

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of Paul Claussen, Executive Member for Planning & Environmental Services

To: Executive Board: 16 April 2012
Overview & Scrutiny Commission: 26 April 2012
Cabinet: 8 May 2012
Council: 24 May 2012

(Author: Antony James-Orekogbe, Principal Housing Advisory Officer)

Subject: Homelessness Strategic Business Plan

Purpose: The Council has a duty to review its homelessness strategy every five years and produce a Homelessness Strategic Business Plan following the completion of the review. That review has taken place and most of the actions have been completed. There will be a raft of changes over the next two years and as a result a Homelessness Strategic Business Plan has been produced to steer the course of the service.

Recommendation(s):

That the Cabinet accept the Homelessness Strategic Business Plan as detailed in the attached draft and recommend to Full Council its final adoption as a council working document.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The last three years have seen Breckland Council commission services to deliver a wide range of innovative ways to prevent homelessness. These services were assessed at the time to offer value for money. The Homelessness Strategic Business Plan is a review of these services to determine if they still offer value for money and reflect the need of community or deliver value for money on their stated objectives.

1.1.2 With most of the actions from the 2008 homelessness strategy completed there is now a need to develop a short Homelessness Strategic Business Plan that will direct the course of homelessness service delivery focusing on delivering value for money, commissioning new services to meet the rising need for homelessness services over the next two years

1.1.3 Detailed statistical analysis has been completed to reveal where resources need to be focussed in order to prevent homelessness spiralling out of control and resulting in cost implications to the Council.

1.1.4 The Council has received a homelessness prevention grant settlement from central government since financial year 2004/05. This funding has been directed, successfully, in line with corporate and business plan priorities, at the prevention, early intervention and relief of homelessness across the district. The homelessness prevention grant will not be available to the service for use in 12/13 or 13/14.

1.2 Issues

1.2.1 There is a clear message that Homelessness services need to deliver a more robust service that offers value for money. Through the strategic plan there will be an improvement in service delivery with a re-focus on the issues that have the most impact on the local community. On 13th December 2010 the local government financial settlement was announced by the Government which included a Homelessness Grant settlement for Breckland for 2012/13 and 2013/14. The Council settlement showed a marked increase on previous years with a 133% increase from £60k per year to £144,000 per year.

1.2.2 A driving reason behind the uplift was the expectation that local authorities should continue to provide services which address homelessness and in granting a significant uplift have recognised the likely implication of other budgetary/policy decisions on this area in the immediate term.

1.2.3 Temporary accommodation cost has a major impact on budgets, the Homelessness Strategic Business Plan details how reduction in its use through partnerships working will be achieved.

1.2.4 There is a need not only to offer value for money but also more innovation in developing partnership relationships that will be beneficial to both parties and offer savings. Additionally to meet the deficit in the Council budget the Homelessness Strategic Business Plan indicates ways in which we can run an improved service within limited budgets.

1.2.5 The Localism Act will change the way the service is delivered to our customers and one of its impacts with the homelessness service will be allowing the local authority to discharge its homelessness duty into the private sector. Whilst this is a positive way forward there are cost implications.

1.2.6 There has also been a raft of benefit changes and with the potential introduction of Universal Credit, restriction of Housing Benefit to under-35's, limiting Local Housing allowance to 30th percentile of rent than the median of 50th and the capping of total benefit payments. All these changes will have a major impact and it is expected that an increased number of customers will contact the service as a result.

1.2.7 There is already a national increase in the number of customers who are becoming homeless. This is starting to reflect within Breckland with a year on year increase in enquiries. There has been a 25% increase in 2011/2012.

1.2.8 Analysis indicates that 16-44 year olds utilize between 60%-70% of the service that Breckland Council provides, indicating that our services need to be aligned to meet the needs of this group.

1.2.9 In terms of directing future housing need and delivery, it is important that we meet our corporate and legal responsibilities by providing a service that is fair to all and equally accessible to the whole community.

1.2.10 There has been a lack of technological advances within the service, which has meant that extra time has been spent on tasks on a daily basis. This document shows

how we will negate this time wastage by the development of new technologies to meet the needs of the community. Some improvements have already been made to date.

1.2.11 There is a clear merit in adopting the new Homelessness Strategic Business Plan with a raft of changes, including a change in Government agenda which have all taken place since 2008, it is appropriate for the Council to approach homelessness delivery from a new front.

1.3 Options

- § Adopt the Homelessness Strategic Business Plan in order to continue to deliver and innovate new ways of preventing homelessness within the district.
- § Reject the Homelessness Strategic Business Plan.

1.4 Reasons for recommendations

1.4.1 To summarise, the reasons for requesting the adoption of the Homelessness Strategic Business Plan.

- There is a need to have a cohesive business plan that will direct the service over the next two years which can be adapted in line with future Central government changes.

2. IMPLICATIONS

2.1 Risk

2.2.1 I have completed the Risk Management questionnaire and can confirm that risk has been given careful consideration, and that there are no significant risks identified associated with the information in this report.

2.2 Financial

2.2.1 Under advice from colleagues in the finance team a Proforma B is not attached as the adoption of the Homelessness Strategic Business Plan does not in itself does not introduce any financial implications.

2.2.2 There is an added cost of providing accommodation to customers in Bed and Breakfast, and it is advisable to invest in preventing measure to prevent the resultant financial implications.

2.3 Legal

2.3.1 Whilst there are no legal implications to this Homelessness Strategic Business Plan, and to the implementation of the Action Plan, the Council does have significant legal obligations to determine what duties it may have to individual homeless households and to provide accommodation to vulnerable homeless households. It also has a duty to ensure that appropriate advice is provided to all customers that approach the service

2.4 Equality and Diversity

Equalities; There are no Equalities implications

2.5 Other

2.5.1 Human Rights: Whilst there are no human rights implications to this report, the Council does have significant legal obligations firstly to ensure that in determining what duties it may have to individual homeless households and in providing accommodation to some of those households under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, it has to have regard to the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and relevant caselaw. Recent homelessness caselaw has made reference to the Human Rights Act in connection with local housing authorities' performance of their general homelessness duties and the government has had to introduce new regulations to ensure that the legislation complies with Article 8 - The Right to Respect for Private and Family Life.

3. Alignment to Council Priorities

Building safer and stronger communities – contributing to improving the health of people who live in Breckland

Environment – protect and improve Breckland's natural environment and resources

Prosperous Communities – develop flourishing rural communities and securing decent standard of housing across the district.

4. Wards/Communities Affected

4.1 All

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Key Decision

Yes

Appendices attached to this report:

Homelessness Strategic Business Plan