

Executive Member Response To Homelessness Scrutiny Review

Date Recommendations agreed by Housing Development and Scrutiny Committee:

Housing Development and Scrutiny Committee, Thursday, 13 June 2013

Date responses should be made by:

Executive responses should be received by Friday 23 August 2013

| Recommendations: | Executive Response: | January 2015 Update |
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| <p>1. That the tracking of homelessness applications be improved with improved IT. (Action – Jaïne Cresser)</p> | <p>This is programmed for the final quarter of 2013/14. We will be looking at updating our housing advice database which holds both housing advice and homeless cases.</p> | <p>It has been agreed with IT that this project slips to Quarter 4 in 2015/16. Preliminary work will be undertaken by the team in Q2 15/16 to identify products available.</p> |
| <p>2. That Officers identify ways to assist people in managing their finances. (Action – Jaïne Cresser)</p> | <p>Money advice has increasingly become a necessary skill alongside housing rights based advice. The Housing Advice team have become equipped with training and</p> | <p>No further update the team continues to be accredited and continues the financial assistance. This takes in to consideration ensuring future welfare</p> |

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| | <p>tools to undertake this work. This including having access to online-benefit calculator tools, and legal text resources including the welfare rights handbook, debt advice handbook, and the fuel poverty handbook. The team is able to provide Debt advice, budgeting and money advice, and welfare benefits and tax credits advice, including the drafting of personal finance statements to the standard of "Money Advice Trust, British Bankers' Association and Finance & Leasing Authority license standard. This action is completed.</p> | <p>reforms are taken account of.</p> |
| <p>3. That the Council identifies ways of reinforcing the involvement of the voluntary sector, for example providing a 3 year contract with the CAB. (Action – Jaine Cresser)</p> | <p>The council is currently in the 2nd year of a 3 year financial inclusion services contract with the CAB. There is a further option to extend this contract by a further year if required. In addition the council also partly funds the CAB to provide a court deskworker and debt advice service that is aimed at households threatened with homelessness.</p> <p>Also we currently fund a Young Person Prevention Worker with Herts Young Homeless</p> <p>How the council commissions or supports voluntary and community based organisations in the future will be</p> | <p>This work continues although we have stopped funding the women's refuge.</p> |

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| | <p>addressed through a refreshed Homelessness Strategy.</p> <p>We operate a joint homelessness forum with North Herts DC which involves a variety of statutory and voluntary organisation in shaping the future of local services.</p> <p>We support and lend our name to our voluntary sector partner's funding applications</p> <p>We provide funding to the Stevenage Women's refuge</p> | |
| <p>4. That Officers identify ways of promoting the use of the Credit Union to residents (Action - Richard Protheroe)</p> | <p>Discussions are underway with various Credit Unions to identify how best they can promote and improve their range of services (such as managed payment accounts) for the benefit of Stevenage. With the assistance of SBC Stevenage Credit Union has moved into new town centre offices in Swingate House next to the CAB.</p> | <p>The CAB continues to support the Credit Union and plans are in place to increase membership.</p> |
| <p>5. That Officers review the Council's and Partners severe weather provision for the homeless. (Action – Jaine Cresser)</p> | <p>The council is in the process of establishing severe weather provision for rough sleepers that will be provided by the Haven.</p> | <p>The redevelopment of the Haven has had an impact on our effectiveness in cold weather provision and last winter SBC housed 2 individuals which we would have expected the Haven to pick up. This year due to pressures on our TA caused by a lack of affordable</p> |

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| | | Private rented accommodation we cannot house those we have no duty to accommodate. The Haven uses accommodation in Hitchin, though some people refuse to travel. |
| <p>6. That Officers investigate ways and means of avoiding future use of bed and breakfast accommodation as the level of demand on Council services increases, to be addressed through the drafting of a Temporary Accommodation strategy. (Action – Sue Waller)</p> | A new approach to temporary accommodation provision will be addressed through a new Homelessness Strategy that is currently being developed. | Draft strategy written – to go to February Exec. |
| <p>7. That Officers examine more creative ways of dealing with claimants, for example by providing extensions to existing properties to deal with overcrowding. (Action – Tony Campbell)</p> | These options are to be considered as part of the HRA Asset Management Review. | The HRA Business plan, which covers asset management has been agreed by Exec in Nov 2014. |
| <p>8. That Officers investigate supporting / mentoring those requiring assistance, especially as access to benefits is proposed to be via on-line methods and penalties for non-compliance (i.e. failure to notify change of circumstance or attend for interview) are severe. (Action – Jaïne Cresser)</p> | This action is scheduled for Q4 year 2013-14 and forms part of the overall council work on Welfare Reform. | This forms part of the work of the Corporate Welfare reform Steering Group. The team are due to start a project in Q4 2014/15 looking at the outcomes of the resident impact survey and contacting all those placed by us in PRS. |
| <p>9. That the Head of Housing Mangement keep Housing Scrutiny Members informed of any significant pressures on the Council and its partners to deliver an effective service in the future. (Action – Tony Campbell)</p> | Noted by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Head of Housing, Community and Communications. | No further update |

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| <p>10. That consideration be given by officers to how individuals who present themselves as Homeless are initially dealt with by the Council, with specific thought given to providing a more private area for interviews. (Action - Richard Protheroe)</p> | <p>The feasibility of this will be discussed with Donna Smith Head of the CSC in Q3 2013-14.</p> | <p>Ongoing discussions with the CSC, changes in partner services have occurred smoothly and have not impacted on our service delivery. We will continue to monitor.</p> |
| <p>11. That officers consider providing an electronic banner messaging service in the Customer Services Centre to signpost what support services are available with partners outside of the Council. (Action - Richard Protheroe)</p> | <p>The feasibility of this will be discussed with Donna Smith Head of the CSC in Q3 2013-14.</p> | <p>This is being considered in the overall review of the CSC – Richard may be able to provide a further update on this.</p> |
| <p>12. That officers consider using a “mystery shopper” in the CSC to test the service to make sure the advice and service given regarding Homelessness is as helpful as possible. (Action - Richard Protheroe)</p> | <p>We are proposing to undertake a mystery shopping exercise in early 2014/2015 using volunteers from our partner agencies</p> | <p>This has not taken place. When we spoke to our main client group (families) they were unhappy to participate. This will be incorporated into the peer review scheduled for 2015/16.</p> |

A copy of these recommendations have been sent to the named officers for a response on behalf of the Executive.