

SUBJECT:	South Bucks District Council Homelessness Strategy
REPORT OF:	Head of Healthy Communities

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To advise Members of the issues around homelessness in South Bucks that have been identified to date in the shared housing service implementation and to consider how these will be taken forward in developing the Council's revised Homelessness Strategy.

2. Links to Council Policy Objectives

- 2.1. This links to the following aims of the Joint Business Plan 2014-19:

- "Delivering cost-effective, customer focused services"
- 'Working towards safe and healthier local communities'

3. Background

- 3.1. On 21st November 2013, the Health and Housing PAG received a report on the South Bucks District Council Homelessness Strategy. The report advised that the current Strategy ran from 2008 to 2013 and that a new Homelessness Strategy would need to be put in place for 2014-19. The PAG noted the proposed themes for the new Strategy and agreed that Officers would prepare a full draft Homelessness Strategy for consideration early in 2014.
- 3.2. At that time, the review of the Chiltern and South Bucks Housing services was ongoing and the decision had been taken to introduce a shared housing service. In view of this, officers felt that it would be appropriate to wait for the implementation of the new shared housing service in 2014 before taking forward the development of a new Homelessness Strategy for South Bucks DC. This would provide the opportunity to assess homelessness issues across both Chiltern and South Bucks and to identify common themes and opportunities across both districts.
- 3.3. To help the development of new Homelessness Strategies for South Bucks and Chiltern District Councils, Officers have referred to the document "Making Every Contact Count - A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness" which was published in 2012 by the DCLG and a Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness. This document sets down Ten Local Challenges that Government expects all local authorities to adopt in order to deliver the best standard of homelessness service. These challenges provide a useful benchmark for South Bucks and Chiltern District Councils to (i) assess their current homelessness service delivery and (ii) identify the issues that need to be addressed within a new Homelessness Strategy.
- 3.4. **Appendix 1** to this report contains a table that:
- (i) lists the Ten Local Challenges and
 - (ii) for each challenge gives a summary of the current position in South Bucks and the next steps to be taken.
- 3.5. Officers will be undertaking the same exercise to review the Chiltern District Council Homelessness Service and assess it against the Ten Local Challenges. Officers will then

compare the assessments for both South Bucks and Chiltern to identify those themes and issues which are common to both districts and those which differ. This will then support the development of a joint homelessness strategy which will accommodate shared priorities and specific action plans for CDC and SBDC respectively.

4. Temporary Accommodation

- 4.1. **Appendix 2** to this report provides an overview of key homelessness statistics for South Bucks District Council over the period April 2014 to October 2014 and showing the monthly figures for:
- Total number of households in temporary accommodation (including B & B)
 - Total number of households in B & B
 - Total number of families in B & B for over 6 weeks
 - Total number of homelessness applications and acceptances (i.e. where Council has “accepted” a long term duty to secure accommodation)
- 4.2. The assessment of the South Bucks District Council homelessness service and the above statistics highlight that the main risk to the Council continues to be the significant pressure on temporary accommodation and, in particular, the continued use of bed and breakfast to fulfil the Council’s statutory duty to secure accommodation. The Government has clearly stated that the use of B&B is appropriate only for emergencies or short-term temporary accommodation. It states that applicants with family commitments (i.e. with or expecting children) should not be in Bed and Breakfast for any longer than 6 weeks. In addition to the social and welfare impacts of using B & B accommodation for families, the Ombudsman has ruled that Councils are liable to pay compensation to applicants with family commitments if the stay exceeds 6 weeks Therefore, SBDC is at risk of breaching Government requirements and being liable for compensation payments if applicants spend long periods in B&B.
- 4.3. Members will be aware that earlier this year, the Council secured an arrangement with Thames Valley Police and Bucks Housing Association to utilise six vacant police houses in Gerrards Cross as temporary accommodation for a short term. This has had a positive impact in reducing some of the pressure on temporary accommodation and the use of B & B. A further opportunity has arisen in Chiltern District where Paradigm Housing has offered to make five one-bedroom houses available as temporary accommodation on short term basis pending their redevelopment during 2015. Officers in the shared housing team are now putting arrangements in place with Paradigm for these properties to be made available to accommodate homeless households from Chiltern or South Bucks. The only potential liability arising from the Paradigm scheme to either Council will be a liability to meet the rent due on vacant properties if the shared housing team is unable to nominate a household. The same requirement applies to the existing scheme involving the Police Houses and the same measures will be put in place for the Amersham scheme to minimise the risk of any liability.

5. Resources, Risk and Other Implications

Financial	The development of the new Homelessness Strategy will not itself commit expenditure or resources. Specific schemes or initiatives to support the homelessness service and prevention work will be subject to the usual budgetary process.
Legal	Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (and associated Statutory Instruments) sets down the Council’s statutory duties with regard to the delivery of

homelessness services. The Council requires an effective Homelessness Strategy in order to ensure that it is compliant with the legal requirements of the Housing Act 1996 (and associated Statutory Instruments)

Risks If the Council does not operate an effective homelessness service in compliance with statutory requirements then it is at risk of legal challenge and the possibility of compensation.

Equalities An effective Homelessness Strategy and associated service will ensure that appropriate advice and assistance is available to all persons who require it.

6 Summary

Members of the PAG are asked to consider the issues raised in this report and appendices and the advice officers of any additional matters that they wish Officers to take into account in developing the new Homelessness Strategy.

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Background Papers:	None