

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**SUBJECT: LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY –  
DRAFT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2008-13**  
**MEETING: HOUSING & SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**DATE: 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2008**  
**AUTHOR: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Tackling the problem of homelessness has now been a national housing priority for a number of years and local authorities have been required to prepare Homelessness Strategies outlining how they intend to deal with this issue in their areas. In 1999, the then Scottish Executive established the Homelessness Task Force whose work led to the development of what has become known as the '2012 Target' which states that, by the year, 2012 anyone in Scotland who is not *intentionally* homeless will have a right to permanent accommodation. This is a progressive but challenging target which has required the preparation of a new Homelessness Strategy which sets out how the Council will meet its duties and obligations in this area.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Council's previous Homelessness Strategy was prepared in 2003 but since this time the homelessness agenda in Scotland has undergone significant changes with a range of new duties and responsibilities placed on local authorities as a result of subsequent legislation. In addition to specific concerns about homelessness, increasing attention has been also given to the wider issues of affordable housing provision and housing need, with the Scottish Government's Housing Supply Task Force and COSLA's Affordable Housing Task Group undertaking work in these areas.
- 2.2 Any comprehensive assessment of issues in respect of homelessness has to consider this wider picture of housing demand and supply and so this new draft Homelessness Strategy has been prepared in the context of the Council's next full statutory Local Housing Strategy which will cover the period 2009-14.
- 2.3 Members will be aware of the current review of the Council's housing allocations and the interim changes which have been introduced which give a greater degree of priority to homeless applicants than was previously the case. Clearly there are significant links between homelessness and housing allocations policies and this draft Homelessness Strategy takes account of these.

- 2.4 Whilst a range of partner agencies have been involved in the preparation of this Strategy, the attached draft now requires full consultation with all relevant stakeholders. It is proposed that, subject to Member approval and a period of consultation, a final Homelessness Strategy 2008-13 be brought back to Committee for endorsement as part of the LHS 2009-14 process.

### **3. DRAFT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

- 3.1 Within the context of the national target that, by 2012, anyone in Scotland who is not intentionally homeless will have a right to permanent accommodation, the former Scottish Executive established five national homelessness outcomes which have subsequently been continued by the new Scottish Government. These are:
- No one need sleep rough,
  - Existing homelessness becomes more visible,
  - Sustainable resettlement is secured for people who become homeless,
  - Few people become homeless in the first place,
  - The duration of homelessness is reduced.
- 3.2 Locally, the Forum Homelessness Forum Executive Group has set out a vision for this Strategy that, 'Through raising awareness, we will ensure that access to assistance and accommodation prevents homelessness in the Falkirk Council area'. The principles of Awareness, Prevention and Accommodation and Support underpin this Strategy and the Action Plans which will direct our activities over the coming five year period.
- 3.3 Members will be aware that in recent years the Scottish Executive/Scottish Government have made ring-fenced resources available to assist local authorities to meet the national homelessness target and outcomes. From 1 April 2008, this funding will no longer be ring-fenced but there will require to be an ongoing commitment of resources commensurate with need if the longer term objectives set out in this Strategy are to be achieved.

### **4. KEY FEATURES OF THE DRAFT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

- 4.1 Key features of the Homelessness Strategy are summarised below:

#### **Context**

- National Homelessness Outcomes and Targets inform the local aims and objectives of the Homelessness Strategy,
- At a national level, developments in respect of the Strategic Housing Investment Framework, the Affordable Housing Investment Programme and the discussion paper, *Firm Foundations: The Future of Housing in Scotland* will impact on the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy,

- Locally , the Council's Housing Allocations Policy Review and a restructuring of the Homelessness Service will have a major contribution to make to Strategy implementation,
- The Homelessness Strategy sits within wider Corporate Planning and Strategic Community Planning Frameworks recognising that the problem of homelessness cannot be tackled in isolation.

