

Monday, February 9, 2009

Summary of homelessness strategy for Herefordshire 2008-2013

Including updates from 2008 key actions.

The Council is required under the statutory requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002 to carry out a review of homelessness and to write a five year homeless strategy, setting out an action plan to meet specific outcomes. The Strategy meets national and local targets around homelessness prevention and reducing the number of households living in temporary accommodation in Herefordshire.

Over the next five years, the Council's Homelessness Strategy emphasises the need to prevent homelessness whenever possible as homelessness prevention is the key to protecting the people of Herefordshire in a challenging housing market.

There is a significant issue of a shortage in the supply of affordable housing for vulnerable single people and homeless families. The Strategy provides an effective and targeted homelessness prevention approach that is required to stop homelessness in the County rising.

The Strategy ensures that:

- there is sufficient accommodation and support available for people who are, or who may become homeless and aims to increase community stability locally.
- It addresses the accommodation; health, support and other needs of homeless people and ensures the provision of high quality homelessness advice and other services.
- the outcomes are delivered by a multi-agency partnership of statutory, voluntary and private sector organisations. These agencies have demonstrated a high commitment to work together with the Council to prevent homelessness in the county.

Herefordshire Community Strategy is the overarching strategic document for Herefordshire Council and its public, private and voluntary sector partners. The Community Strategy sets out a shared vision for the county to 2020. This links with the Herefordshire Local Area Agreement (LAA) priorities and is managed by the Herefordshire Partnership.

Herefordshire forms the West Housing Market area with neighbouring Shropshire. Herefordshire and Shropshire local authorities aim to move towards cross-boundary working, information sharing and best practice, this is co-ordinated through the West Housing Market Area Partnership.

Linked to the Strategy are the 'Smart Action Plans' and these outline the expected achievements within the next 5 years with Shropshire partners.

The overall objectives for the Strategy is to achieve the following 6 outcomes:

1. The prevention of homelessness through the effective targeting of housing options and services.
2. To end the use of bed and breakfast as temporary accommodation and to continue to reduce the overall number of households in temporary accommodation.
3. To ensure sufficient accommodation and support is available for people who are, or who may become, homeless.
4. Improve joint working amongst all agencies concerned with homelessness and prevention.
5. To reduce homelessness and it's related impacts amongst vulnerable client groups including young people and children.
6. To maximise the effectiveness and targeting of homelessness services through the use of improved data collection and intelligence gathering.

Linked to the Strategy is the Strategy Action Plan. Each of the above 6 outcomes have a section within the Action Plan outlining the key actions and objectives and how and when they will be achieved.

Key Actions

The Council will work with its partners to achieve the keys actions of the Strategy Action Plan.

The Keys Actions for 2009 include:

- Ensure that procedures, customer services standards, planning review documents, customer charter and leaflets available and are in line with the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquires (KLOE's).
- Improve advice services and empower Herefordshire Citizens.
- Re-specify the rent deposit scheme.
- Undertake a hidden homeless count of sofa surfers. From these results develop a Hidden Homeless and Rough Sleeper needs analysis.
- Develop and produce a Temporary Accommodation Strategy with action plan and complete Temporary Accommodation Procedures.
- Preparation and development of the hospital discharge protocol between Mental Health, County Hospital, Community Hospitals and Herefordshire Council.
- To produce and implement a Young People Homeless Strategy Action Plan to include 16-25 year olds.
- To set up a Homeless Case Panel Action Group to review individual Hard to House cases.
- To commission a housing strategy for people with substance misuse problems to identify their housing needs.

Reviews

Strategy Action Plan is monitored regularly and reviewed annually. The annual review will enable:

1. The regular and consistent monitoring of performance against targets.
2. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the Strategy.
3. The tackling of homelessness trend data and preventative activity.

HSIG will undertake the review, evaluation and monitoring process of the Strategy Action Plan.

Herefordshire HSIG meets on the last day of the month on a bi-monthly basis. The resulting annual review will be presented to the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

HSIG is updated bi-annually in order that a review of the action planning can take place. HSIG requested a key fact sheet with key strategic information including PIE data, prevention cases, home point data and supporting agencies data to be produced twice a year.

The review process also recognises that the profile of homelessness locally will change over time, as new housing market pressures develop, the strategy was written in the run up to the current economic decline. It has been highlighted that the needs of Migrant workers are reviewed.

Attendance at Regional HSIG supports the work of Herefordshire and Shropshire Homelessness Strategy Implementation Groups.

The key activities for the RHSIG are:

1. Promoting intelligence gathering and sharing at a local, sub-regional and regional level.
2. Promoting and supporting joint working, sharing of good practice and innovation at a sub-regional and regional level.
3. Influencing strategy and supporting the alignment of key policy strands at a regional level.

Update of 2008 achievements

1. HOS 9 – a court desk service has been developed in Herefordshire aimed at preventing homelessness by ensuring households are appropriately advised and supported in cases where repossession proceedings are being taken against them.
2. HOS 16 – the development of a specialist debt advice service in support of homelessness prevention through the Citizens Advice Bureau.
3. HOS 46 – working in partnership with the voluntary sector including charitable and church organisations working with the homeless to develop appropriate solutions for Herefordshire to enable emergency access to food – Food and Drink now available in Herefordshire 7 days a week.
4. HOS 42 - Completed Hereford City's first Extra Care scheme which will enable over 91 older people to live independently in their own homes with support matched to their individual needs.
5. HOS 58 – Links developed with Connexions, Job Centre and Learning Skills Council encouraging attendance at HSIG.
6. HOS 8 – Detailed accommodation needs analysis has been completed by Mental Health to support their Housing Plan.

7. HOS 19 – Rough Sleepers count completed.
8. HOS 15 – A pilot for 3 years has been set up to create a wrap around service for drug and alcohol service users along with offenders.