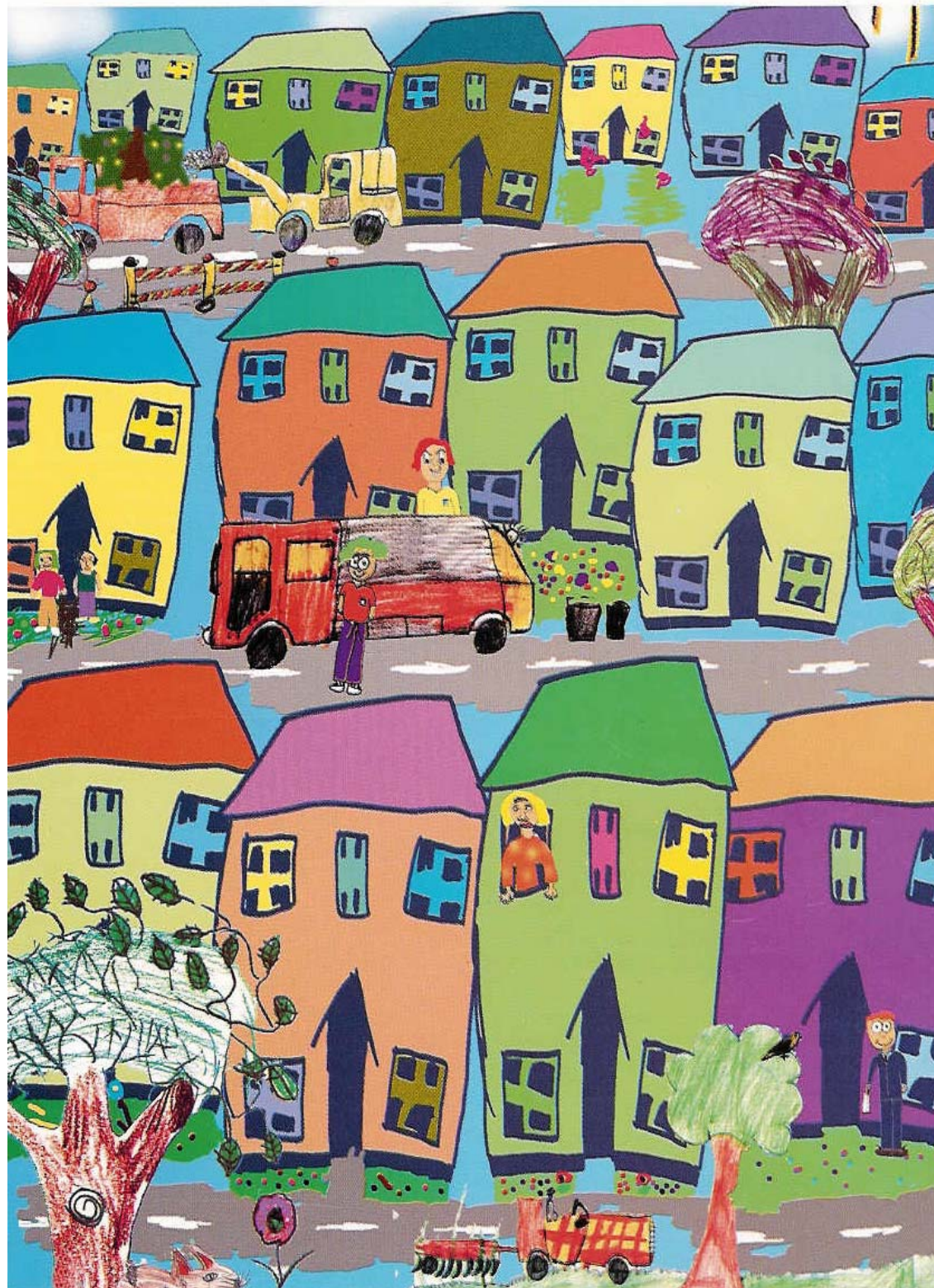


HEREFORDSHIRE HOMELESSNESS REVIEW AND STRATEGY

SUMMARY JULY 2003



This leaflet provides a summary of:

- The Herefordshire Homelessness Review and
- The Herefordshire Homelessness Strategy, which is based on the findings of the Review

The Review process and Strategy development has been informed by consultation with homeless and previously homeless people and consultation and involvement with other agencies in the county that, directly or indirectly, provide services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.

