

# MUNICIPAL YEAR 2013/2014 REPORT NO. 140

**MEETING TITLE AND DATE:**

Cabinet  
11 December 2013

**REPORT OF:**

Director of Health, Housing and  
Adult Social Care

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Agenda – Part: 1	Item: 6
<b>Subject: Enfield's Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018</b>	
<b>Wards: All</b>	
<b>Key Decision No: KD 3822</b>	
<b>Cabinet Member consulted:</b>	
<b>Cllr Oyken</b>	

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 It is a legal requirement under the Homelessness Act 2002 for local authorities to carry out a Homelessness Review and formulate a Homelessness Strategy based on the results of the review every five years.

1.2 Enfield's new 5 year Homelessness Strategy underpins a key priority and area of work for Enfield on tackling and preventing homelessness in the borough which requires considerable and continuing resources.

1.3. Enfield's Homelessness Strategy sets out the intentions of the Council and its partners to prevent and address homelessness in the borough.

1.4 Information is provided in this report on:

- Why a new Homelessness Strategy is needed
- How a new one has been developed
- The key issues arising from Enfield's Homelessness Review
- The key issues and challenges for Enfield in addressing homelessness
- The Vision, Ambitions and Action Plan for Enfield's new Homelessness Strategy

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The report requests Cabinet approval for the Council's Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 and Action Plan

### **3. BACKGROUND**

#### **3.1 Reasons for Having a Homelessness Strategy**

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to carry out a Homelessness Review and formulate a strategy based on the results of the review that includes plans for:

- Preventing homelessness
- Ensuring sufficient accommodation is available for people who are, or who may become homeless
- Ensuring there are satisfactory support services for people who are, or may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again

Enfield's new 5 year Homelessness Strategy plays an essential part in delivering aspects of Enfield's 15 year Housing Strategy agreed by Cabinet in 2012. It also underpins a key priority and area of work for Enfield on tackling and preventing homelessness in the borough which requires considerable and continuing resources. Enfield's Homelessness strategy sets out the Council and it's partner's plans to prevent and address homelessness in the borough

#### **3.2 How Enfield developed its Homelessness Strategy**

Enfield's Homelessness Strategy has been developed using findings from a comprehensive Review of homelessness undertaken between January-June 2013. This involved:

- Setting up a Homelessness Strategy Steering Group made up of statutory, private sector and voluntary organisations to oversee the Review and development of the strategy.
- Setting up a Homelessness Operational Steering Group to involve front-line staff in shaping and developing the Homelessness Strategy.
- Consultation and involvement with a wide range of stakeholders, including private and voluntary sector partners, Council Members, local residents, service users and staff
- A review and evaluation of outcomes from the previous homelessness strategy and action plan 2008-2013
- A review of statistical data and trends about homelessness.
- Analysis of recent Census data to understand the demographics and potential growth in population in Enfield for the future.

- Comparing Enfield's performance against best practise and other Local Authorities performance.
- Writing the Strategy and producing a detailed 5 year action plan.

### **3.3 Key issues identified from Enfield's Homelessness Review**

#### **3.3.1 Partnership Working**

Effectively preventing and reducing homelessness in Enfield relies upon the council working with a wide range of partners. Our partner's commitment to our ambitions and a willingness to play their part are essential to the success of addressing homelessness in the borough. Pooling knowledge, resources and expertise has never been more important in the current economic climate with resources being stretched.

#### **3.3.2 Changes in Government Policy**

Enfield's Homelessness Strategy has been developed at a time of significant change to national policy relating to welfare and social housing reform. Two key changes in government policy are now driving the context in which homeless services are provided:

##### Welfare reform Act 2012 - key changes are:

- Caps on welfare benefit so that working age households can no longer receive more than a total in benefits per week of £500 for a family and £350 for a single person or couple without children
- Council Tax Local Support Scheme, requiring all working age claimants to pay something towards council tax
- Bedroom Tax, any working age claimant in social rented housing will no longer receive housing benefit for a spare room.

##### The Localism Act 2011 - Key changes are:

- Discharge of the main homelessness duty with an offer of a suitable home in the private rented sector.
- Greater flexibility for Council's to decide who can apply to their housing register to obtain social rented housing.
- Reduced funding for Registered Providers to build affordable new homes.
- Flexibility for Housing Providers to use shorter fixed term tenancies and the Affordable Rent Model.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ability to charge rent up to 80% of the local market rents

### 3.3.3 The Economic downturn

The impact of the economic downturn on Enfield has been:

- Increased deprivation in the area, Enfield has risen six places in the last 5 years to 64th<sup>2</sup> most deprived local authority in England
- Increased levels of un-employment, figures for 2012 showed Enfield has the fifth lowest employment rate in London and above average increases in all the main working age benefits since 2008
- Reduced income levels both earned and from welfare benefits
- Increased inability to access affordable housing options

### 3.3.4 Changes in the local housing market

An understanding of the housing markets in Enfield and the changes happening within them is important for addressing homelessness. Enfield's homelessness review found the following facts about Enfield's local housing market:

