

# HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

## Agenda Item 44

Brighton & Hove City Council

**Subject:** Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013 Annual Update  
**Date of Meeting:** 8 September 2010  
**Report of:** Director of Housing, Culture and Enterprise  
**Contact Officer:** Name: **Steve Bulbeck** Tel: **29-3120**  
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**Key Decision:** No  
**Wards Affected:** All

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

#### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report outlines the key achievements and progress of Brighton and Hove City Council's Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 which is a sub strategy of the Housing Strategy 2009-14.
- 1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires Local Authorities to have a Homelessness Strategy which is renewed every 5 years, and sets out a strategic approach to responding to and preventing homelessness.
- 1.3 The vision for the Homelessness Strategy is:  
*To prevent homelessness through early intervention and the timely intervention of advice and support. When homelessness is unavoidable, to ensure that people receive appropriate housing, care and support, with a clear pathway towards living independently.*
- 1.4 The Homelessness Strategy is formulated on the principle that prevention is better than cure. 'Homelessness Prevention' can be defined as housing advice and/or positive action that the Local Authority and partner agencies undertake to enable a household at risk of homelessness to remain in their home or to secure alternative suitable accommodation before they become homeless.
- 1.5 This report should be read in conjunction with the Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2008-2013 Annual Update.

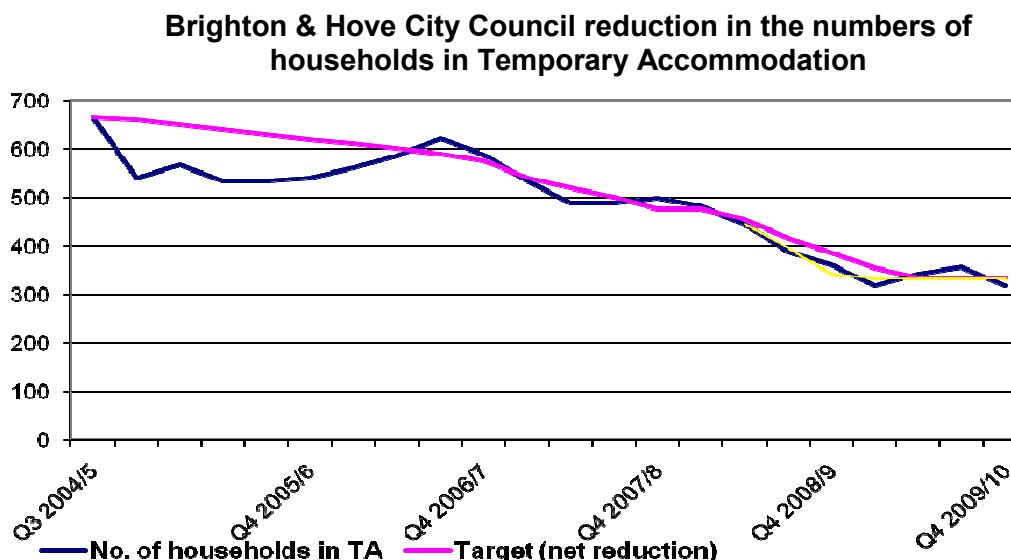
#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Housing notes this report.

