



COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 16 FEBRUARY 2006

Title: MONITORING REPORT OF THE HOMELESSNESS AND
CARLISLE CITY COUNCILS HOSTEL'S SERVICE ACTION PLAN

Report of: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Report reference: DS. 02/06

Summary:

This report is to update Members of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the delivery of phase one targets of the Homelessness and Carlisle City Councils Action Plan. The report also identifies areas within phase one of the Action Plan that can be streamlined.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that;

1. That the report be considered
2. That completed actions are taken out of the Action plan
3. That the identified areas that can be streamlined within phase one of the Action plan be approved.

Contact Officer: Simon Taylor

Ext: 7327

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 A review of Homelessness and Carlisle City Councils Hostel's Service was carried out between November 2004 and May 2005. The review followed the Audit Commissions 'Key Lines of Enquiry' (KLOE). From the review came an Action Plan which was brought to the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1/8/05.
- 1.2 The key principles that have been used to prioritise our work within the Action Plan are;
 - breaking the cycle of homelessness
 - homeless prevention
- 1.3 The activities within the Action Plan are broken down for implementation over a two and a half-year period in two phases. Phase one is over a period of 12 months and the activities are being concentrated on dealing with the immediate issues relating to operational systems, developing the preventative homeless work programme and strengthening the partnership working processes. Phase two is to be over an 18 month period and looks at dealing with the longer term issues relating to provision of suitable temporary accommodation for client needs, access routes to permanent re-housing and support provision where needed.
- 1.4 It was felt that the long term issues regarding accommodation provision are significant and implementation of the Action Plan would require a continuation of the partnership working that had already started with key partners. This included Registered Social Landlord's (RSL's), private sector landlords, statutory bodies, support providers and voluntary agencies.

2.0 ACTION PLAN – PHASE ONE

- 2.1 Attached at Appendix one is an update on the targets set for phase one. Below a contextual information is given in relation to each strand of the Action Plan and the phase 1 targets within that strand.
- 3.2 Partnership Development – Under this strand the short term issues regarding the numbers of people in temporary accommodation who are accepted as homeless and the timescales involved in re-housing was highlighted as a blockage within the system. There was one area for improvement and two specific actions within phase one. Significant work has been undertaken since September 2005 to take forward the scheme with CHA to bring empty properties back into use for homelessness nominations as well as reduce the numbers of people in B&B and temporary accommodation. The aftermath of the flooding within Carlisle had had a longer term effect regarding pressure on temporary accommodation which was made more difficult by the Council's hostel at John Street being out of use for a long period of

time. Movement within the system has been achieved and the blockages reduced. The expense of using B&B accommodation has been curtailed and empty properties have been brought back into use for homeless people. Discussions with housing providers are planned to start in March as part of the overall approach to lettings.

- 2.3 Access, Customer care and User Focus – Under this strand issues around the actual homelessness team and service delivery were highlighted. There were 4 areas for improvement and 9 specific actions within phase one. The capacity of the team was approved in April 2005 with extra staff providing increased homelessness officer cover as well as support and administration. Following recruitment of the extra staff focus could be given to the identified gaps in service provision, planning training and introducing a performance management system. This includes monthly case review meetings with each officer, monthly staff meetings, quality checking of cases and development of the homelessness database. An initial 'early warning' system has been put in place with CHA to identify tenants who may have issues and potentially become homeless. It is intended to have this in place with all social landlords. Joint working continues with Probation and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership regarding the provision of accommodation for offenders. Six out of the nine specific actions have been completed.
- 2.4 Housing Advice, Homelessness Prevention and Option Services – Under this strand issues relating to the prevention of homelessness, advice and benefits were highlighted. There were three areas for improvement and four specific actions within phase one. Work has started on analysing the causes of repeat homelessness, working with partners to strengthen our approaches to preventing homelessness and linking the work of welfare benefits and housing advice. Increased capacity within the homelessness section together with better working systems are benefiting these processes. Work on delivery of these actions is ongoing.
- 2.5 Homelessness Services – Under this strand issues to the delivery of homelessness services were highlighted. There were four areas for improvement and five specific actions within phase one. As stated in 2.3 above the capacity within the homelessness service has been increased with the permanent structure currently being addressed through the re-organisation process. Significant work has been undertaken between Housing and Legal to strengthen the appeals process and develop the case paperwork to withstand robustly legal challenge. The development of relationships with social services and health continues. Three out of the five actions are completed and one other is in the process of being completed.
- 2.6 Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Households – Under this strand issues relating to the provision of temporary accommodation were highlighted. There were eleven areas for improvement and thirteen specific actions within phase one. Of these seven have been completed and six are ongoing. Work on the mapping of accommodation provision for client groups has started with work being carried out to look at the needs of young people and those leaving care. By working with Social Services, Supporting People and housing providers consideration can be given for the provision of support and accommodation. The actions for areas for improvement