- Social rented homes in Enfield are in very short supply. The Council let 693 Council and housing association homes in 2012/13<sup>3</sup>. Enfield's Lettings Forecast predicted 568 will become available for letting in 2013/14
- Under the Government's Affordable Homes Programme 2011-15, there are no new 'handovers' of housing association homes to be let on social rent terms planned in Enfield beyond 2013/14<sup>4</sup>.
- Owner occupation in Enfield has seen a significant decline. The high cost of home ownership has made it increasingly difficult for local people to buy somewhere to live with prices rising faster than earnings. Many of those who would have bought now rent
- There has been dramatic growth in Enfield's private rented sector over the last decade. Rents are escalating and demand is outgrowing supply. Reasons for increasing demand and supply include:
  - Low levels of social rented homes becoming available for letting so households who expected a home in the social rented sector are looking to the private rented sector instead.
  - Competing claims across the sector, e.g. other Authorities with larger budgets outbidding for the supply
  - Landlords withdrawing from letting homes to benefit dependent households due to Government changes to reduce the LHA and reform to welfare benefits

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<sup>2</sup> Index of multiple deprivation figures

<sup>3</sup> Breakdown of lettings: Council General Needs: 392; Council sheltered: 93; Housing association: 208

<sup>4</sup> Enabling Programme Outcomes 2008/13 – Enabling Team 21/6/13

### **3.3.5 Changing reasons for homelessness acceptances**

Under the Homelessness Law, the main reason for homeless acceptances has changed in Enfield during the last five years, from family or friend ejection, to the loss of private rented accommodation.

A summary of Enfield's Homelessness Review is available in the Member's library and on the Council's website.

## **3.4 Challenges for Enfield in Addressing Homelessness**

### **3.4.1 Sustaining the involvement of Partners**

It is essential that partners ensure homelessness and their role in helping to manage it in Enfield becomes and remains a priority for them. The challenge for the Council will be to obtain and sustain the involvement of partners in preventing and tackling homelessness in Enfield, whilst recognising the pressures they face and the differences in our respective roles and responsibilities.

#### **3.4.1 An increased demand for housing options and advice services**

After declining for many years, the number of homeless acceptances and homeless decisions in Enfield has risen; this has led to a significant increase in demand for Enfield's housing options and advice services for homeless households or those threatened with homelessness covering:

- Sustaining tenancies in the private rented sector
- Assisting households with care and support needs
- Preventing increased street homelessness

#### **3.4.2 The lack of affordable, good quality private rented homes in Enfield to meet the increased demand from those in housing need.**

It has become far more difficult for Enfield to source good quality, affordable local homes for:

- Preventing homelessness
- Discharging Enfield's legal duty to provide housing for homeless households
- Maintaining Enfield's emergency housing portfolio for homeless households

#### **3.4.4 The impact of a shortage of Council and Housing Association Homes for letting**

The serious shortage of council and housing association homes to meet housing need has resulted in the Council having to prioritise who is allocated the homes available. The current housing priorities for the Council are:

- rehousing tenants living in homes that are included in the Council's Estate Renewal programme and
- Housing homeless households living in expensive emergency accommodation prior to 9/11/12 who are owed a housing duty by the Council.

The remaining homes are prioritised for those with high care and support needs, which means:

- Those without high care and support needs will find themselves renting from a private landlord and will need to consider alternative affordable housing options.
- It will take longer to house homeless households placed in Enfield's emergency housing before 9/11/12 who are owed a full housing duty by the Council

### **3.4.5 Engaging effectively with residents about the changes and how Enfield can assist.**

Enfield's Homelessness Strategy has been developed at a time of unprecedented welfare and housing policy change, the changes and their impact need to be communicated effectively to local people and the organisations that work with and support them. We need to continue to assess the impact of the changes on service users and plan services accordingly

### **3.4.6 Continuing to provide an effective and value for money housing options and advice service.**

Making best use of Council money and partnership working is key to successfully achieving value for money housing options and advice service in Enfield. In a climate of increased demand for services, increased costs of homelessness and cuts to public spending it is ever more challenging to continue to provide effective and value for money services, making it essential to share knowledge, expertise and pool resources with partners to meet that challenge

## **3.5 Enfield's Vision for preventing and tackling homelessness**

Extensive external consultation took place on the following vision for preventing and tackling homelessness which is set out below:

Eliminate homelessness in the borough and enable people to make their own informed choices for housing that they can afford

## **3.6 Enfield's Ambitions for its Homelessness Strategy**

Enfield's Homelessness Review identified that the five key ambitions from Enfield's Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013 are still relevant. The wording of these ambitions were refined and consulted on at the same time as the vision above.