### 3. BACKGROUND AND PERFORMANCE:

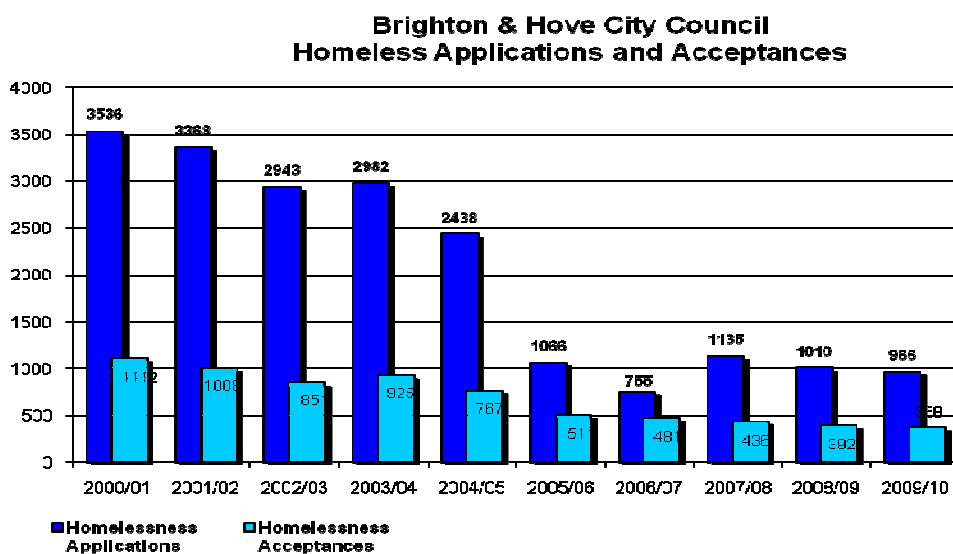
- 3.1 The Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 is Brighton and Hove City Council's second Homelessness Strategy and was formulated following a review of the original strategy in 2007.
- 3.2 As part of the review an extensive city wide consultation was undertaken gathering the views of citizens and partner agencies throughout the city. The Housing Needs Survey 2005 and the Reducing Inequality Review 2007 also informed the development of the strategy.
- 3.3 The Homelessness Strategy addresses issues local to Brighton & Hove but also national government targets such as the 50% reduction of households in temporary accommodation by 2010 and an end to using temporary accommodation for single 16/17 year olds, except in an emergency by 2010.
- 3.4 Over and above this the Homelessness Strategy seeks to link into a broader 'prevention agenda' (for example preventing looked after children, re-offending and unnecessary hospital admissions) in an attempt to improve wider outcomes and life chances for citizens and contribute to social inclusion in the city.
- 3.5 The Homelessness Strategy has been successful in enabling the council to meet these targets by increasing homelessness preventions and reducing homelessness applications and acceptances. A city wide multi-agency approach to preventing homelessness has been critical to the progress made.
- 3.6 The tables below demonstrate the success of the Homelessness Strategy in improving performance. It should be noted that performance trends have continued to improve despite the economic downturn. The council met the government's Temporary Accommodation Target by more than halving the number of households in temporary accommodation from 665 on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2004 to 316 on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.

Table 1



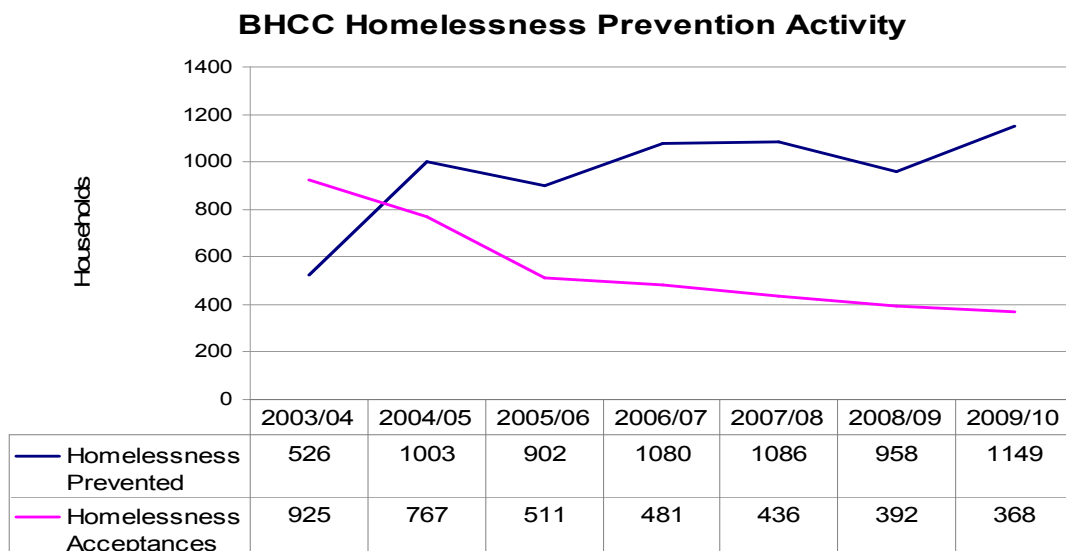
3.7 Table 2 below shows that from the peak of 3563 applications in 2000/01 homeless applications have reduced by more than two thirds and that since the implementation of the prevention approach in 2005/06 they have decreased further to 966 in 2009/10. Homeless Acceptances have continued on a downward trajectory reduced from 1112 in 2000/01 to 368 in 2009/10 representing a 16% reduction over the past two years and a 67% reduction since 2000/01.

