

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	1 May 2018
Subject:	Housing Strategy Monitoring Report
Report of:	Peter Tonge, Head of Community Services
Corporate Lead:	Robert Weaver, Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Cllr E J MacTiernan, Lead Member for Built Environment Cllr J Greening, Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing
Number of Appendices:	2

Executive Summary:

The Housing Strategy 2017-21 was developed by an Overview and Scrutiny Working Group and adopted by Council in January 2017. The comprehensive Housing Strategy incorporates renewal, as well as two distinct sub strategies: the Homelessness and Prevention of Homelessness Strategy, and the Tenancy Strategy.

The Strategy contains 4 key priorities to meet the housing needs of the borough. These are:

- Priority 1: Increasing the supply of housing
- Priority 2: Prevent homelessness
- Priority 3: Meet the housing needs of specific groups
- Priority 4: Improving the health and well-being of local people

Annual action plans are agreed by Executive Committee with regular reporting to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review of achievements and future challenges. The action plan priorities focus on developments in the service rather than service performance which is outlined in the performance tracker.

This report presents the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a summary of the key activities in the first three months of year 2 of the Housing Strategy Action Plan (January – March 2018). A more comprehensive update of actions achieved against each of the action plan targets can be found at Appendix 1.

Recommendation:

To CONSIDER the progress made to date in respect of the outcomes identified in the Housing Strategy Action Plan.

Reasons for Recommendation:

The Homelessness Act 2002 and Local Government Act 2003 require all district councils to develop a strategy which sets out the Council's policies, commitments and programme for a wide range of housing matters. Following development of the Council's Housing Strategy 2017-21, the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group requested that outcomes identified in the Action Plan be monitored and regular updates be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resource Implications:

Staff and Member time. Resource implications will be met from existing budget allocations and, where they cannot, will be subject to a growth bid within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and a separate report to Members.

Legal Implications:

The Council is required to have a housing and homelessness strategy in place so that its duties under the Homelessness Act 1996 (as amended) and Local Government Act 2003 can be met. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to publish a strategy setting out how it will address homelessness and the Localism Act 2011 places a duty on all local authorities to produce a tenancy strategy.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is effective from April 2018 and further actions are likely to be added as the new legislation is implemented. The action plan is renewed annually to enable the strategy to flexibly respond to legislative change, and the strategy incorporates the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Risk Management Implications:

The review of activities against the Action Plan has identified that the aims and objectives of the strategy are being delivered in a timely way. This significantly reduces the risk of not meeting statutory housing and homelessness duties.

Performance Management Follow-up:

The Housing Strategy 2017-21 and associated Action Plan should be reviewed in January 2019 to ensure that it remains fit for purpose in the future.

Environmental Implications:

There are positive environmental implications in the delivery of the strategy objectives e.g. the strategy supports the delivery of new energy efficient homes and energy efficiency improvements in the existing housing stock across the borough.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and Local Government Act 2003 require all district councils to develop a strategy which sets out the Council's policies, commitments and programme for a wide range of housing matters. The Housing Strategy 2017-21 was developed by an Overview and Scrutiny Working Group and adopted by Tewkesbury Borough Council in January 2017. A review of the activities against the Action Plan has been undertaken quarterly as requested by the Working Group.
- 1.2** The Housing Strategy Action Plan achievements and a new Action Plan for 2018-19 was reviewed by the Executive Committee in January 2018. The action plan includes coordinated activities within Development Services, Environmental Health and Benefit Services as well as those of the Housing Services Team to meet the wide range of objectives within the strategy.

2.0 UPDATE AND KEY ACTIVITIES

2.1 The following is a summary of the key activities, identified within the Housing Strategy 2017-21 which have been achieved January – March 2018. This report also coincides with the end of the financial year and some activities include an annual summary to give comparators with previous years:

3.0 Priority 1 – Increasing the supply of housing (for full details see Action Plan)

3.1 *P1.1 Implement JCS housing policies through the development management process.*

3.1.1 Following the adoption of the JCS, the three authorities have been working closely with the preferred social housing providers to establish common lettings policies across the different providers using best practice models, and outlining expectations regarding pre-tenancy conditions which are considered unreasonable such as: 4 weeks rent in advance, minimum income levels etc.