## **5. HOMELESSNESS IN FALKIRK**

5.1 Across the country there has been a rise in homelessness in recent years. Key features of homelessness in the Falkirk area outlined below:

- Homelessness presentations have increased by 29% over the last five years,
- Relationship breakdown is by far the greatest cause of homelessness in the area,
- The majority of people becoming homeless were either single or single parents,
- 32% of households presenting as homeless had children and the negative impact homelessness can have on children is recognised,
- The extent of rough sleeping is small and greater awareness of the services and support available to homeless people may help alleviate this issue,
- Further work is required to clarify the position in respect of repeat homelessness,
- The Accommodation Resource Centre is the hub of current homelessness services with a variety of other activities and support provided elsewhere,
- A range of initiatives have been implemented under the Action Plan which flowed from the 2003 Homelessness Strategy and any outstanding actions are being carried forward into the new Strategy.

## **6. PLANNING AHEAD**

6.1 Taking account of the needs and priorities identified in the preparation of this Strategy, a range of actions have been identified for implementation. The Falkirk Homelessness Forum will be the key means by which integration and co-ordination of these actions is achieved. Actions taken or planned include:

- Changes to the Council's housing allocations policy, along with agreements with RSL partners and the development of a Common Housing Register which will seek to accommodate those in greatest housing need more quickly,

- Arrangements will be put in place that will minimise the time homeless people spend in temporary accommodation and improve the efficiency of the services currently provided,
- Specific work has been undertaken in respect of homelessness as it affects young people and a housing strategy for young people in the Council area - *homes for falkirk's bairns* - has been prepared,
- Improved communication on homelessness issues is seen as a priority and a Housing Advice and Information Plan has been drafted,
- Easier access to homelessness services involving improvements to the assessment process, housing options interviews by specialist Housing Options Officers and service provision utilising the neighbourhood office network is also being explored,
- The provision of supported accommodation for homeless people and other support services will continue to be reviewed and assessed,
- The role that the private rented sector can play in helping to meet the needs of homeless people will continue to be explored in terms of the rent deposit guarantee scheme and private landlords forum,
- The continued development of initiatives with Forth Valley NHS will work towards improving health outcomes for homeless people,
- Partnership working with the Criminal Justice Authority will help minimise homelessness amongst ex-offenders and contribute to wider community safety,
- The expansion of existing education initiatives will seek to reduce youth homelessness in the longer term,
- The establishment of family mediation and befriending services will help in preventing homelessness and sustaining tenancies,
- The further development of furniture schemes for homeless people will help resettlement and also contribute to the Council's waste management and recycling strategy,
- The development of more effective links with providers of training, education and employment will help break the cycle of homelessness and assist individuals sustain more independent living.

## 7. MONITORING

- 7.1 Progress on the Homelessness Strategy will be monitored through an Action Plan as outlined in Section 5 of the Strategy with quarterly reports to the Housing and Social Services Committee and Falkirk Homelessness Forum Executive Group and annual reports to the wider Falkirk Homelessness Forum, service users and the general public by means of Falkirk Council News and the Performance Zone.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 The Draft Homelessness Strategy has been prepared within the context of the forthcoming 2009-2014 Local Housing Strategy. Tackling homelessness is a key priority at both the national and local levels and this Homelessness Strategy sets out how Falkirk Council and its partners will work together over the coming five years to meet needs in this area, particularly in respect of the 2012 target previously mentioned.
- 8.2 Members will be aware that the Homelessness Service was graded D in the recent Communities Scotland Inspection report. An Improvement Plan is currently being prepared in response to this report and the Action Plan included within the Homelessness Strategy will help inform future improvement actions.

## **9. RECOMMENDATION**

**It is recommended that Committee:**

- 9.1 **Agree the Draft Homelessness Strategy 2008-13, as attached, and receive a further report on this matter following consultation with Stakeholders.**



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**DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & COMMERCIAL SERVICES**

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**Background Papers**

