

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

Report of the Executive Member for Economic and Housing to the

CABINET: 12 MAY 2009

(Author: Darryl Smith – Principal Housing Officer)

Financial Inclusion Strategy for Breckland

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To invite members to consider and agree the Financial Inclusion Strategy for Breckland and recommend it to Council for approval.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Council:

- 2.1 Adopt the Financial Inclusion Strategy and associated action plan.

Note: In preparing this report, due regard has been had to equality of opportunity, human rights, prevention of crime and disorder, environmental and risk management considerations as appropriate. Relevant officers have been consulted in relation to any legal, financial or human resources implications and comments received are reflected in the report.

3. Information, Issues and Options

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 The current financial climate being experienced across the Country impacts on the day to day lives of everyone. We are all affected by rising energy costs, closure / mergers of banking institutions, increase in the cost of credit, availability of financial products but some people are hit harder by these issues.
- 3.1.2 Within the housing environment the impact of the loss of employment, inability to access mortgage or loans can affect the ability of people to sustain or secure their home. With this is the ability of people to access appropriate financial advice and services.
- 3.1.3 The Government has recognised the need to address financial exclusion through a number of recently published reports such as 'A Snapshot of Financial Inclusion' 2007, 'Promoting Financial Inclusion' HM Treasury which have been backed up with a level of investment into services.
- 3.1.4 Nationally there are vast amounts of data setting out the position of the financial picture within the current climate, but the data is difficult to reduce to a local level. The data that is available locally still produces a picture of a district experiencing difficult times.

3.2 Issues

- 3.2.1 The Housing team have developed the strategy in recognition that it is focused on housing issues and the impact many of our customers face with debt problems. The strategy has been developed over a couple of months and it is noted its is not as far reaching as it could be in addressing other issues which may be dealt with within the Council.
- 3.2.2 With this in mind the Council may want to consider how it will develop the strategy further in the future into a corporate strategy, picking up on Economic development activities with businesses and employers and Communities team in making services accessible to the wider community.

3.2.3 The Strategy has identified four key areas to develop :-

- Developing appropriate services for Breckland residents to increase awareness and greater understanding of financial matters
- Reduce the number of homelessness applications for repossessions due to mortgage and rent arrears
- Lift 200 households out of fuel poverty
- Increase awareness of debt organisations through public and employer debt information and advice sessions

3.2.4 The related action plan sets out actions to address these recommendations and the partners we will work with to do this. The majority of actions are within existing resources, which have been reprioritised within the Housing teams budgets, but some will require us to seek funding from the myriad of funding opportunities which we will be presented with from central government or partners resources.

3.2.5 This strategy will deliver against our own Councils thematic priorities for 'Prosperous Communities' as well as support the Local Area Agreement targets for delivering Norfolk Ambition

3.3 Options

3.3.1 To agree to adopt the strategy for financial inclusion will demonstrate the Councils priority to improve the quality of life of residents currently facing severe hardship due to unemployment , reduction in income and loss of their home. The current financial climate has touched every resident in some way. This strategy enables an opportunity to strengthen our partnerships to deliver appropriate services to our residents.

3.3.2 To not agree to adopt the strategy will prevent a coordinated planned approach to service delivery for those requiring financial support. It will undermine the partnerships that have been developed and demonstrate to residents that we do not recognise the difficulties they may be facing in the current climate.

3.4 Reasons for Recommendation(s)

3.4.1 This will be the first Financial Inclusion Strategy in Norfolk. It aims to build strong partnerships to deliver services to a cross section of the community. Financial hardship does not just affect social housing tenants it impacts on the young, old, homeowners, those in work as well as those out of work.

3.4.2 The strategy is a positive reaction from the Strategic Housing team on the impact to their service from those experiencing financial hardship. Having a strategy in place will enable us to have a platform to make funding bids to secure resources where we need to deliver actions outside of the budget constraints we have.

4. Risk and Financial Implications

4.1 Risk

4.1.1 Failure to adopt the Strategy presents a low risk to the Council as it is not a statutory requirement to produce the Strategy. However not having a clear strategy to address the issues our residents are currently facing presents a medium risk to effective partnership working and delivery. There will be a high risk to the ability to provide services from within existing budgets if service requests within homelessness continue to grow.

4.2 Financial

4.2.1 There are no direct financial implications in the adoption of this Strategy.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 There are no direct legal implications in the adaptation of this Strategy.

6. Other Implications [*Insert statement or confirm 'none' as appropriate at each sub-paragraph*]

- a) Equalities: An Equality Impact Assessment is to be carried. The strategy is to address some of the inequalities residents already experience with regard to financial services but there may still be inequalities which have not been addressed.
- b) Section 17, Crime & Disorder Act 1998: There are no direct section 17 implications as a result of adopting this strategy
- c) Section 40, Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006: There are no direct implications through the adoption of this Strategy
- d) Human Resources: There are no direct implications for Human Resources as through the adoption of this Strategy
- e) Human Rights: This strategy directly supports article 8 of the Human Rights act and will provide services to all who require them regardless of race, ethnicity or disability
- f) Other: [e.g. Children's Act 2004] None

7. Alignment to Council Priorities

7.1 Prosperous Communities – by seeking to reduce deprivation, improving access to services.

Building Safer and Stronger Communities – by reducing poverty.

8. Ward/Community Affected

8.1 All Wards / Parishes affected

Background Papers

None

Lead Contact Officer:

Name/Post: Darryl Smith – Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and enabling)

Telephone: 01362 656890

Email: darryl.smith@breckland.gov.uk

Key Decision Status (Executive Decisions only):

Key decision on the forward plan

Appendices attached to this report:

Financial Inclusion Strategy