3.2 *P1.5: Evaluate potential for additional promotional activities with private sector landlords to boost availability of homes in the Borough*

3.2.1 New burdens funding associated with the Homelessness Reduction Act have been allocated to employ an additional member of staff. This will increase the capacity of the Housing Services officers to meet the demands of the new statutory duties, but also to develop a local private sector landlord scheme to increase the accommodation available to residents.

4.0 Priority 2 – Homelessness and Homelessness Prevention (for full details see Action Plan)

4.1 *P2.1 and P2.1a Implement changes associated with the forthcoming Homelessness Reduction Bill.*

4.1.1 The new extended statutory homeless duties take effect from 1 April 2018 and will involve considerable additional support to all residents affected by housing crisis. The new legislation has been the primary focus of development within the service for several months. As well as the additional member of staff outlined earlier, a homeless database was also introduced on 28 March 2018 using new burdens funding. This will offer online interactive personalised support plans to customers which can be accessed from mobile devices, and also collate the increased data required by the MHCLG associated with the new legislation. Our intention is to fully migrate our homeless advice process from a partial paper process within the next six months as the process becomes more familiar.

4.2 *P2.1b Reduce homeless acceptances and increase homelessness preventions and reliefs.*

4.2.1 Housing Services has worked with customers to prevent homelessness in more cases this financial year than previously recorded. Appendix 2 demonstrates the success in these activities

- 4.3** *P21.d Work with partners to find solutions for high risk/high support/ multiple needs homeless households.*
- 4.3.1** Tewkesbury Borough Council continues as the lead partner on the Places of Safety Project for victims of domestic violence for the county. This project now offers 12 properties for victims of violence across the county (as an alternative to bed and breakfast) and funding should be sufficient to continue the project for another three years.
- 4.3.2** The Sanctuary Scheme/Target hardening project has also been recommissioned and extended until July 2018. This scheme has been very successful in preventing the use of bed and breakfast for victims of violence who wish to remain in their own homes.
- 4.3.3** The countywide Social Impact Bond (SIB) funded New Entrenched Homelessness Service – ‘ACTion Glos’ was launched at the end of last year for long-term rough sleepers/repeat users of homelessness services. Following a competitive tender process, P3 Charity has now signed the contract with Gloucester City Council (as lead authority for a countywide partnership) to deliver a new 3½ year service across the county. Interacting with a wide range of organisations, ‘ACTion Glos’ will provide intensive and relatively long-term support to a fixed cohort of 110 homeless people with multiple and complex needs for whom traditional services haven’t worked. It is a ‘Payment by Results’ service, with defined outcomes around access and sustainment of: accommodation (including ‘Housing First’ type tenancies); mental health and substance misuse services; and education, training and employment. Gloucestershire was one of eight areas in England to have successfully bid for new DCLG (SIB) funding to bring this important new resource to the county. An interim report indicates that there are currently 9 clients engaging with the service including one woman from Tewkesbury Borough.
- 4.4** *P2.3 and 3a – Welfare reform – early intervention, transitional support, assistance to find work. And minimisation of homelessness, particularly following the introduction of universal credit for housing costs.*
- 4.4.1** This action requires input from multiple teams within the Council and across partnership agencies. Our Benefits team is piloting a budgeting advice scheme with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) which includes self-referral and referrals from the DWP for persons affected by benefit changes. The budgeting advice has been linked into transitional discretionary housing payments to ensure that customers have all the assistance they need to address their housing related debt issues. Our benefits team is assisting two/three residents per week affected by benefit changes. At this stage, a large rise in homelessness caused solely by welfare reform has not been noted – although resolving those which have become homeless and are affected by these issues is problematic. This is particularly the case for households in temporary accommodation who would struggle to find work whilst in an area they will not stay permanently (see p.2.4).