Table 2



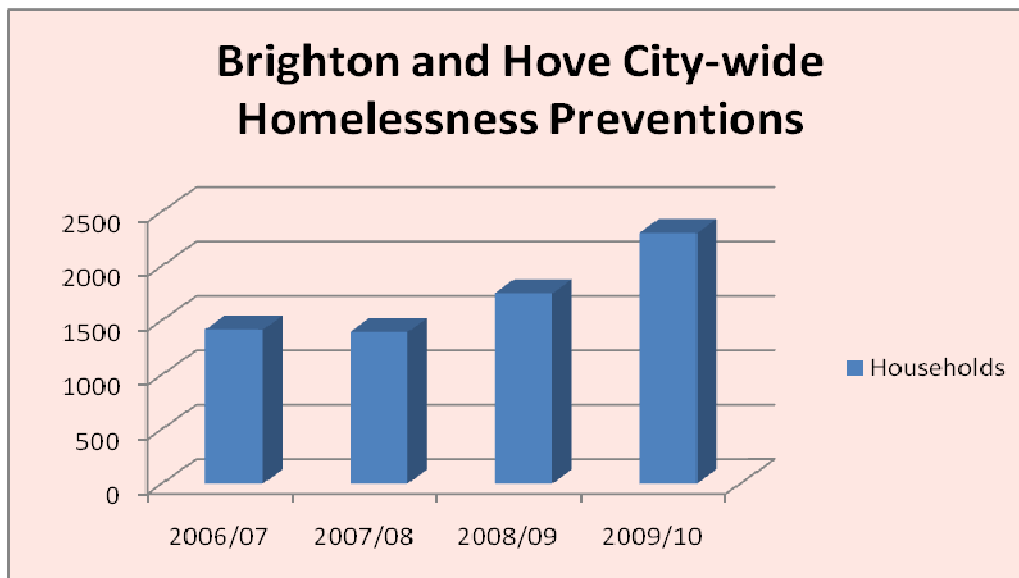
3.8 Table 3 below shows the direct impact of the council's Housing Options service on Homeless Prevention and Homeless Acceptances. Preventions have risen from 526 in 2003/04 to 1,149 in 2009/10 an increase of 118 %.

Table 3



3.9 The table below shows performance on prevention of homelessness including contributions from statutory and third sector partners linked with the Homelessness Strategy. Preventions have increased from 1416 in 2006/7 (11.5 preventions p/head of population) to 2303 in 2009/10 (18.6 preventions p/head of pop.) placing Brighton & Hove well within the upper quartile of national performance.

Table 4



3.10 The Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 sets 5 Objectives in order to realise the vision. The following section outlines some of the key activities in relation to each objective which have contributed to improved performance and improved outcomes for customers.

