Agenda Item IMD13

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION
REFERENCE IMD: IMD 2019/13

TITLE	'Tackling Homelessness Together' Consultation Response
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Housing - Norman Jorgensen
DATE, **MEETING ROOM and TIME**	13 May 2019 FF14 at 17:30
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers, Director of Locality and Customer Services - Sarah Hollamby

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PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

In submitting a formal response to this consultation, the Council seeks to ensure that the direction taken by Government is informed by Wokingham Borough's local needs and circumstances.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Housing approves the consultation response at Appendix 1 for submission.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This consultation assesses the current local delivery of homelessness and seeks views on how the Government could improve local accountability for the delivery of homelessness services. The full consultation document can be found here. The consultation covers the following:

- The effectiveness of existing non-statutory and statutory local accountability and partnership structures.
- The challenges and opportunities in two-tier authorities (not applicable to Wokingham Borough Council as a unitary authority).
- Whether the Government should introduce Homelessness Reduction Boards and, if so, how this could be done most effectively.
- How to improve local accountability and partnership working.

The Council's response to this consultation is included at Appendix 1.

The Council considers that Homelessness Reduction Boards would best serve local authorities with particularly high levels of homelessness. However, the Council is currently reviewing existing structures in the borough and is therefore prepared to implement a Homelessness Reduction Board if required.

The response agrees with Government proposals to consider the implementation of a Duty to Co-operate on delivery partners. The Council is receptive to the Government's proposed data pilots, provided that the outcomes framework remains relevant at a local level.

The consultation closes on 16th May 2019.

Background

The Government opened this consultation on 21st February 2019. The full consultation document can be found here. The consultation closes on 16th May 2019.

This consultation reviews the current setup of homelessness delivery and accountability structures, and request views on improving provision.

The consultation poses questions about where our current collaborations are working, what more we can do, what is stopping us from doing it, how we can make better use of data and how we can improve accountability. The consultation covers the following:

- The effectiveness of existing non-statutory and statutory local accountability and partnership structures.
- The challenges and opportunities in two-tier authorities (not applicable to Wokingham Borough Council as a unitary authority).
- Whether the Government should introduce Homelessness Reduction Boards and, if so, how this could be done most effectively.
- How to improve local accountability and partnership working.

Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)

The Government does not put forward detailed proposals in this consultation. However, analysis of current accountability structures and partnership working will take place following this consultation. Therefore, our response seeks to highlight the strengths of the Council in these areas.

The consultation seeks views on proposals to introduce Homelessness Reduction Boards. If implemented, there will be additional resource implications for the Council to hold Homelessness Reduction Boards.

The response at Appendix 1 confirms that, although the Council does not consider that the homelessness levels in this borough warrant a mandatory Homelessness Reduction Board, the Council plans to reframe a similar existing structure as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act action plan. Therefore, should Homelessness Reduction Boards become mandatory for all local authorities, the Council will be in a position to comply.

The consultation also seeks views on the merits and drawbacks of implementing a Duty to Co-operate on local delivery partners. If a Duty to Co-operate is implemented, the Council will need to ensure compliance.

The response indicates the Council's support for the proposed Duty to Co-operate. As a next step to the Duty to Refer implemented by the Homelessness Reduction Act, this duty could assist the Council when working with partners and form a national minimum standard to support homeless applicants.

Finally, the response requests further information on the Government's proposed data pilots. The Government's aim is to explore what data exists, the definitions and standards of data, and to develop and test an outcomes framework. The Council agrees that a consistent method of collecting and reporting data on homelessness and rough sleeping will improve analysis at both a local and national level. The response confirms that the Council wishes to ensure that any resulting outcomes framework remains relevant at a local level, and represents data and priorities that are pertinent to and reflective of this borough.

The Council's response to this consultation is included at Appendix 1.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Not Applicable
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Not Applicable
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Not Applicable

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
If implemented, a Homelessness Reduction Board and the Duty to Co-operate will have additional resource implications. It is not clear in the Government's consultation paper whether there will be new funding to support this.