- 4.5** *P2.4 and 5 – stop the use of bed and breakfast (b and b) and procure effective temporary accommodation + procure cost effective temporary accommodation within the borough.*
- 4.5.1** The average length of time homeless applicants are staying in bed and breakfast accommodation has risen from 99 customers remaining 37 days (2016/17) to 96 customers remaining 52 days (2017/18) but remains considerably lower than previous years. The costs for the previous year are still to be clarified but it is likely that the average cost per day has continued to rise this year. The rise in average days in bed and breakfast is largely due to the reluctance of landlords to take on high risk tenants (i.e. those with previous debt or ongoing benefit restrictions). A more detailed report will be included in next quarter's summary. Discussions are ongoing with Severn Vale Housing Society regarding options for emergency and temporary accommodation but the solutions under discussion are likely to be medium/longer term project.
- 5.0** **Priority 3 Meeting the housing needs of those who need it most (for full details see Action Plan).**
- 5.1** *P3.1 – commissioning Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)*
- 5.1.1** A standard methodology for calculating housing has now been confirmed through the Draft National Planning Policy Framework Guidance, and the county is now in a position to progress the SHMA.
- 6.0** **Priority 4 Improving the health and well-being of local people (for full details see Action Plan)**
- 6.1** *4.1b work with rps and partners to offer advice and assistance with grants, loans and support services*
4.1c and 4.2 monitor levels of private sector housing complaints
- 6.1.1** The Environmental Health Service has actively processed complaints from private sector tenants:
- 15 complaints from tenants were received during the first quarter of this year which resulted in one notice and a pending notice for improvement action from landlords.
 - 2 further notices were issued for Filthy and Verminous properties.
 - 1 successful prosecution for a failure to comply with a prohibition order which resulted in a fine and costs.
- 6.2** *4.2a carry out the actions within the strategy for Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire.*
- 6.2.1** A communication strategy is currently being drawn together with the Warm and Well provider, Severn Wye, and Tewkesbury Borough will be the focus of targeted marketing over the next three months. Publicity will be included in the Borough News and Severn Wye has offered to do a presentation on fuel poverty at the next Town and Parish Council Seminar.
- 7.0** **OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**
- 7.1** None – this is an update on progress made to date.

8.0 CONSULTATION

8.1 None – updates have been provided by the relevant service managers.

9.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

9.1 Housing Strategy 2017-21

10.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

10.1 The main documents driving Government housing policy and legislation are:

- National Planning Policy Framework 2012
- Homelessness Act 2002 and Housing Act 1996 & 2004 (Housing Standards)
- Local Government Act 2003
- Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (Housing grants, loans and home improvement assistance)
- The Future Home Improvement Agency (CLG 2009)
- Equality Act 2010
- Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England (Nov 2011)
- Localism Act 2011
- The Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013
- Welfare Reform Acts 2012 and 2016
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Housing and Planning Act 2016

11.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

11.1 None directly associated with this report other than staff and Member time. Any resources associated with the actions in the strategy will form part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and Asset Management Plan. Resource implications will be met from existing budget allocations and, where they cannot, will be subject to a growth bid within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and a separate report to Members.

12.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

12.1 The strategy includes considerations of sustainability and energy efficiency in addition to the social and economic implications.

13.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

13.1 Housing is a basic human need. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken prior to the Council's adoption of the strategy in September 2016, this is still relevant.

14.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

- 14.1** The Housing Strategy 2017-21 has been approved and adopted by Council in January 2017. The Action Plan for year 2 of the strategy was approved by Executive Committee in January 2018.

Background Papers: Existing strategies and policies are available on the Council's website.

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Appendices: Appendix 1 - Housing Strategy 2017-21 Action Plan Update Jan-Mar 2018
Appendix 2 – Homeless Prevention, Homeless applications, and Homeless Acceptances (chart showing 5 year progress)