Independent research on the views of homeless and previously homeless people was undertaken by Dr Joan Smith, Dr Jane Henriques and Mary Ing of the Centre for Housing and Community Research, Staffordshire University, following a competitive tendering process.

COMPLIANCE WITH LEGISLATION

In accordance with the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002, the Review has considered:

- The levels and likely future levels of homelessness in the County
- The activities and services provided, which help to prevent homelessness, help to find accommodation for homeless and potentially homeless people or provide support for them, including support to prevent them from becoming homeless again
- The resources available to Housing Services and Social Services, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other agencies for providing those services

The Aims and objectives of the Homelessness Strategy comply with those set out in the Homelessness legislation, which are:

- The prevention of homelessness
- Ensuring there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or who may become homeless
- Ensuring there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homelessness

STRATEGY VISION

To develop a multi-agency Homelessness Strategy for Herefordshire that seeks to address the accommodation, health, support and other needs of homeless people and ensure the provision of high quality homelessness advice and other services to prevent homelessness occurring.

CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC LINKS

As is the case in many rural authorities, Herefordshire is experiencing substantial and sustained increasing demand for affordable housing against a decreasing supply. This is a consequence of the combined effect of Right to Buy across the county and considerably diminished opportunities for many local households to access either owner occupation or the private rented sector, both of which are operating in buoyant and very competitive markets.

KEY STATISTICS:

- The average price of a house in Herefordshire at £147,826 exceeds the average for England and Wales (HM Land Registry figures for the period October to December 2002)

- Herefordshire as a whole has a higher proportion of its housing in the most expensive valuation bands than is the case either regionally, or nationally
- The average price for a semi-detached house is £118,277. Assuming a 5% deposit the earnings needed, if the mortgage is calculated at 3.25 times earnings, would be approximately £34,573 per annum. Set against this, the average gross annual earnings for Herefordshire during 2002 were only £19,377.
- Average earnings in Herefordshire are 87% of the regional average and just 79% of the national average
- As at December 2002 the average (median) private sector rent for a 3 bedroom house in Herefordshire was £450 per calendar month

The shortage in the supply of affordable housing for vulnerable single people and homeless families is a critical issue for Herefordshire, particularly as it is likely that the high levels of homelessness in the county will continue to rise without effective and targeted programmes of intervention. This will need to be balanced by continued initiatives to increase the supply of accommodation, which is affordable to local people.

On the positive side all the agencies concerned with the provision of services to homeless people, or those at risk of homelessness, have demonstrated a high commitment to work together to maximise the capacity to respond. The Homeless Strategy has been jointly developed and is a multi-agency response to the needs of homeless people in the county and those who are at risk of homelessness.

STRATEGIC LINKS

The Herefordshire Plan is the overarching strategic document for Herefordshire Council and its public, private and voluntary sector partners. The Herefordshire Plan aims to provide an Action Plan for the county through the realisation of 10 'Ambitions.' The Homelessness Strategy links directly to the Ambition to 'meet Herefordshire's accommodation needs.'

The Strategy is integrated with the Supporting People Shadow Strategy and has important links to the Housing Investment Strategy, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy and the various Health and Social Services plans and programmes.

PROFILE OF HOMELESSNESS IN HEREFORDSHIRE

As part of the Review process we have aimed to establish, as comprehensively as possible, a profile of homelessness in Herefordshire. We recognise however, that there are existing gaps in our knowledge and that the collection of data and information must be an ongoing and shared process. This, in turn, will inform continued Strategy development and the annual Monitoring and Evaluation processes.

