

## Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	17 July 2008
Subject:	Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013
Key Decision:	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Paul Najsarek, Director Adults and Housing Services
Portfolio Holder:	Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing - Cllr Barry Macleod-Cullinane
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013 Homelessness Review 2008 (via weblink)

**1.1** This report sets out the key objectives and priorities of the new Homelessness Strategy for Harrow, to be delivered over the next 5 years. It has been developed following a full review of homelessness services, including extensive consultation with staff, partners and service users. It sets out the way in which the council, and its partners, will develop services to meet the challenges of homelessness demand in Harrow, while at the same time supporting national, regional and local priorities.

### **1.2 Recommendations:**

Cabinet is requested to approve the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 and delegate to the Corporate Director the ability to make changes including any adjustments necessary following discussion with Communities and Local Government (CLG) and report to Tenants and Leaseholders Consultative Forum (TLCF) on 22 July 2008.

**1.3 Reason:** All councils are required, under the Homelessness Act 2002, to have a five-year Homelessness Strategy in place, based on a full review of homelessness and homeless services. Harrow's

**existing Homelessness Strategy was developed in 2003 so the Council is required to develop a new Homelessness Strategy for submission to CLG by 31 July 2008.**

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **2.1 Introduction**

2.1.1 Every local authority has a duty to produce a Homelessness Strategy under the Homelessness Act 2002. Harrow produced its first Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan in 2003. This Homelessness Strategy 2008 builds on the achievements of the first strategy and sets out our road map for meeting the challenges of homelessness over the next five years. In doing so, it links with and supports a number of key local strategies. The links to key local objectives are summarised below.

Corporate Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep crime low</li> <li>• Improve the well being of adults and children and the care of those who most need our help</li> <li>• Improve the way we work for our residents</li> <li>• Develop communities where people from different backgrounds get on well together</li> </ul>
Sustainable Community Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage affordable housing to be developed in accessible locations</li> <li>• Increase social inclusion</li> <li>• Ensure continuous improvements in the quality of housing, affordability, and choice of type, size and tenure</li> <li>• Ensure sound multi-agency communication and practice around protecting children from harm and promoting their welfare</li> </ul>
Adults and Housing Services Transformation Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing accommodation opportunities and increasing housing options for older people and for people with LD, MH, PD and people with multiple disabilities, in mainstream housing</li> <li>• Effective working practices</li> </ul>
Housing Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To tackle homelessness and high demand, while reducing the use of temporary accommodation</li> </ul>

2.1.2 The Strategy also sets out how it is informed by the national and regional strategic context, including the extensive work done in the West London sub region to tackle homelessness.

### **2.2 Options considered**

2.2.1 Harrow's Housing Strategy 2007-2012 (approved by Cabinet 19 July 2007 minute 273) contains an objective with 3 key priorities relating to

homelessness, which have been used as the basis for the development of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-13. Staff, stakeholders and service users have considered these, along with other priorities. The multi-agency Project Board agreed the final priorities identified in the Strategy.

- 2.2.2 There are a number of actions included in the Strategy for which an options analysis will be required; for example future hostel provision and the review of the housing advice service.

## **2.3 Background**

- 2.3.1 It is a statutory requirement (Homelessness Act 2002) for the council to have in place a homelessness strategy, based on a full review of homelessness and homeless service provision in the borough. This is used to inform the establishment and delivery of key strategic priorities to improve services to homeless people. Latest guidance from CLG stresses the need for close partnership working across the council and partner agencies in the delivery of the strategy.
- 2.3.2 This strategy demonstrates a comprehensive approach to tackling homelessness in Harrow. The strategy has been based upon both the research carried out through the review, as well as interviews and other forms of consultation with partners and stakeholders. We have also drawn upon performance and needs data, and research from sources such as Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Harrow Housing Needs Assessment 2006.
- 2.3.3 Finally, the Strategy builds upon the aims and delivery of the first Harrow Homelessness Strategy 2003 – 8. This was developed at a time when Harrow was just starting to implement its innovative approach to tackling housing need via homelessness prevention. The Strategy was extremely successful initially; resulting in the council getting national recognition by way of Beacon status for tackling homelessness and outcomes such as a dramatic reduction in the number of homelessness acceptances and the elimination of the use of bed and breakfast hotels. Since 2005, the external environment has been more challenging and some of the quick wins available in 2003 are no longer possible. Nevertheless, the central themes of the 2003 strategy are still valid and are carried through to this successor document.

