

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

16 July 2007

**Joint Report of the Director of Health and Housing and Cabinet Member for
Housing**

Part 1- Public

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken
by the Cabinet Member)**

1 WEST KENT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Summary

The purpose of this report is to present Members with the final draft of the Joint Homelessness Strategy for Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks councils and seek authority for its adoption.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 This project emerged from a desire to work in partnership with our neighbours, Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells to tackle homelessness in west Kent, whilst still retaining a local focus within the Borough. Many of our partners (e.g. the Bridge Trust) were also keen to see a more holistic, cross-boundary approach to tackling homelessness being taken. Working across the west Kent authorities proves more effective and achieves consistency with the added benefit of economies of scale.
- 1.1.2 The Strategy seeks to identify the clients most at risk of homelessness, the main causes of homelessness and the most significant issues needing to be tackled in west Kent. The Strategy goes on to consider our key priorities to be addressed through the action plan. The Strategy has been distributed as a separate document with this agenda.

1.2 Progress of the Joint Homelessness Strategy

- 1.2.1 Members will recall from the February 2007 meeting of the Board that extensive consultation has been carried out with stakeholders and service users to provide the framework for the Strategy and identify the key issues in west Kent. Following that meeting, the draft Strategy was subject to consultation for a period of seven weeks ending 30 April 2007. Stakeholders were also given the opportunity to submit further evidence of need during this period.

1.2.2 The consultation responses have confirmed that the Strategy has identified the correct priorities for action but also serve to raise awareness of the needs of marginalised groups such as rough sleepers.

1.3 Priorities for Action

1.3.1 The following priorities provide the framework for the action plan found at chapter eight of the strategy [**Annex 1**]:

- Priority One: Provision of housing options and advice;
- Priority Two: Supporting people to access and retain their accommodation;
- Priority Three: Improve access to private sector stock; and
- Priority Four: Effective partnership working.

1.4 Moving the Service Forward

1.4.1 The action plan is effectively the most important part of the Strategy as it translates our objectives into a work plan for the coming years to 2010. Throughout the Strategy we have highlighted our achievements to date and it should be acknowledged that considerable progress has been made as the Strategy has evolved as follows:

- effective use of the private rented sector through home finding service coupled with rent deposit assistance and fast track housing benefit assessment. 33 households were assisted with rent deposits in Tonbridge and Malling during 2006/07;
- innovative working through 'spend to save' policy. The provision of financial assistance and guarantees has proved effective in the prevention of homelessness and has been applauded by the Specialist Homelessness Advisor at the Department for Communities and Local Government;
- a total of 97 households had their homelessness prevented by the Council's housing advice service in 2006/07;
- bed and breakfast usage is being kept to a minimum and there is a move on plan for all clients placed in bed and breakfast;
- four self-contained one-bedroomed units of accommodation with visiting support are being provided in Tonbridge as housing for clients with mental health issues;
- the buoyant development programme in 2007/08 will bring forward 194 additional units of affordable housing

1.5 What will the New Strategy Achieve?

1.5.1 It is hoped that the partnership approach to the formulation of the Strategy has helped to foster a greater understanding by all agencies of their role in the prevention of homelessness. The action plan provides a structured approach to enable the necessary services, procedures and provision to be put in place.

1.5.2 The Strategy aspires to achieve a number of key outcomes including:

- at least one additional supported housing scheme for 16/17 year olds by March 2010;
- a debt advice service for west Kent;
- a tenancy sustainment service for west Kent;
- robust evidence of need through a common monitoring system;
- increased awareness of diversity issues;
- enhanced partnership working in the prevention of homelessness.

1.6 Next Steps

1.6.1 Following Members' approval of this final draft, the document will be made ready for publication and distributed to key agencies and stakeholders. Progress against the action plan will be monitored through the Joint Homelessness Strategy Group on a quarterly basis. A schedule of meetings is being drawn up to facilitate this rigorous monitoring and review process. In the event that targets appear to be failing to deliver the intended outcomes and the Group agrees, the action plan will be brought back to Members for review.

1.7 Legal Implications

1.7.1 The Council, as an excellent authority, is exempt from the statutory duty to publish a new Homelessness Strategy. However, it is open to the Council to do so.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.8.1 Funding for the Strategy can be contained within existing budgets. Delivery of some objectives will be subject to attracting additional funding e.g. through successful bids to the Housing Corporation.

1.9 Risk Assessment

1.9.1 Good practice suggests that the Council should prepare robust plans to deal with, and to prevent homelessness as far as is possible. Such an approach requires joint working with the other agencies including Adult Services, and agencies in the

voluntary sector such as Shelter and the Bridge Trust to ensure the Council is properly discharging its duties to homeless households.

1.10 Recommendations

1.10.1 That Cabinet be **RECOMMENDED** to **ENDORSE** the Strategy for adoption.

The Director of Health and Housing confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

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