

Summary Fair Treatment Assessment (FTA)

Area for Assessment:	
Name of service or function etc	Solihull Homelessness Strategy 2012-2015
Which Service does this affect?	Policy and Spatial Planning Services
Is this a new, existing or revised function?	Revised strategy
Summary of findings:	
Main conclusions on the likely impact of the function on different equality groups (protected characteristics):	
<p>Local authorities are required by law to produce a homelessness strategy.</p> <p>Solihull's current Homelessness Strategy covers the three-year period from 2012 to the end of March 2015. This was approved by the Council's full cabinet in July 2012. This is the fourth Homelessness Strategy for Solihull with previous ones covering 2003-2005, 2005-2008 and 2009-2011.</p> <p>The Strategy is based upon a comprehensive review of homelessness in Solihull which has included consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The Homelessness Review (2012) provides up to date information about the current and likely future levels of homelessness in Solihull, the range of services that are provided and activities that are carried out to tackle and prevent homelessness and the resources available to the Council and its partners to deliver these services. All documents relating to the Homelessness Strategy can be found on the Council's website using the following link: http://www.solihull.gov.uk/policies/homelessnessstrategy.htm</p> <p>The Homelessness Strategy acts as a focus for bringing together all agencies involved in providing services to homeless and potentially homeless households in Solihull. Homelessness policy and initiatives are developed by the Council in consultation with a wide range of internal and external partners. A Multi-Agency Homelessness Forum (MAHF) is convened by the Housing Team within the Places Directorate to provide a focus for this. This draws together representation from Solihull Community Housing (SCH) who delivers the homelessness and housing advice service on behalf of the Council, Council teams from the People and Resources Directorates, Citizens Advice, housing associations, providers of specialist accommodation and support services and a range of other voluntary and community sector organisations.</p> <p>The Strategy aims to prevent homelessness in Solihull and provide a quality response to those affected by homelessness. This overarching aim will be progressed through the following five objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with relevant statutory and voluntary sector organisations to prevent homelessness through the provision of timely housing options and advice and support to vulnerable people 2. Supporting residents through the economic downturn and the changes being implemented through welfare and benefit reform 3. Preventing youth homelessness and enabling the provision of a range of housing options to meet the needs of those young people who are homeless / threatened with homelessness 	

4. Facilitating the supply of temporary and longer term accommodation options and enabling the development of accommodation and support services for vulnerable people
5. Improving services to customers

The statutory homelessness service is delivered by SCH on the Council's behalf and more general housing advice and support services are provided by a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations. The FTA has primarily focused on data collected and reported by SCH which covers information collected from those customers that attend a housing options / homelessness prevention interview and those customers who go on to be accepted as homeless which means the Council has a duty to provide them with accommodation. Where data is available on the implementation of specific projects or services this has also been used and in cases where local information is not available findings from national research / evidence have been used.

The data available has shown that:

- Young people are overrepresented in homeless statistics. Tackling and preventing youth homelessness is therefore a key priority for the homelessness strategy. It has however been noted that older people are likely to have differing accommodation needs to younger people; these needs are addressed in more detail as part of Solihull's Independent Living and Extra Care Housing Strategy which is currently out for consultation.
- People with physical disabilities and / or mental health needs may be disadvantaged by access arrangements and by the operation of certain policies and procedures. Recognising this there are housing related support services in place to offer enhanced support to those who are particularly vulnerable, the homelessness service can be accessed in a variety of ways with staff offering home visits or telephone interviews to those unable to make it into the housing offices and for those who do attend one of SCH's offices they are easy to access and additional help can be provided on request. In addition a detailed analysis of the current and future accommodation and support needs of people with physical and sensory disabilities, people with mental health needs and people with learning disabilities is included in the draft Independent Living and Extra Care Housing Strategy which is currently being consulted on.
- There is a comprehensive assessment process in place between SCH and the Council's Children and Young People's Service which responds to the accommodation and wider support needs of homeless 16 & 17 year olds and ensures that vulnerable young people are effectively supported. In addition there is a Care Leavers Protocol in place to ensure that young people leaving care aged 18 – 21 are given sufficient priority within the Council's housing allocations scheme; in 2011/12 37 young people were effectively housed through this process.
- There is nothing in the evidence available to suggest that there are any negative impacts for expectant or new mothers; pregnant women are a specific priority need group recognised in the Homelessness legislation and are given appropriate support to meet their needs (this includes the provision of emergency temporary accommodation if they have nowhere else to stay).
- People from BAME groups are slightly over-represented in terms of the proportion accessing the homelessness and housing advice service (BAME groups made up 14% of housing options interviews, 12% of homeless applications and 13% of homeless acceptances) although this is less so when looking at 2009 mid-year population estimates for Solihull as opposed to 2001 census results. Within this there are concerns that people from BAME communities may not be aware of the services available to tackle and prevent homelessness and that services may not always be accessible / tailored to their needs, with national research suggesting that people from BAME communities often report a poor experience of homelessness services, choosing not to access services available as a result. In response to