## **2.4 Priorities**

- 2.4.1 The key priorities that frame the Strategy are as follows:
- To prevent homelessness, and to tackle high demand and the wider causes of homelessness
  - To secure accommodation for homeless people across a range of tenures, and to manage and reduce the use of temporary accommodation
  - To support vulnerable homeless people, including young and single homeless, in accessing settled homes and sustaining their tenure

- To regularly review the homelessness strategy, to ensure it is effective, adapts readily to the changing external environment and that the Housing Needs service provides good value for money

## **2.5 Consultation**

- 2.5.1 A comprehensive programme of consultation has been completed, with staff, partners and customers including all homeless households on the Housing Register, existing council tenants and specific service user groups such as teenage parents and young homeless people. A variety of methods were employed including a reception based satisfaction survey (47 responses), postal survey with Homeseecker News (488 responses), focus groups with 47 services users and 11 staff and a homelessness conference for 60 partners. Full details of specific consultations and their findings are detailed within the Homelessness Review document and the Strategy includes a section on "what stakeholders told us" under each of the four priorities.
- 2.5.2 The information gathered has been used to shape the Strategy, and participants in the consultation have been kept informed of the progress of the work. A Homelessness Strategy Project Board was established to oversee the review process and development of the strategy. The Board was made up of stakeholders from various agencies providing services across the spectrum of homelessness. Membership is detailed in the Homelessness Review document. The Board made detailed comments on drafts of the Strategy as it developed and agreed the final priorities.

## **2.6 Equalities impact**

- 2.6.1 An equalities impact assessment (EIA) has been developed and is included in the Homelessness Review 2008. The EIA assesses the impact the strategy will have on defined groups based on an analysis of current evidence. It reflects actions required to address differential impact, which has then been included in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.
- 2.6.2 The assessment has shown that although higher proportions of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) households are presenting as homeless and on waiting lists for suitable accommodation, particularly larger accommodation, there is no evidence from the data to suggest that this group is directly discriminated against in the homelessness process (12.3% of applications from BME households are accepted, compared with an overall average of 12.2%). However, it is important to note that there will continue to be an imbalance in the proportion of larger BME households waiting for accommodation with so few larger properties becoming available for letting each year.
- 2.6.3 Key findings from the assessment have been reflected in the action plan, particularly the need for larger accommodation (Action Plan objective 2 action 5), the need for access to adapted properties for physically disabled people (objective 3 action 23), improved collection of data on disability for more accurate monitoring on disability (objective 4 action 12) and research into the needs of Lesbian, Gay,

Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) groups, faith groups and gypsies and travellers (objective 4 action 15).

- 2.6.4 In addition to the EIA, the Council needs to demonstrate that it has had due regard to promoting the equality of opportunity of disabled people and other persons in accordance with Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. Section 49 also requires the Council to take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons. Equality of opportunity in this case would be represented by the specific needs of disabled people for suitable temporary and permanent accommodation being recognised and prioritised.
- 2.6.5 Data is not currently routinely collected on the numbers of disabled people, or households containing a disabled person, presenting as homeless to assess whether or not this is disproportionate to the number of disabled people in the community. In addition, the council's ability to find suitable temporary accommodation for people with mobility impairments is restricted by the limited availability of such accommodation that has been designed or adapted for use by people with mobility impairments. There are similar difficulties concerning the provision of permanent accommodation, although there is scope for adaptations, subject to resource availability.
- 2.6.6 The strategy has recognised these issues and, at objective 4 action 12 addresses the need for improved collection of data on disability for more accurate monitoring. In addition, at objective 3, action 23, the Strategy specifically addresses the need to increase the availability of suitably adapted temporary property.
- 2.6.7 In the case of other disabilities, the strategy recognises the needs of people with learning disabilities and mental health issues by a range of actions at objective 3, actions 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.
- 2.6.8 The actions set out in the Homelessness Strategy should positively address any existing differential impact on specific groups. Any change, positive or negative, will be identified through the annual review process by the multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Project Board, and will be addressed in future updates to the action plan.

## **2.7 Financial Implications**

- 2.7.1 The resources available for implementation of this strategy include: Harrow Council homelessness revenue budget, specific CLG revenue grants, Harrow affordable housing fund capital and Housing Corporation capital, plus privately raised finance for new housing schemes delivered by RSLs.
- 2.7.2 The total net revenue budget for homelessness in 2008-9 is £2.7m, and includes £204k specific CLG revenue grants and £320k HB income.