26-30 can in effect be dealt with together as experience has shown that when looking at a client groups needs the whole range of support and provision is looked at i.e hostel, move-on accommodation and support provision.

Communication between agencies and understanding has increased around specific cases and this is ongoing. As part of the work between Housing and Legal the position relating to the provision of temporary accommodation for difficult clients has been established. Standards for temporary accommodation have been set and risk assessments for staff in the hostels undertaken. The use of B&B has reduced significantly from a high of 35 during summer 2005 to 1 with a target of reaching 0. Finally the system for placing peoples belongings in storage has been strengthened.

3.0 Conclusion

3.1 The phased approach to the delivery of actions within the plan was based upon dealing with the issues identified during the review as stated in section 1.3. To date concentration on phase one has enabled a number of core issues to be addressed including;

- Reduction in the use of B&B
- Enable the movement of accepted homeless people from temporary accommodation
- Increase capacity and improved working systems within the Homelessness Service including performance management and the prevention of homelessness
- Initial work with partner agencies on looking at the long term planning of solutions to meet need

Appendix One
HOMELESSNESS AND CARLISLE CITY COUNCILS HOSTEL'S ACTION PLAN

Area for Improvement	Specific Improvement Action (If Required)	Measurable	Phase Phase 1 – end 31/8/06	Resourced	Risk Assessment* & Priority For Improvement †**	Update on actions at Jan 06	Status
Key Themes for Partnership Development							
1. Approaches to allocations and lettings (social housing) may be impacting adversely on homelessness/temporary accommodation – blockages regarding accepted households moving into permanent accommodation	1.1 District wide review of approaches to allocations and lettings	Reducing numbers in temporary accommodation/ hostels Reducing time spent in temporary accommodation/ hostels Enabling households to move into permanent housing – bringing empty property back into use (pilot scheme with CHA)	Phase 1 Start process by Nov 05	Staff time Partner time	9 / MT	Numbers in B&B reduced to 1 person/household from a high of 35 in the summer 2005. Reduction of numbers started in Sept 05. Overall time spent in temporary accommodation reducing.	ongoing
			August 2005	Housing Strategy Capital funding	LT	Project with CHA started on 1/8/05 and to date 15 properties have been brought back into use housing homeless people with others having work carried out on them. The scheme will continue into financial year 06/07.	ongoing
	1.2 Review with RSL's introduction of a common Housing register / Property shop / advice centre	Development of Register / property shop / advice centre	Start process by Jan 06	As Above	6/LT	Choice based lettings is being taken forward on a Sub Regional basis by Carlisle CC as part of the Cumbria Housing group. A meeting is planned for March 2006 to which the ODPM will attend. Discussions will look at the development of a common register.	ongoing

