

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Title of Report:	West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy	
Report No:	OAS/FH/18/015	
Report to and dates:	SEBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee	6 June 2018
	FHDC Overview and Scrutiny Committee	7 June 2018
	Joint Executive (Cabinet) Committee	26 June 2018
Portfolio holder:	Councillor Sara Mildmay-White West Suffolk Lead Portfolio Holder for Housing Tel: 01359 270580 Email: sara.mildmay-white@stedsbc.gov.uk	
Lead officer:	Davina Howes Assistant Director (Families and Communities) Tel: 01284 757070 Email: davina.howes@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
Purpose of report:	<p>To present the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the draft West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all councils to review and produce a new homelessness strategy at least every five years. A review of West Suffolk's existing strategy is due in 2018. The new version of the strategy will be known as the West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy.</p> <p>In addition to this, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force on 3 April 2018 and there are a number of fundamental changes to legislation and additional duties that will need to be reflected in the new Homelessness Reduction Strategy for West Suffolk. In legislation there is no legal requirement for a new strategy to be in place before April 2018.</p>	

Recommendation:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee: It is <u>RECOMMENDED</u> that, the West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy, attached as Appendix 1 is considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and recommended for <u>approval</u> by the Joint Executive (Cabinet) Committee on 26 June 2018.	
	<p><i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i></p> <p>Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No, it is not a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(a) A key decision means an executive decision which, pending any further guidance from the Secretary of State, is likely to:</p> <p>(i) be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area in the Borough/District.</p>	
Consultation:	The new West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy has been the subject of public and stakeholder consultation through a workshop and online survey.	
Alternative option(s):	To continue with the current Homelessness Strategy. However, this means that our strategy would not be consistent with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 or with changes to the Housing Options and Homelessness service in response to the Act.	
Implications:		
<i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	

<p>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</p>		<p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all councils to review and produce a new homelessness strategy at least every five years. The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force on 3 April 2018 and producing a new West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy complements the requirements of the new Act and addresses the requirement of the Government's Code of Guidance. 	
<p>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</p>		<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out and its findings are included in paragraph 1.1.6. 	
<p>Risk/opportunity assessment:</p>		<p><i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i></p>	
Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
Strategy not compliant with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	Medium	Sub-regional consultation on the implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act and agreement of revisions to policy	Low
<p>Ward(s) affected:</p>		All wards	
<p>Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i></p>		None	
<p>Documents attached:</p>		<p>Appendix 1 – West Suffolk Draft Homelessness Reduction Strategy</p> <p>Appendix A: Homelessness data 2018</p> <p>Appendix B: Delivery plan</p>	

1. Key issues and reasons for recommendation(s)

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all Councils to produce a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years. Detail of what the strategy should contain are included in the government's Homelessness Code of Guidance which was updated in March 2018. In summary, the code requires councils to carry out a homelessness review of their area and produce a strategy to:

- prevent homelessness in the district;
- secure that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless; and
- secure the satisfactory provision of support for people in the district who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

1.1.2 A review of West Suffolk's Homelessness Strategy is due in 2018. In addition to this, by producing a new West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy we are responding to the fundamental changes to legislation and additional duties introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

1.1.3 In accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002, West Suffolk councils have conducted a review of homelessness in the area between November 2017 and April 2018. The review takes the form of an evidence base that is attached as **Appendix A** to the West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy (**Appendix 1**). The depth and scope of the review has contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the key issues facing West Suffolk. It has enabled us to consider where we need to focus our attention in the future in order to determine which priorities and actions we need to focus on.

1.1.4 The Act has introduced the following:

1. The definition of being threatened with homelessness be extended from 28 days to 56 days, meaning councils can start working with people at an earlier date.
2. Councils must accept a valid 'section 21' notice as evidence that the tenant is threatened with homelessness.
3. A greater duty to give advice and information to a wider range of people at a much earlier stage than previously offered.
4. Duty to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a plan (known as the 'personal housing plan').
5. The creation of a stronger prevention duty for anyone threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance. This can involve assisting them to stay in their current accommodation, or helping them to find a new place to live.

6. A new relief duty which is available to all those who are homeless, have a local connection and are eligible regardless of whether they have a priority need. It requires councils to take reasonable steps to help secure accommodation. This help could be, for example, the provision of a rent deposit or debt advice. Those who have a priority need (for example they have dependent children or are vulnerable in some way) may be provided with interim accommodation while the council carries out the reasonable steps.
 7. Duties to help to secure accommodation.
 8. Incentives to people to engage in prevention and relief work by allowing councils to discharge their prevention and relief duties if an applicant unreasonably refuses to cooperate with the course of action proposed.
 9. A right for councils to discharge the prevention and relief duties by providing accommodation with a reasonable prospect of this being available for at least the next six months. This does *not* need to be social housing.
 10. A right to a review at the prevention, relief and main duty stages to ensure councils are held to account.
 11. A requirement to collect data in order to monitor the overall effectiveness of the new legislation.
- 1.1.5 The West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy is an important part of what we are doing across West Suffolk to prevent and reduce homelessness. However, other activities that support the reduction of homelessness are outlined in West Suffolk's Housing Strategy and the Strategic Framework 2018-2020.
 - 1.1.6 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out on the West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy. The EqIA was an assessment of any impact there might be on any particular group. It shows that there will be no negative impact on any of the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010. The strategy contains priorities and actions that seek to prevent homelessness, respond to those in housing need and additional support is identified for those who have priority need and specific groups who may be more vulnerable to homelessness. We will use data to monitor the help and support being provided to people within the protected characteristics.

2.1 Resourcing the West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy

- 2.1.1 The delivery plan at **Appendix B** has been developed to deliver on our priorities as set out in the strategy and will be resourced through existing budgets and resources. Once the delivery plan has been put in place, if it becomes clear that any of the projects or initiatives require additional funding then these will be considered by Members as separate businesses cases as appropriate.

- 2.1.2 In order to support the delivery of our priorities we will continue to access external funding opportunities through central Government and our partners.

3.1 Consultation

- 3.1.1 A consultation exercise took place in January this year with a number of our key partners. The aim of the workshop was to gain a collective understanding of the pressures, how services and partners can work together to prevent and reduce homelessness and setting our priorities for West Suffolk as a whole. Outcomes from the workshop have been fed into the development of the strategy.
- 3.1.2 The formal consultation is taking place for a seven week period between 24 April and 12 June 2018. It involves an online survey which is available on our webpages and has been sent directly to Members, parish councils and a number of our partners.
- 3.1.3 As at 22 May 2018, 29 responses have been received to the online survey from residents, partner organisations and registered providers. The responses so far show that there is strong support for the priorities and actions set out in the strategy and for the issues that we are addressing.
- 3.1.4 Through the consultation, specific comments have been received that relate to specialist accommodation for vulnerable families and individuals and around the delivery and affordability of our priorities and actions.
- 3.1.5 As a result we are not proposing any changes to the priorities set out in the strategy. However, these points have been addressed through our robust delivery plan.