

To: City Executive Board

Date: 5th. December 2012

Report of: Housing Panel

Title of Report: Comments on the Homelessness Strategy Review

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present comments from the Housing Panel on the proposed Homelessness Strategy

Key decision? No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Cllr. Stuart McCready

Executive lead member: Cllr. Scott Seamons

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy

Recommendation(s):

That the City executive board say if it agrees or disagrees with the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

That the Board Member provide a brief to the HSP on the planning arrangements currently underway to deliver the cuts in the Supporting People Funding showing current options and the consequences of these along with planning for the future.

Recommendation 2

To extend campaigns set at increasing the supply of private rented sector accommodation to include encouragement to those who don't currently see themselves as landlords but may be prepared to let accommodation.

Recommendation 3

The Board Member should ensure that the outcomes from the review of our approach to mediation provides for this services to be delivered by

people trained and skilled in this area. The HSP would like to see the outcomes from this review.

Recommendation 4

That the Board Member brings the Action Plan to the HSP for review and monitoring.

Introduction

1. The Housing Scrutiny Panel (HSP) considered the Homelessness Strategy Refresh at its meeting on the 8th. October 2012 and would like to present the following comments and recommendations as part of the consultation process.
2. The Panel would like to thank Sheila Farley for her attendance and advice and support.

General comments

3. The work done in the Council to prevent homelessness is impressive and the HSP would like to extend its congratulations to the Board and officers for their achievements. In particular the HSP highlighted:
 - The partnership work that has produced the Old Fire Station facilities; and
 - The work done by the Options Team in preventing homelessness.
4. The outlook is however worrying with the statistics painting a daunting picture of increased demands on services set against reducing resources. The cuts in the Supporting People Funding and the uncertainty around the Homeless Prevention Payment will present particular challenges when responding to the many and complex needs of those who are homeless or potentially homeless. It is clear that the Council and its partners will need a sharp and collaborative focus to be able to provide the best response it can for these very vulnerable people.
5. The HSP would like to continue to scrutinise developments in this area and early in 2013 will ask to see performance and statistics that show trends. In particular the HSP want to see the planning arrangements that are on-going to deliver the £500,000 cut in the Supporting People Budget and ask the Board Member for an up to date briefing on this issue which gives the current options and consequences of these along with planning for the future.

Recommendation 1

That the Board Member provide a brief to the HSP on the planning arrangements currently underway to deliver the cuts in the Supporting People Funding showing current options and the consequences of these along with planning for the future.

Private Landlord Survey

6. The HSP discussed the increasing difficulties in finding accommodation in the private rented sector for those people who are at risk of being homeless. In the past officers have had considerable success in supporting clients to find accommodation in the private rented sector but current housing supply and demand pressures coupled with the changes in welfare benefits are making this a particularly challenging area. The HSP discussed what could be done to encourage landlords to come forward and possibly increase the supply of properties at affordable rents. Officers outlined a "Private Landlord Survey" which is to happen at the end of the year and talked in outline of the possibilities of creating a social lettings agency.
7. The HSP saw these as positive initiatives but would like to see campaigns extended to identify landlords that don't currently see themselves as such and may be prepared to let accommodation they own with our support or rooms in their home.

Recommendation 2

To extend campaigns set at increasing the supply of private rented sector accommodation to include encouragement to those who don't currently see themselves as landlords but may be prepared to let accommodation.

8. Mediation services are important for preventing homelessness and sustaining accommodation to avoid repeat homelessness. The strategy recognises that many people find themselves homeless or potentially so because of a break down in family or other relationships. Mediation is a specialist and skilled field and the HSP wanted to be sure we had the best quality inputs here. Officers said this will be reviewed.

Recommendation 3

The Board Member should ensure that the outcomes from the review of our approach to mediation provides for this services to be delivered by people trained and skilled in this area. The HSP would like to see the outcomes from this review.

9. The "Potential Priorities for Action 2012-18" are very comprehensive and the HSP is keen to see the views of officers and our partners, skilled in this area, who are part of this consultation. It is clear that times are challenging and what we decide to priorities and focus on in the Action

Plan will need to be well co-ordinated with our partners and be flexible enough to respond to changing needs.

Recommendation 4

That the Board Member brings the Action Plan to the HSP for review and monitoring.

Director and Board Member Comments

10. Comments at the meeting.

Financial Implications

11. There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report

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List of background papers:

Version number: 1