Area for Improvement	Specific Improvement Action (If Required)	Measurable	Phase Phase 1 – end 31/8/06	Resourced	Risk Assessment* & Priority For Improvement †**	Update on actions at Jan 06	Status
KLOE Sub Theme: Access, Customer Care and User Focus							
4. Gaps in staff knowledge in relation to full range of enquiries and referrals to other agencies	4.1 Staff training using case study scenarios 4.2 Integration of the team 4.3 Use of logging system 4.4 Performance manage to improve the service	Demonstrable knowledge of full range of enquiries and ability to access appropriate information/make referrals	Phase 1 By April 2006	Training budget Establishment of systems – staff time	9/QW	Staff have been on homelessness training and update courses which use case study scenarios. All courses are logged and training is a key part to team / service integration. Staff are fully trained on the use of the IT system and homelessness database. Performance management of the section has been strengthened in the last 6 months with regular monthly case supervision of officers and monthly team update meetings.	Completed – systems in place
5. Service standards are underdeveloped	5.1 Develop challenging service standards, consult with service users, develop and implement monitoring system to ensure standards are met and performance communicated	Timescale standards met Positive feedback from service users	Phase 1 By end August 2006	Minimal cost Staff time to develop and implement	4/QW	Feedback system with customers has been introduced. Statutory and Best value indicators are set for the service. Further service standards being developed and will be integrated into the management and monitoring system.	ongoing

Area for Improvement	Specific Improvement Action (If Required)	Measurable	Phase Phase 1 – end 31/8/06	Resourced	Risk Assessment* & Priority For Improvement †**	Update on actions at Jan 06	Status
6. Arrangements to identify and prevent potential cases of threatened (or imminent) homelessness are weak (e.g. CHA only notify once legal and only if tenant agrees)	6.1 Develop improved “early warning” systems and procedures in partnership with RSLs, private landlords and mortgage lenders homelessness amongst ex-offenders and those with mental health issues	Prevention of homelessness (numbers of cases)	Phase 1 By March of 2006	Staff time	9/MT	An ‘early warning’ system has been put in place with CHA the areas largest landlord and is being planned to be rolled out to other housing providers.	ongoing
	6.2 Continue partnership with probation and the CDRP (Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership) to tackle offender accommodation problems	As Above	Immediately	Staff time	9/QW	Joint working with both Probation and the CDRP continue regarding accommodation provision for offenders.	ongoing
	6.3 Continue and strengthen use of RESOLVE to prevent	As Above	Immediately	Staff time / ODPM Grant	9/QW	Resolve are a key part of our referral system and ODPM grant has been used to sustain the service they	completed

Area for Improvement	Specific Improvement Action (If Required)	Measurable	Phase Phase 1 – end 31/8/06	Resourced	Risk Assessment* & Priority For Improvement †**	Update on actions at Jan 06	Status
	homelessness amongst young people					provide to prevent youth homelessness.	
7. Interview rooms not always equipped for the job	7.1 Develop clear specification as part of re-building	Interview rooms are private, high standard and allow access to IT case files etc.	Phase 1 In accordance with refurbishment programme timescales – end 05	As part of post-flood refurbishment	9/MT	Interview room secured for service as part of the post flood redevelopment work.	completed
KLOE Sub Theme: Diversity							
KLOE Sub Theme: Housing Advice, Homelessness Prevention and Options Services							
11. Significant repeat homelessness (many with history of ASB, criminality or dependency)	11.1 Analyse and review causes as well as continued partnership working with other involved agencies 11.2 Establish safety net mechanisms and targeted preventative work	Reduction in repeat homelessness	Phase 1 By Nov 2006	Staff time	12/MT	Work on analysing and reviewing the causes of repeat homelessness has started. Partnership working with other key agencies will help develop the current systems for preventing homelessness.	ongoing
12. Linkage between general housing advice and proactive	12.1 Further develop information sharing	Improved welfare benefits advice to	Phase 1 By August 2006	Staff time	9/MT	Improved working with welfare and benefits advice started. Referral	ongoing