In 2009-10 cost savings of £160,000 will be made to support the HARP IT project.

2.7.3 In the 2008/09 approved revenue budget Housing Services contributed to the Council's savings programme, resulting in growth in homelessness costs being absorbed within the existing budget through a range of initiatives to manage demand. The budget is based on an average of 32 families in Bed and Breakfast for a full year; however at the start of 2008/09 there were 71 families in Bed and Breakfast. This is a significant cost pressure but will be managed down by the initiatives detailed in the strategy and the maximisation of Housing Benefit. It is not clear at this stage whether this can be contained within the existing budget by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 and it will be closely monitored and reported as appropriate.

2.7.4 As noted throughout the strategy the homelessness service is subject to changing external forces and a number of budgetary pressures associated with the costs of temporary accommodation and prevention initiatives. Where new initiatives have revenue cost implications these will be managed within the overall homelessness budget or within the corporate medium term financial strategy.

## 2.8 Performance Issues

2.8.1 The Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan relate directly to a number of key performance indicators including:

### CPA Housing Block - Housing the Community:

PI ref no / Frequency	PI description	Lower Threshold	Upper Threshold	Actual and CPA threshold 2007/08
BV183a H14	Average time in B&B (weeks)	6 weeks	1.2 weeks	7.02 lower
BV 183b H15	Average length of stay in hostel accommodation (weeks)	23.1 weeks	0 weeks	11.6 middle
BV214 H16	Repeat homelessness acceptances	8.00%	1.00%	0% upper
BV203 H22	% change in average no of families placed in TA	28.31%	-6.94%	-2.48% middle

2.8.2 Performance on some of these indicators, such as length of time in B&B, has been worsening due to a variety of factors. The Action Plan puts in place measures to reduce the use of B&B in overall numbers and the length of time spent.

### 2.8.3 National Indicator Set:

From 2008/09 there are two new performance indicators that will be used to measure performance of the homelessness service:

- NI 156 will measure the number of households living in temporary accommodation;

- NI 155 will measure the number of affordable homes delivered (gross). This is also an LAA target.

The Strategy sets out in detail how we aim to meet the CLG target of reducing the use of TA by 50% (2004 – 2010) and refers to the Housing Strategy 2007 action plan to increase the number of affordable homes delivered in Harrow.

2.8.4 Successful delivery of the strategy will also impact on national performance indicators relating to offenders, older people and vulnerable people (specifically NI 46, 139, 141, 142, 143, 145, 147, 149).

**2.8.5 Adults & Housing Services Transformation Plan:**

The review of the Homelessness Strategy and the reduced use of temporary accommodation are key deliverables of Programme Area 2: developing accommodation opportunities. The Strategy also supports

- The widening of accommodation options for vulnerable people (2.3)
- Conclude the HARP project (CAPITA) contract (5.1)
- Ensure services are efficiently and effectively resourced by skilled staff, through partnership working (programme area 6)
- Ensure consistency of approach and evidence based decision making in order to direct resources to front line services.

2.8.6 The homelessness strategy action plan at Section 4.1 of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 identifies where actions relate to specific performance indicators.

## **2.9 Risk Management Implications**

2.9.1 Risk included on Directorate risk register? Yes

2.9.2 Separate risk register in place? Yes

2.9.3 The homelessness strategy operates in an environment that is fluctuating and highly susceptible to change due to external factors. In response to this there has been a risk appraisal of key elements of the Strategy and Action Plan and controls are in place to mitigate and manage the highest risks.

2.9.4 Specific factors currently impacting on the delivery of the Strategy include the current financial climate, which could significantly affect both numbers of households presenting as homeless and the development of new affordable homes. This could lead to increased pressure on temporary accommodation for homeless households on the Housing Register.

### Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Donna Edwards



on behalf of the  
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 26 June 2008

Name: Helen White



on behalf of the  
Monitoring Officer

Date: 27 June 2008

### Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Tom Whiting.



Divisional Director  
(Strategy and  
Improvement)

Date: 18/06/08

### Section 5 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Jane Fernley, Interim Housing Needs Manager, tel: 020-8424-1283, [jane.Fernley@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:jane.Fernley@harrow.gov.uk)

#### Background Papers:

Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013

Homelessness Review 2008 available from website at

[www.harrow.gov.uk](http://www.harrow.gov.uk)