The Homelessness Review established that:

- Homelessness in Herefordshire is increasing – from 254 accepted homeless households during the 1998-99 financial year (the first year of the Unitary Authority) to 417 households during 2002-03
- Families with children, or expecting their first child represented 61% of homeless households during 2001-02, followed by vulnerable young people (12%)
- The main reasons for homeless in Herefordshire are parental eviction, breakdown in a relationship where there has been actual violence, or threats of violence and termination of private sector Assured Shorthold Tenancy
- 153 homeless households were in temporary accommodation as at 31st March 2002 (82% in self-contained accommodation, 11% in hostels and 7% in Bed and Breakfast)
- There were almost 5,000 households on the Herefordshire Home Point Register as at 31st March 2003, with an average of 19 households bidding for each property advertised
- 72% of the properties sold under Right to Buy were three and four bedroom houses

PROFILE OF SERVICES FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE AND THOSE AIMED AT PREVENTION

The Homeless Review identified the resources currently available for the provision of homeless services and preventative activity as follows:

- The provision of tenancy and re-settlement support services are important preventative activities, particularly for those who are particularly at risk of repeat homelessness. Tenancy support services are provided, by a number of different agencies, to vulnerable groups including homeless households in temporary accommodation, people with mental health needs, women and their children experiencing, or at risk of domestic violence, teenage parents, ex-offenders and vulnerable young people.
- There are a number of supported transitional housing schemes operating in the county, which aim to address the needs of vulnerable people to enable them to successfully sustain independent living. Current transitional housing provision includes that for ex-offenders, people with mental health needs and young people between the ages of 16 and 25 years.
- The provision of affordable housing is vital in a high cost housing environment that is inaccessible to many homeless and low-income households. The council is committed to the continued provision of new social housing, the promotion of low cost home ownership schemes, improving standards in the private rented sector and increasing the supply.

- There is a strong voluntary agency commitment in the county to homelessness prevention and the provision of high quality services. This is formalised in the Herefordshire Homelessness Forum, which has been and remains a vital partner in the Strategy development process.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

The following have been identified in the Homelessness Strategy as key actions:

- Reduce the numbers of young people becoming homeless from the parental home
- Reduce the numbers of repeat homeless households
- Ensure young people leaving care do not become homeless
- Ensure that women and their children with more complex issues, arising from their exposure to domestic violence, have access to appropriate housing and support
- Identify if there are any preventative measures, which could be implemented to reduce the numbers of households becoming homeless due to termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy
- Ensure that the customer care approaches and housing management practices of all social landlords work to prevent homeless and repeat homelessness where possible
- Ensure there is sufficient support available for people who are, or who may become homeless
- Identify and reduce the numbers of rough sleepers in the county and 'hidden homeless' households
- Enable access to affordable and / or appropriate housing
- Ensure the provision of high quality housing advice and more effective promotion of services aimed at homelessness prevention
- Identify the means through which the employment and training needs of homeless and previously homeless people can be met
- Reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation as temporary housing through the provision of alternative supported temporary accommodation
- Enable existing services and agencies to work more effectively and coherently together to meet the needs of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness

- Ensure that the needs of homeless people are considered in the development of strategies, plans and policies across statutory bodies and partner organisations
- Develop ways in which homeless and previously homeless people can participate effectively in seeking practical solutions to tackle homelessness and social exclusion

THE STRATEGY MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROCESS

Due to the significant issues that have been identified there will be an Annual Review and Development process and an annual Action Plan.

The Annual Review will enable:

- The regular and consistent monitoring of performance against targets
- An evaluation of the effectiveness of the Strategy
- The tracking of homelessness trend data and preventative activity.

A Review Group, composed of selected members of the Strategy Development Group and the Herefordshire Homelessness Forum, will undertake the Review and Evaluation process. The Review Group will meet on a quarterly basis.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you would like a full copy of the Herefordshire Homelessness Review and / or the Homelessness Strategy please contact:

Flo Holder
 Housing Policy and Strategy Team
 Old Priory
 Church Street
 Leominster
 Herefordshire
 HR6 8DA

Tel : 01432 383070
 Fax : 01568 615965
 Email: fholder@herefordshire.gov.uk