#### 4. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES:

Number of actions in strategy: 150  
 Actions completed: 82 (55%)  
 Actions in progress: 46 (93% on track)  
 Actions not started: 22 (14%)

#### 4.1 Objective 1: Provide Housing and Support Solutions that Tackle Homelessness and Promote the Health and Well-Being of Vulnerable Adults.

4.1.1 The Housing Options Service is comprised of four teams providing tailored housing solutions to customers. The Vulnerable Adults Team, Families & Young People Team, Crisis Intervention Team and Advice & Assessment Team.

- 4.1.2 The Vulnerable Adults Team comprises specialist roles in Mental Health, Older People, Substance Misuse, Transitions from Care, Offenders and Learning Disabilities.
- 4.1.3 The team has worked closely with our partners in Adult Social Care and Health to ensure that delayed discharges from hospital due to housing are minimised. Housing issues are identified on admission and these patients are referred to Housing Options. Cases are tracked and monitored while still in hospital with a view to ensuring that a solution is identified prior to discharge. Housing Options surgeries are offered at Millview Hospital to enable staff and patients to receive timely advice. Since 2008 Homeless Acceptances of those who are vulnerable due to mental health issues has reduced by 18%.
- 4.1.4 Two officers specialise in work with Offenders. The council has worked in partnership with Hastings Council, Lewes Council and the Probation Service to develop the Preventing Offender Accommodation Loss project (POAL). The project aims to ensure short sentence prisoners do not lose their accommodation whilst in prison or have alternative accommodation upon release. In 2009/10 POAL provided pre-release advice and assistance to 267 offenders only one of which went on to make a homeless application.
- 4.1.5 The team also works with high-risk offenders through the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). Relationships have been developed with landlords, the Housing Benefit Service and a Support Service to manage risk and enable this group to be housed and managed in the community.
- 4.1.6 The team has also developed specialist literature for customers who have a learning disability and provide specialist assistance to enable those customers who wish to live independently to move into suitable housing. Targets have been exceeded over the first two years of the strategy. In 2009/10 18 people were assisted to move into their own tenancy.

**4.2 Objective 2: Provide 'whole families' housing and support solutions that tackle homelessness and promote the well-being of families and young people.**

- 4.2.1 The Families and Young People Team have been trained in Brief Solution Focussed Therapy to improve skills in working with this client group.
- 4.2.2 A Respite Scheme has been set up with Sussex Central YMCA to provide respite accommodation for young people who would otherwise be homeless due to family breakdown. Family mediation is used with a view to the young person returning home or ensuring that links between the young person and the family are maintained if this is not possible. This has allowed us to only use bed and breakfast accommodation in an emergency for homeless 16/17 year olds so that on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 there were only 3 16/17 yr olds in B&B, a reduction of 94% in the past 5 years.

- 4.2.3 The Team provide a housing options service from Sussex Central YMCA Housing Advice Hub which provides a wide range of services for young people including life-skills training, counselling, drug and alcohol services and sexual health advice.
- 4.2.4 Work to prevent Youth Homelessness has been developed through the Youth Homelessness Strategy 2007- 2010. 92% of the action plan has been completed with the remainder of the actions in progress. As a result of this work Homeless Acceptances due to eviction by family or friends has reduced by 29% in the first two years of the Homelessness Strategy.
- 4.2.5 The Domestic Violence and Hate Crime Officer Role continues to develop and participate in the local Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and relevant Hate Crime Case Panel to ensure a multi-agency approach to managing domestic violence cases.
- 4.2.6 The Sanctuary Scheme provides a solution to householders at risk of violence who wish to remain in their own home by working in partnership with the police to provide security measures such as locks, grills and panic alarms.
- 4.2.7 A multi-agency Domestic Violence Housing Liaison Group has been set up through which procedures and protocols have been reviewed with the Community Safety Team. This has contributed to a 15% reduction in Homeless Acceptances due to domestic violence in the first two years of the Homelessness Strategy.

