

**REPORT TO:** Urban Renewal Policy & Performance Board  
**DATE:** 17 June 2009  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Health & Community  
**SUBJECT:** Homelessness Strategy Consultation Exercise  
**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

1. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To consult PPB on the draft Homelessness Strategy for the Borough.
- 1.2 To inform PPB of the findings of the consultation exercise with stakeholders and service users.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i) **That the PPB notes the results of the consultation exercise attached as Appendix 4. (The findings of dedicated consultation exercises with the service users at YMCA, Grange Way Court and Belvedere will be presented for PPB to consider also).**
- ii) **That a final document is prepared for adoption by Executive Board which incorporates PPB's recommendations and any relevant comments from the consultation exercise.**

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires each local authority to review the extent and nature of homelessness in their area and to produce a strategy and action plan to prevent and tackle the problem. Halton's first Homelessness Strategy was published in 2003, creating a 5 year programme of measures to develop and improve services for households who become homeless and to prevent homelessness.
- 3.2 The next strategic phase will build on the progress made and will focus heavily on prevention and early intervention strategies.
- 3.3 Attached are three Appendices:  
Appendix 1- Executive Summary (Strategic Review and recommendations.)  
Appendix 2- Strategic Review.

## Appendix 3- Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013.

### 3.4 Some of the key findings of the Review are as follows:

- Halton's first Homelessness Strategy met the majority of its aims. Achievements include the setting up of a Homelessness Forum, rent deposit scheme, and a Homeless Prevention Service.
- In 2007/08 296 households applied to the statutory homeless service. Of which 221 households were accepted as having a priority need and being homeless through no fault of their own. This represents a 14% reduction since 2003/04.
- In total the homeless service (including prevention work) dealt with 1,093 customers.
- More households seeking help have multiple problems such as mental health, and substance misuse.
- Homelessness due to parental evictions remains high.
- Levels of homelessness amongst those with dependent children also remains high.
- Debt related homelessness requires earlier intervention.
- A wide range of support services are available for those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.
- Consultation highlighted a desire for service user involvement to shape service delivery.
- General satisfaction was expressed regarding provision, but services needed to be better co-ordinated.

### 3.5 Key Recommendations include the following:

- Provide mechanisms to enable service users to contribute to service development.
- Ensure a comprehensive approach to intelligence gathering and analysis.
- Enable specific service developments and interventions focused on those most at risk and those facing multiple problems.
- Combine homelessness services with measures to improve employability, linking with training and employment services.
- Ensure mechanisms for cross departmental and organisation work to improve service delivery and development of joint planning to resolve barriers for re-housing, particularly for those with drug and alcohol issues and mental health problems.

### 3.6 An outline Action Plan is included in Appendix 3 (pgs 19-27). Some of the work detailed here is currently underway, or some preparatory work has been undertaken for example scoping the introduction of a gateway system.

## 4.0 **CONSULTATION EXERCISE**

### 4.1 A formal consultation exercise was carried out in March 2009, to seek views on the draft documents referred to above. The Council

received only 6 formal responses of which 3 were from external sources, 1 from an Elected Member and 2 from internal officers. Appendix 4 is a list of the respondents and their comments.

- 4.2 However it should also be noted that the 'blue print' for developing the draft Homelessness Strategy was presented to the Borough's Homelessness Forum. The Homelessness Forum also had the opportunity to consider and comment on the findings and draft strategy on several occasions ahead of a wider consultation exercise.
- 4.3 The Council consulted with service users regarding the Homelessness Service as part of the options appraisal, which informed the Council's thinking on the most appropriate service delivery model for the operational service. The views of young service users aged 16-25 years were also considered during a Youth Homelessness Conference in October 2008. The views from these consultation events have been fed into the review findings and addressed via the strategy action plan. The general public has also had the opportunity to comment via the Council's web site.
- 4.4 Specific service user consultation regarding the Homelessness Strategy (as opposed to the operational aspects of the Housing Solutions service) has also taken place. This will provide a credible foundation on which to proceed. (Results to be presented at the meeting).
- 4.5 The majority of comments received from the formal consultation exercise referred to in paragraph 4.1 relate to presentational issues, or the need to update some information due to a time lag from the documents being written and the consultation exercise-taking place. One of the respondents (HHT) felt that some comments contained within the documents required further expansion or clarification. These comments will be acted upon accordingly and any factual inaccuracies will be corrected.
- 4.6 The key thing to note is that the respondents were supportive of the preventative emphasis of the new strategy, of the general strategic direction and objectives and recommendations contained within the draft strategy.
- 4.7 The next steps are to revise the draft documents, taking account of all appropriate comments. It is recommended that the existing three documents be merged and simplified into two documents i.e. The Homelessness Review being one document and the Homelessness Strategy (containing an executive summary of the Review) being the second document. It is also proposed that the recommendations are rationalised where possible in order to clarify and prioritise strategic thinking and to aid delivery of resulting actions.

## 5. **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Homelessness Review has mapped linkages to the Council's strategic priorities and the new strategy will complement existing corporate strategies.

## 6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 It is anticipated that a significant proportion of the actions identified can be achieved within existing budgets. However some additional expenditure may be required overtime as projects develop. The effective use of existing resources, including re-configuration where necessary and any potential new funding streams will be explored to reduce any impact on budgets.

## 7. **RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 Failure to adopt a new Homelessness Strategy for the Borough will be in breach of the Homelessness Act 2002 and would hinder the Council's efforts to reduce homelessness in the Borough.
- 7.2 There is a need to continually engage with stakeholders and service users regarding the Borough's Homelessness Strategy and to communicate key messages to ensure that the Council in conjunction with its partners achieves the desired targets and outcomes. The Borough's Homelessness Forum is key to this process.
- 7.3 There is also a need to refresh the strategy on an annual basis, to ensure that it remains 'current'.

## 8. **EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 The service will not discrimination due to age, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation or ethnic origin and will assist some of the most vulnerable groups in our local community. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed which highlights that the Homelessness Strategy will make a positive contribution to equality and diversity issues in the Borough.