- Ambition 1** Preventing homelessness in Enfield and enabling households to find homes they can afford
- Ambition 2:** Securing adequate accommodation to meet the needs of homeless households and those at risk of homelessness.
- Ambition 3:** Enabling those with assessed support needs to live independently in their own homes and safeguard those who cannot
- Ambition 4:** Providing an excellent standard of customer service
- Ambition 5:** Ensure best use of public money and other resources

### **3.7 Consultation**

Two rounds of consultation were undertaken to inform the development of Enfield's Homelessness Strategy. A summary of survey questions and responses is available in the member's library and on the Council's Website.

### **3.8 Action Plan**

Enfield's Homelessness Strategy contains a comprehensive Action Plan, setting out Enfield's key priorities for achieving the ambitions identified from the review. It is envisaged that as Enfield's Action Plan is implemented and work with our partners continues, it will be subject to change and update.

## **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

No alternative options were considered as it is a statutory requirement for every local authority to publish a Homelessness Strategy every 5 years

## **5. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is imperative that at this time of unparalleled national policy change and Government financial austerity measures, the strategic direction is clearly set out by Enfield Council and its Partners for preventing and tackling homelessness in the borough, and that it is endorsed by Cabinet to demonstrate Enfield's corporate commitment to addressing homelessness in Enfield.

## **6. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, RESOURCES AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS**

### **6.1 Financial Implications**

Enfield's homelessness strategy includes a comprehensive action plan, setting out Enfield's key priorities for achieving the ambitions identified above. Finance was presented with an action plan which shows that all actions will be funded within existing Community Housing resources plus an additional £3.329m available to the service in 2014/15 through the Council's MTFP.

Where additional resources are required, the service will approach other groups, RSL partners, and the HRA for further funding to enable the action plan to be achieved.

### **6.2 Legal Implications**

By the Homelessness Act 2002 section 1, housing authorities were required to carry out a homelessness review and devise and publish a strategy based on the review. By sections 1(3) and (4), the first such strategy had to be drawn up within a year of the section coming into force and thereafter at least every five years.

A homelessness strategy is defined at section 3(1) as one formulated in order to:

- a) Prevent homelessness in an authority's area;
- b) Secure that accommodation is and will be available in that area for people who are or may become homeless; and
- c) Provide support for such people or those who have been homeless and need support to prevent it recurring.

There is no legal requirement that specific objectives or plans should be included in the strategy as such matters are left to the discretion of the Authority. However authorities must when formulating or modifying a homelessness strategy have regard to its current allocation scheme, its current tenancy strategy, the current London housing strategy and equalities issues.

### **6.3 Property Implications**

None

## **7. KEY RISKS**

Any risks identified when implementing the Strategy and Action Plan will be managed through existing departmental risk management arrangements.

## **8. IMPACT ON COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

### **8.1 Fairness for All**

Enfield's Homelessness Strategy is based on intelligence obtained from the Homelessness Review, including demographic and homeless trends in Enfield. The Homelessness Strategy and its associated action plan were developed from this intelligence and aim to ensure the fair provision of homelessness services targeted to the individual needs of homeless households and those threatened with homelessness.

### **8.2 Growth and Sustainability**

Enfield's Homelessness Strategy supports national and local priorities for addressing worklessness, and encourages partnership working to assist homeless households in the borough with training and employment opportunities

The Strategy also provides business opportunities and support for local private sector housing providers.

Enfield's Homeless Strategy also seeks to improve on existing partnership arrangements with the voluntary and community sector, to ensure that there is an adequate range of homelessness prevention, advice and support services available for the whole community

### **8.3 Strong Communities**

Enfield's Homelessness Strategy is committed to providing services that have regard to a household's contribution to the community through employment or voluntary work particularly when making decisions around suitability of accommodation or the location of any accommodation provided

## **9. EQUALITIES IMPACT IMPLICATIONS**

A full predictive equality impact assessment has been carried out on the proposed Homelessness Strategy, and is available for inspection. Consultation has been undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders including partners in the private and voluntary sector, Members, residents, service users, homeless households in temporary accommodation and staff. As a result, the Action Plan within the Strategy sets out a range of measures for tackling homelessness in Enfield through providing positive interventions and promoting the inclusion of all disadvantaged groups. No adverse impact is envisaged.

## **10. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

A performance management framework is in place to monitor outcomes from the work of Enfield's Homelessness Services.

Enfield's Homelessness Strategy Action Plan will be kept under review with outcomes reported to Enfield's Housing Strategic Partnership annually.

**11. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

None

**12. HR IMPLICATIONS**

None

**13. PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

Enfield's homelessness strategy supports the national and corporate commitment to reducing inequality in health outcomes for homeless households. Housing is one of the greatest determinants of life-expectancy and potentially health inequality. Life expectancy for the homeless is less than 50 yrs of age<sup>5</sup>, which is more than a third lower than the borough average. This strategy aims to prevent and reduce homelessness and to support those who either become or are in danger of becoming homeless. The success of the strategy will be monitored but it is expected that it will contribute to maintaining or improving public health

**Background Papers**

None

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<sup>5</sup> Information provided by Glenn Stewart, Public Health