these concerns SCH provide a number of interventions to make services more accessible (e.g. translation and interpretation services available, user friendly website, services advertised across a range of community facilities and locations) and ensure that all staff receive regular training and updates about equalities and diversity. In addition specific housing related support is provided by a specialist BAME housing association (Ashram Housing) to a small number of BAME households in Solihull.

- National research would suggest that faith and cultural beliefs may be both a possible cause of homelessness and a potential reason for the difference in the experience of homelessness between different minority ethnic groups. This is also unlikely to appear in local data collection due to potential underreporting / reluctance of people to approach services in the first place.
- Female applicants make up almost two thirds of those who attend housing options interviews and of those who go on to be accepted as homeless. In addition domestic abuse is consistently one of the top 3 reasons for homelessness in Solihull with the majority of people who are homeless as a result of this being female. This might suggest that men feel less comfortable approaching housing advice and homelessness services for advice, assistance and support. However it is also, in part, likely to reflect the priority need categories in the homelessness legislation which prioritise families with children, lone parents or expectant mothers.
- National research carried out by Shelter suggests that people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) are more likely to feel that they are treated differently to heterosexual people when accessing housing services. SCH have been collecting monitoring information on sexual orientation from all those accessing the homelessness and housing advice service and this has enabled some local monitoring. In addition detailed data collection and analysis is carried out in relation to people who are threatened with homelessness as a result of domestic abuse and this provides detail on the victim's relationship to the perpetrator as well as allowing targeted support to be provided.
- Information on carers, gender reassignment, marriage / civil partnership and socio-economic disadvantage is not routinely collected at a local level, although analysis has been carried out as part of the FTA using other available data. There is however a need to decide whether to change existing data collection and monitoring processes to include all relevant groups / characteristics as set out within the Equality Act 2010.
- Research into homelessness and multiple exclusion has shown that childhood experience is a strong indicator of future vulnerability to homelessness (e.g. events such as abuse, bullying, witnessing alcoholism or domestic abuse or experiencing these issues in childhood are strongly correlated to complex and chaotic lifestyles in adulthood which often include periods of homelessness and rough sleeping). This provides support for intervention at much earlier stages in the life course of individuals, something which is beyond the remit of the homelessness and housing advice service in isolation but which links very closely to the troubled families work that the Council and partner agencies are currently implementing in Solihull.

Overall the FTA has shown that there is a much improved basis for monitoring potential differential impacts amongst each equality group and for all areas it can be shown that the Homelessness Strategy is recognising and putting actions in place to respond to the key issues raised. Furthermore the Homelessness Strategy recognises potential gaps and recommends actions to address these gaps. The FTA has however shown that there are particular risk factors for some of the equality groups and that for some groups there might be an issue of underuse of services either due to past experience or a reluctance to ask for advice and assistance arising from a feeling that services are unlikely to meet their needs. These issues need to be addressed through raising awareness of the range of services provided and ensuring that all partners are aware of and equipped to respond to the particular risk factors identified for each of the equality groups.

