

# Gloucester City Council

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> April 2014</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Housing Services</b>		
<b>Report Of:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure</b>		
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Budget/Policy Framework:</b>	<b>No</b>
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<b>Appendices:</b>	<b>None</b>		

## **1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report looks at the successes of the Housing Service in helping our residents find housing solutions to meet their individual needs. It also sets out the excellent work done through homelessness prevention, working with partners and reducing the use of emergency bed & breakfast accommodation.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to endorse;

- (1) The continued use of the Homeless Prevention Grant to provide Housing Options for vulnerable households threatened with homelessness, and
- (2) To support the Housing Service to achieve 'The Gold Standard Award' by striving for continuous improvement in front line housing services.

## **3.0 Background**

### **3.1 Prevention of Homelessness**

- 3.1.1 Gloucester City Council received Homelessness Prevention Grant of £377,000 from the Government for the financial year 2013/14 which has been used to prevent over 600 households from becoming homeless.

- 3.1.2 The main housing solutions offered to persons to remain in their existing homes include:-

- debt advice
- sanctuary scheme (measures for victims of domestic violence)
- mortgage arrears interventions

- mortgage rescue, and
- negotiation with landlords on behalf of tenants.

3.1.3 In addition, GCC uses a range of Housing Options to assist households into suitable alternative accommodation which includes:-

- rent in advance
- deposits for homes in the private rented sector
- placement into supported housing provision and
- homes with friends or relatives.

### **3.2 Gloucestershire Homeseeker Choice Based Lettings Scheme**

3.2.1 The Gloucester Homeseeker Team have assessed the housing needs of 1,300 new applications from households seeking affordable social housing since April 2013.

3.2.3 A further 5000 housing need reassessments, of existing applications, were undertaken in the Autumn of 2013. This followed the successful implementation of the revised allocation policy for social housing to reflect the changes included in the Localism Bill 2011 and the Welfare Reform Act 2012. All amendments were agreed by the Gloucestershire Homeseeker Partnership and following the required consultation, implemented on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

3.2.4 Over 500 affordable social housing properties have been allocated through the choice based lettings scheme.

3.2.5 Currently 4523 households are seeking affordable housing, of which 1884 have a high housing need in line with the allocation policy.

### **3.3 Homelessness**

3.3.1 489 homeless applications have been assessed this year since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013, of which 176 have been accepted as homeless. This is slightly lower than the previous year.

3.3.2 103 Households who were accepted as homeless have been housed into Local Authority or Registered Provider homes since April 2013.

3.3.3 Since November 2013 we have implemented the new power to discharge the council's main homeless duty by an offer of accommodation into the private rented sector. Between November 2013 and February 2014, 16 households have accepted suitable affordable homes in the private rented sector.

### **3.4 Working with Gloucester City Homes**

3.4.1 GCC & GCH have worked closely together to reduce the use of emergency bed & breakfast accommodation. GCH now manage a range of supported, good quality, short term accommodation for households who are homeless, as an alternative to

lengthy stays in emergency accommodation. This has also contributed to a reduction in the Bed & Breakfast costs as this type of interim accommodation has been minimised.

- 3.4.2 Nova House is an addition to our supply of temporary accommodation. It has 9 units and will be ready for occupation in April 2014. In the grounds of Nova House is a training workshop which will be used for providing courses for homeless households including advice on maintaining tenancies and employment opportunities.
- 3.4.3 Priory Place which opened last summer accommodates persons who have high needs and who may have had difficulties at alternative supported housing provisions. Placement into Priory Place gives the person the opportunity to engage with specialist providers to turn their lives around.
- 3.4.4 GCH continue to support this range of homeless interim accommodation through a dedicated homeless support worker who liaises closely with staff at the City Council.

### **3.5 Partnership working with the County Council and local authorities in Gloucestershire**

- 3.5.1 Gloucestershire has a rough sleepers action plan supported by all of the Districts in the County. Funding is provided by central government through the homeless transition grant of £340,000 for rough sleepers and single persons. The action plan is implemented and monitored by the County Homelessness Implementation Group.
- 3.5.2 In partnership with all local authorities in Gloucestershire, Gloucester City Council maintains a severe weather emergency protocol (SWEP) to ensure no one is sleeping outside during periods of extreme weather condition.
- 3.5.3 Gloucester has accommodated 25 persons this winter due to the severe weather conditions. This is funded by central government through the Homeless transition grant.
- 3.5.4 All persons placed into accommodation during extreme weather conditions are referred to the Outreach service at G.E.A.R.
- 3.5.5 The Outreach team, funded by central government, contact the individuals placed under the SWEP to reconnect them to their local area or seek alternative accommodation.
- 3.5.6 Work continues with the county youth service to meet the needs of vulnerable young people. 17 young people aged 16/17years have made homeless applications since April 2013 and been referred to the County Youth Service under a county agreement.

### **3.6. Progress towards Gloucester achieving 'The Gold Standard'**

- 3.6.1 The 'Gold Standard' Programme is a local authority peer-led continuous improvement programme, funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government, to support all local authorities to improve their Housing Options and Homelessness Services through a range of free tools, resources and support.
- 3.6.2 The Gold Standard is based on the ten 'local challenges' set out by government in the 'Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to the Prevention of Homelessness' report.
- 3.6.3 All local authorities in Gloucestershire have agreed to participate in the gold standard programme.
- 3.6.4 Free legal training is being provided at the present time for all Housing Services in the County.
- 3.6.5 Officers from Housing and Strategy and Enabling Services attended a peer-led 'Practitioner Prevention Partnership Sounding Board' Meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2014 which included a workshop on how to undertake a diagnostic peer review.
- 3.6.6 An internal review will now take place prior to a County peer review with our partners in the six Districts.

### **4.0 Conclusions**

- 4.1 The continued success of the Homeless Prevention Service provides a positive alternative to households to avoid the trauma and upheaval of becoming homeless.
- 4.2 Gloucester City Council continues to strive towards continuous improvement in our frontline housing service.
- 4.3 All of our achievements and ongoing ambitions fit with the corporate priorities for 2014/15, A City for Everyone and Strong Performance.

### **5.0 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 All of the activities are contained within existing budgets from April 2014. The Council no longer receives a separate grant for Homelessness Prevention Funding, this now forms part of the Council's Central Government Funding Settlement. However, the 2014/15 Council Budget has maintained the same level of expenditure for the Homelessness Prevention Service as was supported by the grant.

## **6.0 Legal Implications**

- 6.1 The Council has a statutory duty to assist all persons who are homeless or threatened with homelessness under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended 2002) part 7 Homelessness.
- 6.2 The allocation of housing by local housing authorities is governed by Pt.6, Housing Act 1996 (as amended 2002). A local housing authority must have an allocation scheme for determining priorities and procedures in allocating housing and must allocate housing accommodation in accordance with that scheme. When exercising their functions under Pt.6, authorities must have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

## **7.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications**

- 7.1 There are no identified risks contained in this report

## **8.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA)**

- 8.1 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore, a full PIA was not required.

## **9.0 Other Corporate Implications**

### Community Safety

- 9.1 The successes of the Housing Services in helping our residents find housing solutions to meet their individual needs, sets out the excellent work done through homelessness prevention, working with partners and reducing the use of emergency bed & breakfast accommodation, which in turn contributes to 'A City for Everyone' and Performance.

### Sustainability

- 9.2 None

### Staffing & Trade Union

- 9.3 None

Background Papers: None

Published Papers: None

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