

REPORT FOR: CABINET

Date of Meeting:	15 March 2018
Subject:	Review of the Homelessness Strategy
Key Decision:	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Nick Powell, Divisional Director of Housing
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Employment
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	Draft Homelessness Strategy 2018/2019 incorporating the following 4 Appendices Appendix 1: Homeless Accommodation Selection Policy Appendix 2: Homelessness Accommodation Procurement Strategy Appendix 3: Prevention or Relief Assistance under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 Appendix 4: Statutory duties EqIA Summary of Consultation Feedback January 2018

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the proposed changes to the Council's Homelessness Strategy, incorporating two existing policies agreed in 2015 and an additional new policy.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to approve:

1. the proposed amendments to the Council's existing Homelessness Strategy
2. the amendments to and renaming of the incorporated policies (appendices 1 and 2)
3. the introduction of a new Prevention or Relief Policy (appendix 3).

Reason: There is a statutory requirement to have a Homelessness Strategy and it should be updated every 5 years. The incorporated policies are considered necessary for the Council to meet the new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 from 3 April 2018.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

1. This report concerns the Homelessness Strategy, which is proposed to also incorporate the Homelessness Accommodation Selection Policy and the Homelessness Accommodation Procurement Strategy, and introduces a new Prevention or Relief Assistance Policy. These changes are being made as a consequence of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which commences on 3rd April 2018.
2. The Homelessness Strategy is required under the Homelessness Act (2002) and should be updated every 5 years. The Council's current Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 was approved in April 2013.
3. The Homelessness Strategy supports the Harrow Ambition Plan's objective to 'Protect the Most Vulnerable and Support Families'. We will achieve this by supporting customers to take appropriate steps to find or keep a suitable home.
4. It also supports the Housing Ambition Plan's ambition for Smarter Housing to 'offer housing solutions for all Harrow residents with a housing need in spite of continuing homelessness pressures' by 'supporting customers to take appropriate steps to find or keep a suitable home'.
5. We have successfully brought down the number of households in emergency B&B accommodation by over 60% from a peak of 307 families in June 2016 to 116 families by the end of 2017. We have largely done this through actively working with private landlords to prevent homelessness

so families do not have to move, our property purchase programme and offering longer term private rented accommodation in London and elsewhere to end the uncertainty of homelessness.

6. We will embrace the objectives of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to further increase homelessness prevention and find lower cost housing solutions for people facing homelessness.
7. The proposed changes to the strategy and the amended policies will help us to focus the Council's limited resources on those local families with the greatest housing need and to meet our new statutory duties.
8. When resources and the housing market permits, our ambition is to be able to offer all households facing possible homelessness assistance either to stay in their current home or to obtain alternative local accommodation to avoid becoming homeless.

Options considered

9. There is a statutory requirement to have a Homelessness Strategy under the Homelessness Act (2002) and it should be updated every 5 years.

The options considered are:

- To not update the current Homelessness Strategy and to delay the review until after the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the impact is fully understood

This option is not recommended. This option would expose us to the risk of legal challenge, on the basis that the Council has failed to comply with its statutory duty.

- To carry out a full review of the current Homelessness Strategy, before the implementation of the Homelessness reduction Act 2017 and before the impact is fully understood

This option is not recommended because the implementation and operation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 could lead to further changes required to the Homelessness Strategy.

- To amend the current Homelessness Strategy sufficiently to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, extend it until the end of December 2019 and conduct a full review during 2019 after the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the revised Homelessness Code of Guidance.

This option is recommended. This option enables us to meet our statutory responsibilities and reduces the risk of legal challenge.

- To amend the current Homelessness Strategy without the introduction of the new Prevention and Relief Policy.

This option is not recommended. A policy will be required in order to allocate resources to individual applicants. It is better to have a transparent policy which has been consulted on and assessed.

Background

10. The Homelessness Strategy helps us to:

- Provide a strategic framework to deliver a statutory homelessness service, including targeting resources where needs are most pressing
- Identify actions to tackle homelessness, including actions to achieve the objectives within this strategy
- Set out a joined-up approach to addressing the challenges facing housing through companion strategies.