Area for Improvement	Specific Improvement Action (If Required)	Measurable	Phase Phase 1 – end 31/8/06	Resourced	Risk Assessment* & Priority For Improvement †**	Update on actions at Jan 06	Status
welfare benefits advice need to be strengthened	protocols and liaison meetings to discuss debt and benefits advice and case reviews of homeless/potentially homeless clients	homeless/potentially homeless clients and reduce incidence of homelessness/increase prevention				procedure introduced July 2005.	
13. Approach to prevention of homelessness in partnership with other advice agencies (often ad hoc) could be structured and implemented better	13.1 Develop and implement clear protocols with partner agencies (RSLs, CAB, Shelter, PROP, Probation, CASS, Housing/Council Tax Benefit, Jobcentre, health, etc))	Protocols developed and implemented Reduction in homelessness	Phase 1 By August 2006	Staff time Partner time	9/MT	Work on developing our approach to the prevention of homelessness is being taken forward. Initial discussions to be held with agencies regarding the development of protocols.	ongoing
KLOE Sub Theme: Homelessness Services							
18. No case load reviews and case loads per officer are high	18.1 Implement management case load reviews and ensure work is allocated consistently 18.2 Consider resourcing requirements using analysis of homeless presentations and	Reviews of caseloads and specific cases undertaken Staffing numbers appropriate to level of homelessness	Phase 1 By end 2005	Management time	9/QW	Management system introduced for monthly case reviews. Staffing structure temporarily in place since May 05 with increased staff numbers in the homeless section. Permanent structure being dealt with	Completed (Staffing to be completed)

Area for Improvement	Specific Improvement Action (If Required)	Measurable	Phase Phase 1 – end 31/8/06	Resourced	Risk Assessment* & Priority For Improvement †**	Update on actions at Jan 06	Status
	projections					under restructure currently.	
19. further Appeals process is currently unhelpful and not timely	19.1 Look at best practice in appeals elsewhere	Appeals process conforms to best practice standards	Phase 1 By August 2006	Staff time Member training/Member time?	6/QW	Appeals system has been looked at by Housing and Legal. A senior officer review has now been put in place prior to an appeal to Members.	completed
20. Protocols with social services and health are insufficiently developed	20.1 Build relationships through continuation of review groups as homelessness key partners liaison group	Effective relationships?	Phase 1 On-going / immediate	Staff time Partner time	12/MT	Housing strategy theme groups started in September 2005 and relationships with both health and social services are developing.	ongoing
21. Paperwork to support appeals process insufficiently robust to withstand legal challenge	21.1 Establish and implement standard paperwork (IT based if feasible) to support legal process	Reduced legal challenges	Phase 1 By December 2005	Staff time Legal advice	12/QW	Work has been carried out between Housing and Legal to identify shortfalls. Paperwork has developed to be more robust to withstand legal challenge.	completed
KLOE Sub Theme: Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Households							
26. No open access accommodation - to be linked with future models of support and accommodation provision assembled under phase 2	26.1 Review need and resources through homelessness key partners liaison group including Supporting People (SP) services and the SP 5 year strategy	Development of project	Phase 1 End 2006	Staff time Cost of establishment or change of use?	12/LT	Initial discussions started through key partners on future models of accommodation provision.	ongoing

Area for Improvement	Specific Improvement Action (If Required)	Measurable	Phase Phase 1 – end 31/8/06	Resourced	Risk Assessment* & Priority For Improvement †**	Update on actions at Jan 06	Status
27. Significant gaps in specialist provision e.g. young people leaving care, women's refuges, last chance accommodation - to be linked with future models of support and accommodation provision assembled under phase 2	27.1 Map existing provision and review scale and appropriateness compared to need and resources through homelessness key partners liaison group including Supportng people services	Identifying provision needs and project development	Phase 1 End 2006	Staff time Cost of establishment	12/LT	Through theme groups and discussions with housing providers, social services and supporting people a joint approach to dealing with young people is being developed. This will include the potential use of empty property to be converted into flats as semi independent living with support provision. Costs for conversion can be taken forward through Housing strategy capital funding. Work with this client group is being progressed .	ongoing
28. Engage partner organisations in a debate regarding housing and support provision for vulnerable people	28.1 A partnership vision and plan for housing and support provision in Carlisle		June 2006			Work on developing a partnership vision is starting through the theme groups and specific project development as stated above. However the development of such processes is long term.	
29. Significant gaps in "move on" provision and lack of floating support - to be linked with future models of support and accommodation provision assembled under phase 2	29.1 Map existing provision and review scale and appropriateness compared to need and resources through homelessness key partners liaison group including Supporting People services	Identifying provision needs and project development	Phase 1 Start 2006	Staff time Cost of establishment	12/LT	A lot of the work within this action can be linked into the work with specific client groups and their accommodation and support needs.	ongoing