Cross-Council Implications
If implemented, a Homelessness Reduction Board and the Duty to Co-operate will require input from all Council areas.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	No additional comments.
Monitoring Officer	No additional comments.
Leader of the Council	No additional comments.

List of Background Papers
The full consultation document can be found here.

Contact Victoria Higgins	Service Place Commissioning
Telephone No Tel: 0118 974 6562	Email victoria.higgins@wokingham.gov.uk

WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO

THE TACKLING HOMELESSNESS TOGETHER CONSULTATION.

Consultation Questions

Existing non-statutory accountability structures

Question 1: What non-statutory structures are you aware of in your area that cover homelessness as part of their agenda? For each of these please indicate which of the following could be considered one of their objectives:

a) Developing a strategic vision for tackling homelessness in the area;
b) Agreeing actions that each delivery partner will take forward to help reduce homelessness;
c) Co-ordinating use of funding and resources to reduce homelessness;
d) Evaluating the effectiveness of homelessness services and interventions;
e) Monitoring progress towards the delivery of the local homelessness strategy;
f) Holding the local housing authority to account for the outcomes they achieve with people who are at risk of homelessness or are homeless, using key data and evidence;
g) Holding delivery partners to account for the outcomes they achieve with people who are at risk of homelessness or are homeless, using key data and evidence;
h) Discussion of how to manage individual cases;
i) Support for specific vulnerable groups, for example offenders; and
j) Other, please specify.

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Non-statutory Structure	Attendees	Frequency	a)	b)	c)	d)	e)	f)	g)	h)	i)	j)
Housing Panel (WBC)	Housing Needs/Adult Services	Ad hoc.		√	√	√	√			√		
Rough Sleepers Group (WBC)	Multi-agency	Monthly	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Affordable Housing Implementation Group.	WBC/Members	Bi-monthly				√	√	√				
Wokingham Borough Homelessness Forum (Salvation Army)	Multi-agency	Quarterly	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	
South East Homelessness Forum	Multi-agency	Quarterly	√			√						
RP Partnership Meeting	WBC/RPs	Quarterly				√				√		
Strategic Substance Misuse and Violence Against Women and Girls	Multi-agency	Quarterly								√	√	
Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel	WBC/Councillors/Involved Tenants	Monthly		√		√	√	√				

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Question 2: How effective are the non-statutory structures in your area in meeting their stated objectives?

Existing non-statutory structures in Wokingham Borough enable both formal decision making and informal discussion, and facilitate accountability and partnership working. The voluntary sector in Wokingham is a key partner in the delivery of local authority objectives to reduce homelessness. The current range of non-statutory structures includes a valuable mix of participants from across the Council and voluntary sector.

Question 3: More generally, what are your views on whether these sorts of non-statutory structures can drive system change, support the reduction of homelessness in the local area and hold all local partners to account for delivering their commitments?

All of the non-statutory bodies listed under Question 1 play a role in supporting the reduction of homelessness in the borough, whether as a result of strategic planning, partnership working or individual case discussions.

The Council is committed to driving system change in the borough when needed, and works with non-statutory structures in the borough to achieve this. The Council has a strong record of working in partnership with the local voluntary sector, but cannot always hold third parties to account.

Existing statutory accountability structures

Question 4: Which statutory structures and individuals with statutory roles in your local area currently have strategic and operational conversations about how individual services and interventions can help reduce homelessness?

The following roles assume responsibility for strategic and operational conversations about services and interventions to reduce homelessness in the borough:

- Director Locality and Customer Services
- Director Corporate Services
- Assistant Director, Housing, Income and Assessments
- Assistant Director – Place Commissioning
- Executive Member for Housing

Additionally, Wokingham Borough Council has created a Homelessness Reduction Act Specialist role following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The Council operates a number of statutory structures which contribute to the prevention and reduction of homelessness in the borough. Examples include the Community Safety Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board, Youth Offending Board and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).

Question 5: Which statutory structures and individuals with statutory roles in your local area do you think should be having strategic and operational conversations about how to reduce homelessness?

In addition to the response to Question 4, in order to ensure a comprehensive service is provided to those experiencing housing crisis, the Council considers that additional links

between statutory bodies in the borough would be beneficial. For example, rough sleepers should automatically trigger safeguarding. The Council also considers that more engagement with Thames Valley Police would be beneficial.

