

Item No.	Classification OPEN	Committee Executive	Date 29th July 2003
Report Title:		Southwark Homelessness Strategy 2003/04-2005/06	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All Wards, Homeless and potentially homeless households	
From:		Director of Housing	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Executive approve the Southwark Homelessness Strategy 2003/04-2005/06.
2. The Executive to note the current and proposed actions to meet and sustain the Government's target for reduction in the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless families and pregnant women, other than in an emergency.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. During 2002/03 2,359 households approached Southwark as homeless. Of these, 1,857 were accepted as being owed a legal duty to provide homelessness assistance. This figure is likely to underestimate the actual level of homelessness in the borough, particularly as only those in clearly defined circumstances are entitled to such assistance. As at the end of May 2003, 757 households were being provided with temporary accommodation by Southwark, either directly or indirectly. These included 122 households in bed and breakfast accommodation, of whom 55 were families.
4. Under the Homelessness Act 2002 local authorities are now required to:
 - Carry out a review of homelessness in their area;
 - Publish and consult on the results of their review;
 - Formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results by 31 July 2003;
 - Publish a new homelessness strategy within five years of the previous one.
5. The Act and related Government guidance also require that authorities' homelessness strategies address:
 - The prevention of homelessness
 - Securing accommodation for homeless people
 - Providing support to homeless/potentially homeless people.
6. Linked to the development of homelessness strategies, the Government has set the following targets for all local housing authorities, and allocated funding to support local authorities achieving the targets:
 - To reduce the levels of rough sleeping within the area to two-thirds that of 1998 levels and to maintain the reduction and, where possible, to further reduce the numbers of rough sleepers

- To have no families with children in bed and breakfast temporary accommodation by March 2004, except in an emergency.
7. A review of homelessness and housing advisory services was undertaken between January and May 2003. A Project Board was set up to oversee the development of the review and the strategy. The board included representation from relevant Housing business units, Social Services, the Primary Care Trust, Southwark Housing Association Group, non-statutory advice agencies, voluntary organisations working with the homeless, and Shelter, the national homelessness charity.
 8. The Homelessness Strategy is based on the findings of the review and the results of consultation with partner organisations. The strategy also incorporates the Rough Sleepers Strategy, the Bed and Breakfast Action Plan and homelessness and advice related actions from the Best Value Review of Community Housing Services, the Housing and Supporting People strategies, and other relevant strategies and action plans.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

9. The key aim of the first strategy is that, by March 2006, there will be a significant improvement in knowledge and understanding of homelessness in Southwark, and the development of effective, cross-agency and cross-borough partnerships to tackle the problems and deliver improved outcomes for homeless and potentially homeless people in Southwark.
10. The key objectives of the strategy are to:
 - Meet Government targets on eliminating the use of bed and breakfast for families other than in an emergency, reducing rough sleeping and any further targets relevant to homelessness.
 - Further research the causes of homelessness in Southwark, and in particular the factors leading to repeat homelessness
 - Improve the quality and consistency of data collection to inform development of the Homelessness Strategy
 - Fully map resources for the prevention of homelessness and the accommodation and support of homeless households
 - Maximise the role of housing advice in preventing homelessness
 - Prevent homelessness where possible, but in particular reduce the levels of homelessness due to eviction by family/friends and relationship breakdown due to domestic violence are the main cause of homelessness
 - Ensure that temporary accommodation is appropriate to the needs of individual homeless households.
 - Work within the Supporting People framework to address the housing and support needs of vulnerable people, with the aim of accessing and avoiding loss of appropriate accommodation
 - Ensure equality of access and outcome in respect of homeless services.
 - Work with other London boroughs and partners to prevent homelessness and identify and meet the needs of homeless households.
11. In order to meet the Government's Bed and Breakfast reduction targets a number of actions are already underway in Southwark as a result of using funding from the Bed and Breakfast Unit for this purpose:

- Developing 250 additional units of private sector leased accommodation with housing associations
- Developing a private sector rent deposit scheme for accepted homeless households.
- Developing a home visiting service for people threatened with eviction by friends and family.