Actions:		
Actions identified to address negative impacts identified or to better promote equality, human rights, cohesive and sustainable communities and safeguarding issues		
Action	Outcome	Timescale
Consider whether information should be collected on those characteristics included in the Equality Act (2010) which are not routinely monitored by SCH (carers, gender reassignment, marriage / civil partnership and socio-economic disadvantage)	Regular monitoring arrangements agreed and reports in place. Increased understanding of who is accessing services and what the potential gaps might be.	By April 2013 (to allow full year monitoring for 2013/14)
Agree outcome of the pilot arrangements that have been operating for the homelessness prevention / housing options team to collect information on sexual orientation and faith, religion or belief.	Formalised arrangements for the collection of data on sexual orientation and faith, religion or belief.	By April 2013 (to allow any new arrangements to coincide with other changes as set out above and to allow full monitoring for 2013/14)
Based on the outcome of the above 2 actions there is likely to be a need to review IT systems / processes in place for recording and monitoring equalities and diversity information across the services provided by SCH.	Processes and operating systems in place which support the collection of data on equality and diversity in line with decisions made by SCH about which information should be routinely collected.	By April 2013 (to enable any additional data collection required as a result of earlier actions)
Continue to provide up to date and regular equality and diversity training for all frontline officers working in the homelessness and housing advice service.	Increased understanding of staff to be able to respond to and meet the needs of those groups / protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010.	On-going (Training for all new members of staff and updated regularly after that)
Review & further develop advice and prevention options focused on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people (specifically 16 & 17 year olds and under 35's) • Older people in housing need • Couples and single people without children • Victims of domestic abuse • Ex-offender 	Homelessness prevented wherever possible through timely and effective housing advice and options.	From Year 1 of the H/ness Strategy (12/13) and on-going
Work with partners to address the lack of accommodation options for non-priority and single homeless households (particularly those aged under 35)	Prevention of homelessness and targeted advice / suitable and affordable housing options in place for single, homeless people under the age of 35.	From Year 1 of the H/ness Strategy (12/13) and on-going
Work with the Council and partner organisations to help deliver the families facing multiple problems / troubles families work.	Housing advice and homelessness services to contribute to a coordinate recovery service to support families facing multiple problems.	From April 12 and on-going.
Prevent youth homelessness and enable the provision of a range of housing options to meet the needs of those young people who are homeless / threatened with homelessness.	Young people are encouraged to access a range of support services and to deal with housing / support issues as early as possible. Range of suitable housing options available for young people who can no longer stay in the parental home or who need temporary accommodation whilst issues with parents / guardians are resolved.	From April 12 and on-going
Review available options for meeting the need for emergency and direct access accommodation for vulnerable people	Options for the future provision of emergency, direct access accommodation for single, homeless people explored and decision made	By end of year 3 of the strategy – March 2015)

(particularly rough sleepers, single people and young people).	re: future provision.	
Develop / further develop integrated pathways of support for vulnerable client groups dealing with housing as well as other identified support needs.	Tailored support provided to vulnerable households enabling them to access and maintain suitable accommodation and to address wider support needs.	From Year 1 of the H/ness Strategy (12/13) and on-going
Review the range of information provided to customers about homelessness and housing options and build on / improve accessibility for vulnerable customers, specifically those where negative impacts regarding accessibility have been identified as part of the FTA. This should include information on homelessness and advice on prevention made available to all customers on SCH's website (with appropriate links from SMBC's website)	Raise awareness of information and services to encourage people facing homelessness to seek advice and support at an early stage. All information and service provision meets the diverse needs of customers and is available through a range of access points.	By April 2013 & work on-going
Utilise customer profiling on equality and diversity strands / protected characteristics more effectively to shape future service delivery and identify gaps in provision / potential negative impacts.	Increased knowledge and understanding of customers needs, of who services are benefiting and of any gaps in provision.	From Year 2 of the H/ness Strategy (13/14) and on-going
Date Assessment Completed	12 July 2012	