Area for Improvement	Specific Improvement Action (If Required)	Measurable	Phase Phase 1 – end 31/8/06	Resourced	Risk Assessment* & Priority For Improvement †**	Update on actions at Jan 06	Status
30. Scope for increased dispersed properties – to be linked with future models of support and accommodation provision assembled under phase 2	30.1 Map existing provision and review scale and appropriateness compared to need and resources through homelessness key partners liaison group including Supporting People services	Identifying provision needs and project development	Phase 1 Start 2006	Staff time Cost of establishment	12/LT	As above, the work on this action can be combined to action points 28 and 29 when looking at the accommodation and support needs of client groups.	ongoing
31. “Buck passing” the most difficult clients	31.1 Improve communication between agencies to proactively deal with these clients	Improved working between agencies	Phase 1 Start 2006	Staff time	16/MT	Significant work is being undertaken with other agencies in relation to specific cases.	ongoing
32. Legal challenge issues relating to provision of accommodation even when difficult clients evicted	32.1 Reconsider legal position and establish clear criteria	Criteria established	Phase 1 By Dec 2006	Staff time Legal advice costs	12/MT	Work has been undertaken by Housing and Legal to look at this issue. The position has been established.	completed
33. Lack of clear standards for Temporary Accommodation and no regular checks made	33.1 Establish clear standards (including H&S assessment) and set targets for checks to be made	Checks undertaken and any follow up action implemented	Phase 1 By March 2006	Staff time	9/QW	Standards set for temporary accommodation provision in conjunction with the Supporting people’s review of the service. Management checks of standards made regular.	completed
34. Lack of risk assessment of staff working in hostels - staff feel under-valued and exposed to risk	34.1 Undertake risk assessment and develop action plan to minimise risk	Action plan produced and implemented	Phase 1 Immediate	Staff time	16/QW	Risk Assessments / plan for risk reduction completed and in place.	completed
35. Increasing use of B&Bs	35.1 Undertake analysis to identify if short term blip or longer-term trend	Reduction in use of B&B	Phase 1 immediate	Staff time	12/QW	Use of B&B reduced to 1 with the intention of reducing this to 0 and not use B&B in future. B&B’s that have	completed

Area for Improvement	Specific Improvement Action (If Required)	Measurable	Phase Phase 1 – end 31/8/06	Resourced	Risk Assessment* & Priority For Improvement ^{†**}	Update on actions at Jan 06	Status
	35.2 Establish standards and checks for B&Bs where used 35.3 Develop action plan to reduce B&B through other means (as above)					been used are inspected annually and comply with Tourist Centre standards.	
36 Lack of budgets for storage of peoples belongings	36.1 Consider if budgets needed and allocate or explore alternative proposals e.g use of hostel storage facilities, alternative council provision	Clear policy on storage of people's belongings	Phase 1 By April 2006	Staff time Potential budget for storage established	12/QW	System further developed with a clear policy on the storage of people's belongings in place.	completed
KLOE Sub Theme: Value for Money							

***Risk Assessment - Impact:** 1 = Negligible: 2 = Marginal: 3 = Critical: 4 = Catastrophic **Likelihood:** 1 = Extremely Remote: 2 = Remote: 3 = Reasonably Probable 4 = Probable

** **Priority for Improvement** – QW: Quick Win. MT:Medium term and LT:long term