11. It also helps us to meet the objective in our Housing Strategy to 'tackle homelessness through prevention advice and support, improving access to and improving standards in the private rented sector'.

12. The Council's objectives are to prevent homelessness at an early stage and, where this is not possible, to support homeless households and those in housing need to secure economically realistic housing.

These objectives are delivered through the following priority actions:

- a) Good quality housing advice and accessible prevention services
- b) Enable access to economically realistic housing
- c) Support landlords and improve conditions in the Private Rented Sector
- d) Affordability, money and debt advice
- e) Address the needs of vulnerable households, including rough sleepers and single person households
- f) Continue working in partnership to make best use of limited resources and best practice.

13. Partnership working

We work in partnership with a range of stakeholders to address homelessness including:

- Pan-London with other local authorities, London Councils and the Greater London Authority
- Regionally with the West London Housing Partnership and the West London Alliance

- Internally with other departments and teams within Harrow Council, particularly Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Housing Benefit and Residential Licensing
- Locally with
 - Registered Providers of social housing in Harrow
 - Private Sector Landlords in Harrow, including through our Landlord Forum
 - Harrow's Single Homeless Forum and its members
 - Providers of housing related support services
 - Providers of information and advice
 - Other Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations

14. As a result of the work of Harrow' Homelessness Task Force in 2016 and 2017 internal stakeholders were brought together to discuss the key issues and agree actions. A range of both internal and external stakeholders were briefed on the current housing and homelessness situation in Harrow in order to improve local understanding and to ensure that information and advice given to local residents reflect the current challenges.

15. We continue to look for new ways to work in partnership to address homelessness. For example we applied to the Homelessness Trailblazer Fund in late 2016 with local Voluntary and Community Sector partners but unfortunately this bid was unsuccessful.

16. New Housing Supply

Housing supply and the affordability of housing continue to be key issues faced locally and nationally. Our response since 2014 has been to start building the first new council houses in a generation with a target of 500 new council homes built by 2020; to regenerate the Grange Farm estate and invest in building our own Private Rented housing. To date we have completed 16 new social homes, with 91 more affordable homes in development and a further 30 for which we have secured planning permission. Plans have been submitted for 241 new affordable homes on the Grange Farm estate.

17. Hostel Accommodation

We are improving our homeless hostel accommodation, Vernon Lodge, as outlined in a separate Cabinet report.

Current situation

18. The current Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 was approved by Cabinet in April 2013.

19. The Temporary Accommodation Allocation Policy and Temporary Accommodation Procurement Strategy were approved by Cabinet in November 2015 and have now been amended and renamed the Homelessness Accommodation Selection Policy and Homelessness Accommodation Procurement Strategy.

20. We are refreshing the Homelessness Strategy for 2018/2019, in advance of a full review in 2019 once the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has been implemented. The full review will include consultation with all key stakeholders. We anticipate that the Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025 will be submitted to Cabinet at the latest in December 2019.

Why a change is needed

21. As noted earlier the Council is required to have a Homelessness Strategy by law and it must be reviewed every 5 years. The current Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 was approved by Cabinet in April 2013 and so is due for review now. However due to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 from April 2018 we are seeking to refresh the strategy for 2018/2019, in advance of a full review in 2019.

22. Changes coming in as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the revised Homelessness Code of Guidance as well as case law development require that the Council's Strategy and other supporting documents should be updated and/or introduced.

23. As a result of new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 a new policy called the 'Prevention or Relief Assistance Policy' is proposed outlining the steps that the Council will take in order to meet its requirements.

Implications of the Recommendation

Considerations

24. It is intended and anticipated that all applicants who are currently assisted by Housing Needs will continue to be assisted with suitable accommodation.

25. In relation to future applicants under the protection and relief duties, there is no evidence to suggest that these applicants will be adversely affected, however this will be monitored and any necessary adjustments considered.

26. The proposed changes to the strategy are intended to make the strategy more relevant, compliant and clearer to all stakeholders.

Resources, costs, staffing/workforce

27. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 creates additional requirements and responsibilities for the Council which will have resource implications. New Burdens funding has been allocated by Government. While it is anticipated that the budget required to meet the new duties will exceed the New Burdens funding allocation this will be contained and managed within the agreed budgets.

