

Committee: COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Date: 8 June 2006

Title: HOMELESS ACCOMMODATION

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Item for decision

Summary

This report outlines the work that has been completed by the Homelessness Task Group which has resulted in a recommendation to this Committee.

Recommendations

The Homelessness Task Group recommends to the Community Committee that:

- a. there is a proven need for more appropriate homeless accommodation to be provided by the Council
- b. that the Community Committee authorises officers to investigate and report back with proposals on how this Council can provide suitable homeless accommodation with the aim of ending the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation at the earliest opportunity
- c. that the work carried out with other agencies is noted and that Officers are authorised to continue this approach in order to endeavour to provide suitable short term accommodation
- d. the work of the Task Group is now completed.

Background Papers

None

Impact

Communication/Consultation	There is a need to consult with members the tenant forum and any other partner agencies and residents as appropriate regarding any long-term proposals.
Community Safety	More appropriate homeless accommodation could help reduce some

	anti social behaviour
Equalities	N/A
Finance	Possible significant resources will be needed. Any proposal will need to be planned and may require bids to other agencies.
Human Rights	N/A
Legal Implications	Fulfil council's statutory duties to provide suitable homeless accommodation.
Ward-specific impacts	All of the district
Workforce/Workplace	Could have an impact on the housing team

Situation

1. The Task Group was set up to look at the current provision of homeless accommodation within Uttlesford and to consider what future provision might be required by the Authority if it is to continue to meet its statutory duties.
2. Homelessness is a high priority within this Authority and within national government. There is now legislation that requires local authorities to only use bed and breakfast accommodation for families and pregnant women in emergencies and then it is limited to no longer than six weeks.
3. The Task Group has expressed views of concern over the continued use of bed and breakfast accommodation not only for families but for all client groups following review of various cases.
4. The Task Group has received significant amounts of information re the historical background on the homelessness situation within Uttlesford. It has also seen how young people can spend prolonged periods in bed and breakfast which can lead to increased social problems as well as being expensive to the state.
5. As part of its research the Group has visited two other rural authorities, Babergh and Mid Suffolk, to see what provisions they have made for homeless accommodation.
6. It has been concluded by the Task Group that clearly the Council must move forward regarding the provision of accommodation for homeless people and that the practice of using bed and breakfast is untenable and must be phased out.

7. The work of the Task Group has shown what Uttlesford District Council needs to be working towards. This includes closer working with St Matthews particularly on the needs of the young homeless. Also to identify appropriate homeless accommodation that is suitably staffed.
8. The Task Group is aware that there will be a need to work with other agencies and that this is a long term project which will need to be linked with other Council initiatives.
9. Independent of the Task Group there have also been two other multi-agency meetings which have included representatives of charitable organisations looking specifically at the needs of young people within Uttlesford who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Targets

What we should be aiming for

10. The ending of Bed and Breakfast usage for families and pregnant women except in emergencies and then for no longer than six weeks
11. The provision of suitable supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds
12. Support for all homeless clients
13. Ending the use of Bed and Breakfast for all client groups and the provision of more appropriate emergency accommodation.

Options

Following from the discussions of the Task Group it is felt that the Council could consider one or more of the following options.

14. Small general homeless facility, with support provided by part time staff but with 24hr emergency cover. For use by families, vulnerable singles and 16/17 year olds.
15. 3 or 4 bed shared house specifically for 16/17 year olds with part time support and 24 hr call out support.
16. Take existing properties and designate as homeless accommodation and keep furnished and ready to use in emergencies.
17. Provide a floating support service for all homeless clients.

18. Continue to give priority allocation to homeless families and continue to use bed and breakfast accommodation for all client groups including 16/17 year olds.

Pay offs/Penalties

19. The Task Group has identified a number of significant issues that will need to be factors when the Council formulates a way forward on the provision of homeless accommodation.
20. Providing alternatives to Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless cases will help the authority meet current homelessness legislation and reduce the current spend on this type of accommodation which is not fully covered by housing benefits payments.
21. The Council is currently failing to comply in all cases on not having families or pregnant women in bed and breakfast for more than 6 weeks leaving the Council open to a legal challenge.
22. The Council is also currently failing to meet its duties with regards to 16 and 17 year olds by not providing suitable supported housing, again it not only opens the Council to legal challenge but also increases the likelihood of these vulnerable young people becoming further socially excluded.
23. Future homelessness funding could be jeopardised by failing to meet government targets. Also failing to meet these targets will have an impact on the Council's overall objective of achieving a status of Excellent.
24. There is an opportunity to make better use of some council housing that is currently underused.
25. Any provision of specifically dedicated homeless accommodation, especially in the form of a small hostel is likely to be controversial.
26. The preparation, funding, consultation and implementation of any policy is likely to be lengthy and would have to form part of a planned programme for a number of agencies including this Council.

Risk Analysis

27. The following have been assessed as the potential risks associated with this issue.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating Actions
Continued use of bed and breakfast	High	High	Impact on General Fund and possible loss of further ODPM funding
Failure to meet performance Indicator targets	High	High	Will effect overall Council performance
Increased risk of further social exclusion of young homeless people	High	High	Impact on the general community