

**HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP  
1 OCTOBER 2019**

**UPDATE ON PROGRESS RELATING TO THE REVIEW OF THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

**Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr Simon Clist, Cabinet Member for Housing  
**Responsible Officer:** Mrs Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing Services

**Reason for Report:** The homelessness strategy is currently being reviewed and this report provides information on progress relating to this project

**RECOMMENDATION: Members to note the report**

**Financial Implications:** The prevention and management of homelessness is accounted for within the general fund and there are budgets set aside to support this work. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has provided additional funding to the Council in relation to this in recent years but this funding is not guaranteed going forward. The Council has recently been involved in successful bids for monies from MHCLG associated with initiatives to reduce rough sleeping.

**Legal Implications:** In accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002, the Council must have a homelessness strategy. The existing strategy covered the period from 2013 to 2018 and has been extended by delegated decision made by the Cabinet Member for Housing to run until the end of 2019.

**Risk Assessment:** Failure to agree a new homelessness strategy for the period from 2020 to 2023 before the end of 2019 would result in the Council failing to meet a statutory obligation arising from the Homelessness Act 2002. Non-compliance with relevant legislation could result in a judicial review. There is a reputational risk associated with this and the resources needed to respond to such a challenge would be extensive.

Failure to meet statutory obligations relating to the prevention and management of homelessness could result in judicial review which could prove costly. Such an outcome also has the potential to impact the reputation of the Council in a negative way.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** The Council has a number of statutory obligations arising from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and therefore all those presenting as homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to the Council must be assessed regardless of the section of society from which they come to see whether or not the duties apply. Failure to treat homelessness clients fairly could result in judicial review. The Council requests diversity information from clients but this is not always forthcoming.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** Work to prevent homelessness is a priority for the Council

**Impact on Climate Change:** Officers sometimes have to respond to emergencies associated with the prevention and management of homelessness. In such cases,

safeguarding concerns will take priority in order to minimise risk and it is accepted that the ability to manage such issues effectively may have an environmental impact which would not occur if work can be planned in advance and managed in a more co-ordinated way.

## **1. Introduction/Background**

- 1.1 Following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018, a new homelessness strategy is required. The way in which the Council works has changed and therefore the existing strategy requires a complete review. Resourcing issues have delayed the completion of the new strategy.
- 1.2 Officers advised the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) earlier this year that the existing homelessness strategy had expired at the end of 2018, and that a new one was in development. The Housing Service was advised that the life of the existing strategy which covered the period 2013 to 2018 should be extended for a short period to allow completion of this work. Therefore a delegated decision relating to this was sought from the Cabinet Member for Housing.
- 1.3 The Cabinet Member for Housing made the delegated decision on 10 July 2019 and the relevant page on the Council's website was updated to explain that the existing strategy has been extended until the end of 2019.
- 1.4 Work to prevent homelessness is a priority for the Council in accordance with the Corporate Plan.
- 1.5 Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 imposes a duty on the Council to carry out a homelessness review and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the homelessness review. The Council and also Devon County Council, which is responsible for the provision of Social Services in Mid Devon, are required to take into account the homelessness strategy in exercising their functions. In formulating the homelessness strategy, the Council can require Social Services to provide assistance.
- 1.6 Section 2 of the Homelessness Act 2002 provides more information on what should be included in a homelessness review. The Council needs to consider the current and likely future levels of homelessness in the District. In addition, there must be a review of the activities carried out in the authority's area to prevent homelessness; to secure accommodation that is or that will be available in the area for people who are or may become homeless. In addition, the review should take into account the support available for people who are or who may become homeless to prevent this recurring. The resources available to the authority, the social services authority, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons for such activities should also be reviewed.

## **2 Consultation with stakeholders**

- 2.1 There was a series of meetings with stakeholders and as a result Officers in the housing options team were consulted, as were other colleagues within the Council. A meeting for Councillors was held on 4 March 2019 and external stakeholders were invited to another meeting which took place on 8 March 2019.

