

<b>Policy Overview Committee Meeting</b>	<b>Agenda Item: 5</b>
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<b>Meeting Date</b>	12 February 2014
<b>Report Title</b>	Homelessness Strategy 2014 - 2017
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr John Wright
<b>SMT Lead</b>	Pete Raine, Director of Regeneration
<b>Head of Service</b>	Amber Christou, Head of Housing
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Roxanne Sheppard, Housing Options Manager
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Forward Plan</b>	<b>Reference number:</b>

<b>Recommendations</b>	1. To review the draft Homelessness Strategy and make recommendations for inclusion within the final strategy.
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## **Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report sets out the background to the purpose and development of the Swale Homelessness Strategy and seeks recommendations from Policy Overview Committee on the draft strategy as part of the consultation process to inform the final strategy.
- 1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local housing authorities to have a Homelessness Strategy and undertake a homelessness review of the Borough every five years
- 1.3 Through the Localism Act 2011 the Government has sought to enable local authorities to access a wider range of accommodation to rehouse homelessness households.
- 1.4 Homelessness is a key strategic issue for Swale as homelessness continues to increase along with the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 1.5 The proposed vision for the Homelessness Strategy is to prevent homelessness within the Borough and enable unavoidably homeless households to secure accommodation suitable for their needs.
- 1.6 The Council has identified five strategic priorities to help make this vision a reality, underpinned by a series of key objectives.
- 1.7 The strategy supports the key objectives within both Swale's Housing Strategy and Kent Supporting People Strategy's

1.8 The Strategy will be implemented via the Delivery Plan, which will be monitored by the Swale Homelessness Action Forum.

## **2 Background**

2.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local housing authorities to have a Homelessness Strategy and undertake a homelessness review of the Borough every five years. The Strategy is required to provide an overall plan of the local authority's activities to prevent homelessness and to ensure sufficient provision of accommodation and support for households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

2.2 The Government has sought to enable local authorities to access a wider range of accommodation to rehouse homelessness households. Under the Localism Act 2011, local authorities now have the power to discharge their statutory homelessness duty into the private rented sector as well as the social sector.

2.3 Homelessness remains a key strategic issue for Swale. However, recent and future reductions in public funding for Swale Borough Council and its partners make tackling this issue an increasing challenge.

2.4 In line with national trends, homelessness in Swale is increasing and has been rising since 2011. Families and young people remain the top homelessness acceptances with evictions by family or friends the main factors causing homelessness.

2.5 Use of temporary accommodation has increased since 2011, as has the use of Bed and Breakfast outside of the Borough. The length of time spent living in temporary accommodation has also gone up, exacerbated by a limited amount of move-on accommodation in both the private and social sectors.

2.6 Vulnerable households often require additional support to enable them to be able to sustain their tenancies and prevent them from becoming homeless. This can range from housing-related support to help with managing their finances.

2.7 The proposed vision for the Homelessness Strategy is to prevent homelessness within the Borough and enable unavoidably homeless households to secure accommodation suitable for their needs.

2.8 The Council has identified five strategic priorities to help make this vision a reality, underpinned by a series of key objectives. These are

- Prevent homelessness amongst at risk households through the provision of high quality housing advice and assistance

- Increase provision of a range of suitable accommodation options for households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
  - Provide appropriate support to vulnerable households to enable them to live independently
  - Support households in receipt of benefits to ensure that they do not become homeless as a result of welfare reform
  - Build and maintain strong working relationships with local, regional and national partners
- 2.9 This Strategy links to the objectives in the Swale Housing Strategy to support vulnerable people and tackle disadvantage and improve quality of life. It also links with the Kent Supporting People Strategy's aims of homelessness prevention and supporting independent living and the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy's aim to support vulnerable people in housing need to fulfil their potential and live a high quality life through the provision of excellent housing and support services.
- 2.10 The lifespan of this Strategy is until 2017, in line with the proposed implementation of the Government's welfare reforms. The Strategy will be implemented via the Delivery Plan, which sets out the actions to be undertaken by the Council and its partners to achieve the Strategic Priorities and Objectives. Progress against the Delivery Plan will be monitored by the Swale Homelessness Action Forum. The Delivery Plan will be a living document and will be updated annually.

### **3 Proposal**

- 3.1 For Policy Overview Committee to review the draft Homelessness Strategy and make recommendations to be put forward for inclusion within the final document.

### **4 Alternative Options**

- 4.1 To not review the Homelessness Strategy would mean that the committee's recommendations would not be included within the final strategy.

### **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 5.1 The draft Homelessness Strategy is currently out for public consultation, which ends on 13 March 2014. The draft strategy has been published on the Council's website and sent to key partners that operate within Swale.

## **6 Appendices**

6.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report

- Appendix I: Draft Swale Homelessness Strategy 2014 – 2017

Note: Use Roman numerals for appendices.