28. A review of the staffing structure is underway to ensure the new requirements can be met.

Performance Issues

29. There is no change to Council priorities.

30. New performance monitoring indicators have been introduced by the government for the new duties introduced in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The new H-CLIC framework will collect homelessness statistics for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and will replace the current P1E framework. The data will be collected at case-level, rather than aggregated local authority level.

31. Software has been procured to meet the new homelessness data requirements.

Environmental Implications

32. There are no positive or negative impacts on the Environment as a result of these policies & strategies.

Risk Management Implications

Failure to meet our statutory duty to homeless households within budget is in the Departmental Risk register. These changes form part of the identified control measures to reduce the risk.

Legal Implications

Pursuant to section 2 of the Homelessness Act 2002, local housing authorities have a duty to review homelessness in their district and formulate and publish a strategy based on the results of the review. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 comes into force on 3rd April 2018 and requires that local housing authorities must take “reasonable steps” to either maintain or secure accommodation for eligible applicant threatened with homelessness, known as the prevention and relief duties. In addition, pursuant to section 182 of the Housing Act 1996, local authorities are also bound to have regard to the Secretary of State’s Homelessness Code of Guidance. A revised code was published on 22 February 2018. Failure to have an updated Homelessness Strategy may impact the council’s ability to defend challenges to decisions made under the Housing Act 1996 as amended by Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Financial Implications

This report seeks to extend and refresh the current Homelessness strategy sufficiently to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, until the strategy is reviewed in full in 2019. This refresh is introducing a new Prevention or Relief Assistance Policy as a consequence of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which comes into force from April 2018.

The service will operate within its current approved budget from 2018/19 onwards as approved in the General Fund budget for 2018-19 and MTFs 2019-20 to 2020-21, submitted to Cabinet 15th February 2018 and approved by Council 22nd February 2018. The current 2017/18 controllable budget allocation for Housing Needs is £4.173m and is forecasting a balanced position for 2017/18, although a pressure of £300k is expected in respect of the Property Acquisition Programme (PAP) which relates mainly to unachievable Bed & Breakfast savings allocated to the PAP, addressed in the 2018-19 budget.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 creates additional requirements and responsibilities for the Council which will have resource implications. The introduction of the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) in 2017/18, currently a two year ring fenced grant allocation, is designed to give greater flexibility to councils to prioritise the prevention of homelessness. Harrow received a two year allocation:

2017/18 :£1,674,862
2018/19 :£1,985,422

It is anticipated that about £300K of Flexible Homelessness Support Grant ("FHSG") allocation in 2017/18 will be carried forward to assist with meeting the cost of the extra duties in 18-19 (arising from Homelessness Reduction Act 2017).

The Council also received New Burdens Funding to meet the new burdens costs associated with the additional duties contained within the act, Harrow's allocation is:

2017/18 : £182,810
2018/19 ; £167,454
2019/20 :£158,396

It is expected New Burdens Funding allocation will be partly utilised in 2017/18 with unspent funds ring fenced and carry forward for use in 2018/19.

The Council will continue to receive FHSG and New Burdens Funding to 2018-19 and 2019-20 respectively, with future awards to be confirmed. These resources, together with the impact of other initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness, including redevelopment of Vernon Lodge appearing elsewhere this agenda, will be reviewed as part of the update of the Strategy in mid-2019-20.

Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

When making policy decisions, the Council must take account of the public sector equality duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) and in particular any potential impact on protected groups. A comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was completed in 2013 when the new Homelessness Strategy was introduced and a subsequent EqIA was completed in 2015 when the Temporary Accommodation Allocation Policy and the Temporary Accommodation Procurement Strategy were developed.

An EqlA has been completed in respect of the proposed changes to the Housing Strategy and are intended to make the strategy more relevant, compliant and clearer to all stakeholders. The EqlA demonstrates that all applicants who are currently assisted by Housing Needs will continue to be assisted with suitable accommodation. In relation to future applicants under the protection and relief duties, there is no evidence to suggest that these applicants will be adversely affected, however this will be monitored and any necessary adjustments considered.

