service	ADSolutions

6) *Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords;*

5.25 The Council has adopted a pro-active role in working with the private rented sector in Cannock Chase as detailed in the report to the Housing Policy Development Committee on 28 November 2012. In summary, the services provided include:

- Maintaining Property and Applicant Registers to match up tenants and landlords;
- Administering a property accreditation scheme;
- Holding landlord forums and other events;
- Partnership work with the Cannock Chase Churches Housing Coalition;
- Statutory enforcement for illegal eviction; and
- Encouraging landlords to bring empty properties back into use via the private rented sector.

5.26 Figures recorded during 2011/12 for the Government’s P1E quarterly data return show 138 homelessness cases prevented/relieved as a result of measures relating to the private rented sector. For the first two quarters of 2012/13 a further 61 households were prevented from becoming homeless through action with the private rented sector.

7) *Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme;*

5.27 The Council operate a “one stop shop” for advice and assistance on the Mortgage Rescue Scheme (MRS). The Council helps with advice on debt and money management alongside the Citizens Advice Bureau. The Housing Options team liaise with mortgage lenders and, if the situation is appropriate for

the Mortgage Rescue Scheme, help the applicant with all the paperwork and submit it to Orbit, the RSL partner dealing with the MRS.

- 5.28 The mortgage rescue process is administratively complex and not every case is successful. During 2011/12 there were three successful completions of mortgage rescue, which took approximately six months from receiving the application until completion. In 2012/13 to date there has been one MRS completion and, as of December 2012, another 11 applications are still open at various stages of the process. In December 2012 the Council's MRS service was re-advertised to the public, with a press release and new leaflets and posters distributed to partner agencies and placed in public areas such as Council reception areas, libraries and leisure centres.

8) *Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs;*

- 5.29 Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their district and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review.

- 5.30 The 2011-16 Homelessness Strategy for Cannock Chase identifies a number of areas where current services could be improved or where additional provision is required for homelessness to be tackled over the next five years. As a result the following overarching aims were identified:

➤ *Prevent and reduce levels of homelessness.*

To reduce the level of homelessness in the District by:

- Providing a range of effective prevention measures and support services to homeless people and those at risk of repeat homelessness;
- Working with partners to ensure rough sleeping does not become a problem.

➤ *Improve choice and access to housing.*

To ensure that:

- Sufficient affordable accommodation is available for people who may become homeless;
- Appropriate advice and effective and efficient homelessness procedures are available to quickly secure permanent sustainable accommodation.

➤ *Support vulnerable households to live independently.*

To ensure that:

- The availability of support services to enable vulnerable households to live independently and successfully maintain tenancies.

- 5.31 The Homelessness Strategy 2011-16 supports a holistic approach to tackling homelessness. Whilst there is a need to increase the supply of affordable

temporary and permanent accommodation in the District, there is also need for a wide range of support services to meet the needs of different household groups.

- 5.32 The Homelessness Strategy 2011-16 closes with an action plan which is updated every year. Progress is recorded on each action and any additional actions which have been identified from emerging need are added as and when they arise.

9) Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation;

- 5.33 The Children Act 1989 (s.20(3)) places a duty on children's services authorities to provide accommodation for a child in need aged 16 or over whose welfare is otherwise likely to be seriously prejudiced if they do not provide accommodation; whilst s.20(1) places a duty on children's services authorities to provide accommodation for children in need in certain other circumstances. It is the Government's view that children should ideally be accommodated within the family home. On this basis, every effort will be made to encourage the 16/17 year-old to remain or return home where appropriate.

- 5.34 The Staffordshire Young Persons Protocol sets out how Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire District Councils will work together to provide the best possible outcomes for young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The protocol also sets out the procedure for a homelessness approach and the roles and responsibilities for each organisation.

- 5.35 During 2011/12 there were no young people under 18 placed in Bed and Breakfast. In 2012/13 to date there has been one person aged 16-17 placed in bed and breakfast. This occurrence happened before the temporary accommodation provision managed by Adullam for single homeless people was in place. Currently, providing there is a vacancy and it is appropriate to do so, any 16-17 in need of temporary accommodation could be placed in the Adullam managed emergency accommodation project on the Moss Road Estate.

- 5.36 Monitoring of the project will enable the Council to assess the demand and effectiveness of the accommodation and support. A review of the scheme is scheduled to take place after six months of implementation, following which, the future demand for this type of accommodation will be assessed.

10) Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

- 5.37 The Council has two flats above shops at Festival Court, Pye Green Road, which are used as temporary accommodation for families, providing they are vacant and appropriate for the needs of the homeless household. A further report on 'Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Families' shall be received by this Committee on 19 March 2013.

- 5.38 The lack of temporary accommodation in the District has already been mentioned in this report, and so it is sometimes difficult to avoid placing families anywhere but in bed and breakfast. Bed and breakfast is a last resort and the

Housing Options team will look to every other avenue before placing a family in bed and breakfast accommodation.

- 5.39 During 2011/12 there were 8 households placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks. This was out of a total of 15 families placed in bed and breakfast during 2011/12, therefore just over half had to stay longer than the recommended six week duration. During 2012/13 to date, 4 households have been housed in bed and breakfast for more than six weeks, this was out of a total of 10 families placed in bed and breakfast.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6.2 Legal

Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 places an obligation on local housing authorities to secure that suitable accommodation is made available for a person:

- Who is homeless;
- Who is in priority need of accommodation;
- Who did not become homeless intentionally.

The relevant legal implications are set out within the report, at paragraphs 3.3, 5.13, 5.17, 5.29 and 5.33.

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)

None

6.5 Human Rights Act

None

6.6 Data Protection

None

6.7 Risk Management

None

6.8 Equality & Diversity

None

6.9 Best Value

Considering the economic, efficiency and effectiveness of social value; all the services offered by the Council are free of charge and therefore offer best value to the customer. Many people are assisted to attain and sustain affordable accommodation that would otherwise not be a viable option.

7 Appendices to the Report		
Previous Consideration		
Housing Policy Development Committee	28 November 2012	Private Rented Sector Housing
Cabinet	21 July 2011	Homelessness Strategy 2011-16

Background Papers
Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness – DCLG August 2012
Homelessness Strategy 2011-16
Homelessness Review 2009/10