### **4.3 Objective 3: Develop Access to Settled Homes**

- 4.3.1 Brighton and Hove City has a relatively small social housing stock (18%) and a large private rented sector (20%). The Homelessness Strategy therefore recognises the need to make the best use of the housing stock and ensure that people can secure accommodation that meets their needs.
- 4.3.2 The Integrated Support Pathway for Supported Housing provides around 1,500 units of accommodation and support for homeless people with support needs provided across the city by the council and its partners such as Brighton Housing Trust, Sussex Central YMCA, CRI, Brighton YMCA and Southdowns HA. The pathway enables customers to move from high-support accommodation through a transition of lower supported projects into their own tenancies. The transitional nature of the pathway enables customers to gain the skills required to manage a tenancy successfully.
- 4.3.3 Work has been conducted with private sector landlords to improve the quality and supply of private sector accommodation to customers. This includes a 'one stop' phone line for landlords who need to contact the council for advice and information. An online landlord's forum has been set up and the Landlord Accreditation Scheme providing training for landlords has been expanded.

- 4.3.4 A private sector property matching scheme for landlords and prospective tenants who are threatened with homelessness has been set up to enable access to the private rented sector. This operates in conjunction with a Deposit Guarantee Scheme which has allowed 341 households to access private rented accommodation since April 2008. This scheme is being expanded for use by partner agencies such as the Probation Service.
- 4.3.5 A 'move-on toolkit' for people living in temporary accommodation has been developed to assist them to move on into more settled accommodation. Since April 2008, 138 households have been assisted to move from temporary accommodation to a private sector tenancy. This represents an increase of 452% on the preceding two years.
- 4.3.6 Work has continued with the Housing Benefit Service Prevention Team to ensure an integrated housing benefit and housing options service to resolve benefit issues that threaten current tenancies or obstruct new ones.
- 4.3.7 Housing Options and Brighton Housing Trust have worked in partnership to provide a range of housing options for those at risk of homelessness due to mortgage arrears or rent arrears. This work has included increased staff training, the development of a 'tool-kit' for those households at risk and a campaign to promote public awareness. A multi-agency Recession Impact Working Group monitors court activity and employment trends in the city and works strategically to mitigate against the impact of the recession.

#### **4.4 Objective 4: Reduce Inequality and Tackle Homelessness Amongst Our Communities of Interest**

- 4.4.1 A comprehensive system for monitoring outcomes against equalities strands is used to identify barriers and improve access to our service for our communities of interest. Complaints are also monitored by equalities strands to feed into service development and improvement.
- 4.4.2 The Housing Options service has appointed an LGBT Housing Options Officer who has developed links with LGBT services and community groups with a view to ensuring that we are meeting the needs of this client group. Front-line staff have been trained in awareness of issues relating to Trans-gender customers and in challenging discriminatory behaviour and reporting Hate Crime.
- 4.4.3 The Housing Options service attends the BME Community Partnership 'one stop shop' to provide advice and information to BME communities and asylum seekers and refugees.
- 4.4.4 Wheelchair accessible social housing properties are now captured on a register and 8 temporary accommodation units have been adapted for people who use wheelchairs.

#### **4.5 Objective 5: Provide Integrated Housing, Employment and Support Solutions as a Platform for Economic Inclusion**

- 4.5.1 Specialist Financial Inclusion Housing Options Officers have been developing links with other agencies such as Debt Advisors, the Department for Work & Pensions and Credit Unions to maximise opportunities for customers to tackle financial problems, maximise benefit uptake and ensure that they have access to ethical savings and loan organisations.
- 4.5.2 The Financial Inclusion Specialists contact companies where staff are at risk of redundancy to offer housing options advice. Training on housing options has also been provided to Job Centre Plus staff so that they can signpost their customers to relevant services.
- 4.5.3 Work placement opportunities are provided through Business Action on Homelessness and numeracy, literacy and life-skills programmes are commissioned to provide a pathway to employment.
- 4.5.4 Work and Learning is often an integral part of a customer's support needs. Brighton Housing Trust has set up three Working Hostels to integrate supported housing with work opportunities.