There is however evidence of a disproportionate representation of Black applicants and female applicants within Homelessness Services, not specifically in relation to the proposed changes to the Homelessness Strategy, and this will be explored further as part of the full review of the Homelessness Strategy in 2019.

Stakeholders such as other Council departments, homeless applicants, Registered Providers, organisations who support and advise homeless people and the voluntary and community sector have been involved in consultation on the proposed changes to the Housing Strategy, the amendments to the two accommodation policies and the new prevention or relief policy. Consultation was carried out via an online survey, an event for residents living in Temporary Accommodation, a meeting for stakeholders and submissions of feedback by email.

The feedback received with regards to the amendments to the strategy and policies is summarised below:

- Concern from professionals about the effectiveness of procedures in relation to vulnerable individuals with mental health need accessing homelessness services
- Concern from professionals about young people facing homelessness, 'hidden homeless', single homelessness people and rough sleepers
- Challenges of working with some Private Sector Landlords
- Digital exclusion of some vulnerable people at a time of digitalisation
- Tenancy sustainment issues for some vulnerable people and/or those with complex needs
- Clarification requested concerning the publication of Financial Viability Assessments submitted to Planning by housing developers

The Prevention or Relief Policy clarifies what support will be offered to all applicants including vulnerable individuals.

As a result of the consultation feedback regarding the experience of vulnerable individuals accessing homelessness services the Council has determined that the protocol between Housing Needs and CNWL (Mental Health Services) will be reviewed. In addition the EqlA did not suggest that this group would be disadvantaged by the introduction of this policy. The assistance provided to individuals with mental health problems is set out in the Housing Strategy and if it is established that any individuals with mental health issues have a priority need, then they will be owed a duty by the Council.

In respect of concerns about young people facing homelessness, both the strategy and the policy set out how the Council will help with family mediation and work with families to resolve issues that lead to young people being unable to remain at home.

The Council also has discretion in exceptional circumstances to offer assistance outside the policy. As part of the support offered individuals will be offered training in respect of the private rental sector and obtaining accommodation and as set out in the Homelessness Strategy and in this report the Council works with partnership agencies to address homelessness in light with the Council's Equality duties.

A meeting will also be held with some of the organisations who responded to the consultation to discuss the services that they offer and their referral pathway.

As to the concerns regarding the Financial Viability Assessments submitted by housing developers, these are published in line with our Planning Application Requirements. These are published un-redacted unless the applicant demonstrates to the Council's satisfaction that a redacted version should be published for commercially sensitive reasons.

Council Priorities

The Council's vision:

Working Together to Make a Difference for Harrow

Please identify how the report incorporates the administration's priorities.

- **Making a difference for the vulnerable**
- Making a difference for communities
- Making a difference for local businesses
- Making a difference for families.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Tasleem Kazmi	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 1 March 2018		
Name: Victoria Seifert	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 5 March 2018		

Ward Councillors notified:	NO, as it impacts on all Wards
EqIA carried out:	YES
EqIA cleared by:	Dave Corby, DETG Chair, Community Directorate

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

Jon Dalton
Head of Housing Needs
Housing Services
Community Directorate
Jon.Dalton@harrow.gov.uk
Internal: 8647
External: 020 8416 8647

Background Papers:

Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018
http://www.harrow.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/1660/homelessness_strategy_2013

Temporary Accommodation Allocation Policy

http://www.harrow.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/7721/ta_allocation_policy-1_dec_2015

Temporary Accommodation Procurement Strategy

http://www.harrow.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/7720/ta_procurement_strategy-1_dec_2015

Papers from the Cabinet meeting in April 2013 when the current Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 was approved

<http://moderngov:8080/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=249&MId=61078&Ver=4>

Papers from the Cabinet meeting in November 2015 when the Temporary Accommodation Allocation Policy and Temporary Accommodation Procurement Strategy were approved

<http://moderngov:8080/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=249&MId=62618&Ver=4>

**Call-In Waived by the
Chair of Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**

NOT APPLICABLE

[Call-in applies]