Private sector leasing and rent deposit schemes are considerably more cost effective than providing Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families, the average cost of which per annum is over £12, 000, compared with around £2000 for a private sector leased property.

12. A key focus of the strategy is on measures to maximise homeless prevention, including measures to support vulnerable households at risk of homelessness. These include:

- Developing a mediation service, initially targeting those facing eviction by family and friends (the main cause of homelessness presentations in Southwark) including 16-17 year olds.
- Developing outreach and out of hours advice services targeting those with a high risk of homelessness, i.e young people, particular ethnic groups.
- Developing floating support and tenancy sustainment initiatives for a range of vulnerable client groups, including people with mental health problems, young people and care leavers, and people with substance misuse problems.

13. The strategy also emphasises the need to improve information. This covers improving the extent of knowledge about the causes of homelessness amongst different groups, and in particular repeat homelessness. It also covers the provision of good quality, accessible advice and information services.

14. **Policy Implications**

There are no proposed changes to existing policies which are based on the Council's legal responsibilities as set out in the Homelessness Act 2002. There are links between the Homelessness Strategy and a number of other strategies and action plans, both internal to the Council and external. These include the Community and Neighbourhood Renewal strategies, Crime and Disorder Strategy, and Teenage pregnancy strategy. There is a link to the Council's Community Strategy priority of 'tackling poverty' and to the following key management issues:

- Driving down debt.
- Performance management.
- Customer focus.
- Equalities

15. **Effect of Proposed Changes**

The effect of the measures proposed in the strategy will be to move away from a reactive response to homelessness, to a more planned, preventative approach. There will also be more co-ordinated working between agencies.

16. **Equal Opportunities Implications**

Black and minority ethnic (BME) households are disproportionately represented amongst homeless people and those with high levels of housing need. However at the same time there are also particular BME communities who are under-represented amongst those seeking housing advice. People with mental and physical disabilities are also over-represented amongst homeless people. Improving homelessness services, addressing gaps in provision of advice or information, developing accessible information, and providing support services will benefit these disadvantaged communities.

17. Domestic violence accounted for 8% of homeless acceptances during 2002/03, although there is likely to be considerable under-reporting of this. Victims of domestic violence are predominantly women. The strategy includes a number of measures to address the needs of victims of domestic violence including increased refuge provision and floating support services.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

18. Adopting a more preventative approach to homelessness, and developing more cost-effective alternatives to Bed and Breakfast will deliver savings. Reduced use of Bed and Breakfast has already resulted in savings, some of which have been redirected to improve services for homeless people. There is potential for further savings and redirection of resources as a result of eliminating the use of Bed and Breakfast for families, other than in an emergency.
19. Southwark was successful in bidding for funding for initiatives to minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast from the Bed and Breakfast Unit and Homelessness Directorate for 2002/03 and the current year. However the Bed and Breakfast Unit has advised that it is unlikely that there will be any funding for future years, given that the expectation is that authorities will redirect Bed and Breakfast savings into developing preventative services. It is possible that further funding will still be available from the Homelessness Directorate in 2004/05.
20. A number of service improvements are planned as a result of the Homelessness Strategy. Some of these are at no additional cost, or minimal cost. However some, including the continuing expansion of private sector leased accommodation, which is currently being funded by the Bed and Breakfast Unit, will require long term funding if there is not to be a return to use of bed and breakfast accommodation. This will be considered as part of Southwark's 2004/05 budget setting process, but it is possible that these costs could be funded by redirection of savings from the bed and breakfast budget.
21. It should also be remembered that the Homelessness Strategy is intended to be a joint strategy between Southwark and its partners. There may be opportunities to maximise use of resources by pooling funding for particular initiatives or research projects, and the Homelessness Forum with its partner agencies will explore this.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

22. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

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Background Papers
Homeless Review

Held At
Larcom Street

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Lead Officer	Dave Hancock, Head of Community Housing Services	
Report Author	Claire Linnane, New Initiatives Manager	
Version	3	
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Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Borough Solicitor & Secretary	No	Not required
Chief Finance Officer	No	Not required
<i>List other Officers here</i>		
Executive Member		Attached in draft
Date final report sent to Constitutional Support Services		