

Meeting: Integrated Housing Board

Date: 5 April 2011

Report Title: Haringey's Homelessness Strategy

Report of: Strategic and Community Housing Services

1.Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the IHB with an overview of the progress of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2011 action plan and invite the Board to indicate the priorities they would like addressed in the next Homelessness Strategy. The Board are also asked to agree the development of this new strategy.

2.Summary

2.1 The Housing Act 2002 places a duty on Local Authorities to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy and for this to be reviewed and renewed within 5 years. Although Haringey is not required to renew its strategy until 2013, Haringey's existing Homelessness Strategy is due to come to an end in July 2011. A new strategy will reinforce Haringey's commitment to tackling homelessness; making best use of the social housing, reducing the use of temporary accommodation and providing customer focused services.

2.2 The Coalition Government's approach to reducing public spending and the deficit will have an impact on the resources available to tackle homelessness and support vulnerable people. The new homelessness strategy must therefore consider the challenges this presents and identify ways of delivering "better for less" and ensure that our services address housing need while promoting well-being and independence.

3.Legal/Financial Implications

3.1 None identified

4.Recommendations

4.2 To note the progress of Haringey's Homelessness Strategy 2008-2011 action plan and the work to develop the next Homelessness Strategy.

4.3 To advise which issues and priorities it would like reflected in the new strategy

4.4 To agree the development of a new strategy ahead of the statutory requirement.

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5. Background

5.1 Haringey's current Homelessness strategy was developed in 2008. Preceded by a poor audit inspection review and the highest number of households in temporary accommodation in the country, the strategy was developed in partnership with key stakeholders, heavily consulted on and attracted support from a wide range of partners. Homelessness Champions across housing, health, education, mental health, children's and voluntary sector services, promoted the aims of the strategy and were pivotal in its delivery.

5.2 The strategy's delivery framework consisted initially of nine themed multi agency delivery groups, with more than half of these being chaired by external partners. These were later reconfigured to 4 groups, to reflect the amount of work completed. A Homelessness Strategy Implementation Officer supported these groups and monitored the strategy's progress.

5.3 The strategy was formally reviewed in 2009 and twice in 2010. The strategy action plan was also under continuous scrutiny and adjusted to keep in line with local and national priorities and learning. Annual events provided key stakeholders with an opportunity to shape and influence the actions for the next year and information on the progress of the strategy

5.4 The achievements of this strategy have been acknowledged by the Audit Commission who reported that *"An effective homelessness strategy is in place and being delivered with partners. There is now a comprehensive approach to preventing homelessness and offering housing options and appropriate standards of casework advice. There has been a significant reduction in the use of temporary accommodation, increased support to the households that remain, and bed and breakfast targets have been met"*.

5.5 An overview of the achievements through this strategy are set out in the Year 2 (2010) Review in appendix 1

5.6 Since the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) it has become clear that we will see a significant reduction in resources across the public and voluntary sectors. Welfare reforms and the introduction of Universal Credit, could have a severe impact on Haringey's residents. A clear strategic approach which is aligned with our local and sub-regional partners is essential to ensure that we are able to continue to prevent homelessness and support Haringey's most vulnerable residents

6. The current situation

Homelessness Strategy Progress

6.1 A progress review was conducted in February 2011. This found that 86% of the Strategy's actions have been completed and 6% were in progress. The remaining 8% will be considered for inclusion in the new homelessness, private sector housing or the child poverty strategies, which are or will be developed.

6.2 An up to date report setting out the outstanding actions are provided in appendix 2 .

Impacts on service delivery and Homelessness

6.3 As part of the reconfiguration of Council directorates (Rethinking Haringey), from April 2011 the housing service (excluding the ALMO client; Enabling and Strategy and Policy functions) will become part of the new Adult and Housing services directorate. This will provide opportunities to provide more joined up services relating to the commissioning, assessment, safeguarding and provision of support and housing to vulnerable people in housing need.

6.4 In recent months, proposed Welfare reforms and the CSR have set out a number of changes which will affect welfare benefits claimants, both social and private sector tenants, and public and voluntary sector organisations. Phased in Welfare reforms will -

- Introduce greater control and penalties for job seekers who do not meet their job seeker commitment
- In some cases (particularly for single people under 35 and larger families) less housing benefit will be payable, leaving residents to make up shortfall in rent or move to smaller/cheaper accommodation
- Parts of centrally located boroughs will become inaccessible to housing benefit claimants, which is likely to result in migration to outer London Boroughs, which in turn could result in delayed transitions between health, education and care services
- Higher housing benefit deductions will also be made to claimants who have non dependants living with them
- Housing benefit may not pay the full rent of social housing tenants if they under occupy their home
- The development of new social housing may also present a challenge given the aim to change the way in which Social landlords secure funding for new developments, from grant funding to a to self financing (affordable rent model).

6.5 While homelessness prevention work has been very effective in bringing down the levels of homelessness acceptances in recent years, the new and proposed reforms may result in a reluctance from private sector landlords to let to tenants claiming welfare benefits, both directly and via local authority schemes.

Strategy Development

6.6 In seeking to develop a homelessness strategy that will take us to 2014/15 we have begun to consult with key stakeholders. The review event in 2010, provided us with our first opportunity to consider what we have learned from the implementation of the current strategy and the challenges and priorities for the future. The homelessness strategy delivery groups have also focussed on the next strategy over recent months. One of the more strategically facing groups, (Partnership Communications and Customer Experience), will also be expanded to effectively become the strategy steering group.

6.7 To help us identify and raise awareness of the issues which need consideration in the new strategy, Shelter has been invited to speak to IHB. The Homelessness Adviser for London from the Department of Communities and Local Government was also invited to speak at the next Partnership, Communications and Customer Experience Delivery Group on 29 March 2011.

6.8 At the homelessness strategy review event in November 2010, stakeholders took part in workshops where they told us what challenges they were facing and which priorities should be included in the next homelessness strategy (a summary is provided in appendix 3). During the workshops partners expressed an anxiety about the reforms and the cost efficiencies that were needed as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review. There was recognition that partnership working has been successful, however the capacity to continue to work in this way and concerns that services would be funding rather than customer led, were apparent. The need to prevent homelessness and ensure the supply of good quality, private sector, temporary and affordable housing was also seen as a challenge in the current climate. Despite the concerns expressed, communication joined up working and shared services were considered to be the way forward.

6.8 A draft project plan and scoping document will be presented at the IHB meeting on 5 April.

6.9 A draft strategy will be presented at future IHB and Cabinet meetings with a view to public consultation beginning this summer.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The three year strategy will come to an end in July this year and a robust evidence based strategic approach is needed to make the best use of limited resources across the public and voluntary sector.

7.2 The project plan and scoping document details the stages of the development of the strategy and comments on this are welcomed.

8. Appendices

8.1 Year 2 Review - November 2010

8.2 Outstanding Actions Report – February 2011

8.3 Homelessness Strategy Review Workshop Outcomes Nov 2010