2.2 At each meeting, Officers discussed the current approach to the prevention and management of homelessness. Participants were asked to think about the following strands of the strategy in more depth:

- 2.2.1 Prevention of homelessness including rough sleeping
- 2.2.2 Partnership working
- 2.2.3 Reducing the use of temporary accommodation
- 2.2.4 Supporting those with complex needs

2.3 Participants were also given an opportunity to discuss:

- 2.3.1 What the Council does well in relation to this area of work
- 2.3.2 What could be done better
- 2.3.3 Challenges
- 2.3.4 What additional work could be done
- 2.3.5 What work should be prioritised

### **3 Review of relevant evidence**

- 3.1 The data reviewed to date show a number of trends.
- 3.2 The cost of purchasing a home in the District is relatively high. During 2018, the average house price in Mid Devon was £235,000. The median ratio of house prices to local earnings is 8.4, which compares with the average for England, which is 8.0. (LGA, 2019)
- 3.3 Full time earnings in Mid Devon are below the national average. Median full-time earnings in Mid Devon were £27,970 in 2018, compared to £29,869 in England.
- 3.4 It would appear that rents are relatively high in Mid Devon; private rents in the District in the 12 months to September 2018 ranged from £425 per month for a lower quartile one bed to £1,150 for an upper quartile four (or more) bed property. The overall median private rent was £625, which is similar to the England average of £690.
- 3.5 The Council uses the Devon Home Choice (DHC) scheme to assess housing need and in accordance with this, housing applicants are banded according to need with those in Band A having high housing need and those in Band E having no housing need. At the end of 2018/19, there were 875 households deemed to be in housing need in the District, and a further 1,081 registered for rehousing but assessed as having no housing need.
- 3.6 The statistics contained within the end of year report held on the DHC webpages show that there were 310 social homes belonging to the Council and other Registered Providers of social housing available for letting during 2018/19. 125 (40%) of these available homes were let to those in Band B.
- 3.7 The Housing Service uses an electronic system to manage homeless cases and the statistics obtained from reports based on the data held on this system show some interesting trends. The number of people presenting as homeless is increasing with a rise of 70% following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 at the beginning of April 2018.

3.8 The review has established that the majority of those approaching for assistance because they are homeless or at risk of homelessness is now made up of those who have lost a tenancy. The loss of a tenancy in the private rented sector is increasing as a trigger for homelessness but those who have lost a tenancy in the social rented sector also make up a significant number of those approaching for assistance.

3.9 Unfortunately, the number of cases where homelessness has been successfully prevented or relieved is decreasing and work will continue to try to establish why this might be. The use of temporary accommodation has increased but this is due to the provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which introduced more statutory obligations to those who approach the Council as homeless. The period over which local authorities are expected to work with homeless people or those who may be at risk of homelessness has been extended and this is having an impact.

#### **4 Strategic priorities**

4.1 The homelessness review is ongoing but following consultation, a number of issues have been identified which are likely to form important strands within the strategy:

4.1.1 Minimising rough sleeping

4.1.2 Maximising prevention activities & outcomes

4.1.3 Increasing accommodation options

4.1.4 Improving health & wellbeing by supporting those with complex needs

#### **5 Action Plan**

5.1 Officers are now working on on the homelessness review and this will inform the homelessness strategy. Once this is complete, the draft document will be sent out to stakeholders for consultation.

5.2 The final draft will be on the agenda for adoption at the meeting of the Homes Policy Development Group on 3 December 2019.

#### **6 Recommendation**

6.1 That Members note the report.

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**Circulation of the Report:** Cabinet Member for Housing, Leadership Team

#### **List of Background Papers:**

Devon Home Choice, Quarterly monitoring report, April 2019  
<https://www.devonhomechoice.com/useful-information-0>

LGA (2019), Understanding Local Housing Markets, Local Government Association, 29 July 2019  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/understanding-local-housing-markets>