#### **5. CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Extensive consultation was undertaken in 2007 which informed the development of the Homelessness Strategy.

#### **6. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

##### Financial Implications:

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendation made in this report.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Mike Bentley*

*Date: 11/08/10*

##### Legal Implications:

- 6.2 As there is no specific right to housing under the European Convention on Human Rights or Human Rights Act 1998, there are no significant human rights issues to be considered in relation to this report. This is an update report. As stated above there is a requirement under legislation to have a Homeless strategy and we should keep this under review. This report meets the best practice requirements.

*Lawyer Consulted:*

*Simon Court*

*Date: 10/08/10*



#### Equalities Implications:

- 6.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and a full Equalities Impact Assessment of the Housing Options Service was completed in 2009/10. An action plan is currently being implemented to ensure that the services are appropriately targeted and accessible. These documents are due to be published in 2010/11.

#### Sustainability Implications:

- 6.4 The prevention approach, embodied in the Homelessness Strategy, represents a sustainable approach to tackling homelessness by attempting to intervene early to address the underlying causes of homelessness rather than simply responding to it.

#### Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 6.5 Objective 1 of the Homelessness Strategy includes actions which are directly linked to the prevention of crime and disorder and reducing reoffending.

#### Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 6.6 The Homelessness Strategy and the prevention approach at its heart, provides an invest to spend model which is key to preventing a wide range of social problems over and above preventing statutory homelessness and so improving broader outcomes for citizens whilst reducing the cost burden on statutory services. A cost/benefit analysis is planned for 2010/11 in order to be able to demonstrate this.
- 6.6.1 There is a risk that the demands on the service will increase as a result of the current economic situation. Presentations have been steadily increasing but as interest rates rise, public sector funding cuts come into force and housing benefit changes are enacted, it is very likely that presentations will increase more dramatically. It will be important to maintain the strategic work to prevent homelessness but it may be necessary to channel more resources into responding to statutory homelessness which could impact on the ability to deliver our strategic actions within timescales.
- 6.6.2 Access to the Private Rented Sector is central to the council's ability to deal with homelessness in the city. Housing Benefit changes are likely to have a significant impact on the ability of those on Job Seekers Allowance or a low wage to access or remain in private rented sector accommodation due to affordability issues.

- 6.6.3 If the council is to sustain the prevention approach it is vital that the Private Rented Sector is utilised as an alternative to social housing and recent government announcements would suggest that increasing private sector leased accommodation is an option that should be explored.
- 6.6.4 The impact of any cuts to the Supporting People budget and potential loss of supported accommodation units also raises a significant risk to the council's ability to deal effectively with homelessness. The supply of this accommodation is vital to preventing homelessness and homeless applications and subsequent use of unsuitable B&B accommodation.
- 6.6.5 In the light of the changing external environment and the internal moves towards intelligent commissioning, it is proposed that the Homelessness Strategy is fully reviewed ahead of its current end date to ensure that the council's response to the changes provides the best opportunity for success.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 6.7 The implementation of the Homelessness Strategy has the potential to contribute to 22 measures in the Local Area Agreement.
- 6.7.1 Delivery of the Homelessness Strategy also contributes to the delivery of the 2020 Community Strategy.
- 6.7.2 Measures in the Homelessness Strategy link to the priorities in the Corporate Plan.

**7. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

- 7.1 Under the terms of the Homelessness Act 2002 it is a legal requirement to formulate and deliver a Homelessness Strategy.

**8. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 To appraise the Cabinet Member for Housing as to the progress of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. None

### **Documents in Members' Rooms:**

1. Homelessness Strategy 2008-13
2. Homelessness Strategy Action Plan to date

### **Background Documents:**

1. None