Question 6: Please describe how you think the statutory structures and individuals with statutory roles in your area should be discussing and contributing to plans and actions to reduce homelessness i.e. what should they be doing?

The Council is committed to tackling homelessness, and is currently in the process of devising a new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to be adopted later on this year. This strategy will guide the strategic and operational aims of the Council to prevent and reduce homelessness.

The existing statutory structures and individuals with statutory roles, along with Members, the voluntary sector and the public will be consulted on the strategy, which will be supported by action plans focused on delivering outcomes including the reduction of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Two-tier authorities

Question 7: For homelessness services alone, what are your views on how effective two-tier working is in your area, the specific challenges in two-tier working and/or the opportunities for strengthening joint working in two-tier areas?

Not applicable - Wokingham Borough Council is a unitary authority.

Question 8: If you work in an area with two-tier local government, which individuals in a higher or lower tier of local government do you believe should have a responsibility for reducing homelessness and do you think they are already involved in strategic and operational conversations? Please explain your answer.

Not applicable - Wokingham Borough Council is a unitary authority.

Homelessness Reduction Boards

Question 9: What are your views on whether the aims for Homelessness Reduction Boards could be met by amending the remit and function of existing local non-statutory and/or statutory structures?

Current mechanisms and structures, including inspections, performance reporting, the Duty to Refer and Health and Wellbeing Boards, are sufficient to ensure that the Council is delivering on its objectives to tackle and reduce homelessness in the borough. Therefore, the Council does not believe that an additional Homelessness Reduction Board is needed here. This may not be the case for boroughs with higher levels of homelessness.

The Council's Homelessness Reduction Act action plan includes proposals to reframe the existing Homelessness Forum in the borough. The Council anticipates that the Forum will become responsible for monitoring progress against the new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and action plans to be adopted later this year. The new structure may also assume responsibility for reviewing funding and resources. This redesigned structure could become a Homelessness Reduction Board if required.

Question 10: What are your views on the merits and drawbacks of establishing Homelessness Reduction Boards, and whether we should establish them?

The Council would be concerned about the impact of excessive regulation on our existing collaborative environment. However, Homelessness Reduction Boards could play a key role in overseeing the work of the local authority. This structure could be vested in the voluntary sector and map priorities, consider funding and resources, review outcomes and deliver accountability.

If we were to establish Homelessness Reduction Boards:

Question 11: What do you think their purpose and objectives should be?

Homelessness Reduction Boards should facilitate a mix of strategic and operational planning, and bring together the local authority and voluntary sector. Boards could also be a focal point for achieving outcomes for key groups such as care leavers and ex-offenders, and facilitate discussions at a regional level.

Question 12: In which authorities should Homelessness Reduction Boards be established (e.g. in all local authorities, areas of high homelessness, top-tier authorities only)?

As per the response to Question 9, the Council considers that Homelessness Reduction Boards, if implemented, are most needed in areas of high homelessness.

Question 13: Who should be members of Homelessness Reduction Boards?

Membership of Homelessness Reduction Boards would be best determined at a local level. The Council would expect Homelessness Reduction Boards to include a mix of statutory roles, local government officers and voluntary sector partners. The Council also considers that representatives from MHCLG and StreetLink would be beneficial.

Question 14: What is needed to make Homelessness Reduction Boards effective (e.g. guidance, legislation, incentives etc.)?

If implemented, Homelessness Reduction Boards will need to be supported by guidance and funding from Government, and have local accountability. A clear responsibility structure needs to be agreed, with supporting protocols on data sharing and use.

Other ways of supporting effective partnership working

Question 15: Other than through the creation of structures and roles, how else do you encourage effective partnership working in your area?

A joint strategic approach and shared objectives are essential to supporting partnership working. The Council works with agencies across the borough, including Citizens Advice Bureau, Salvation Army and Wokingham United Charities, to provide a comprehensive service to residents.

The Council regularly listens to and engages with partners, including through extensive consultation to take into account the views of our stakeholders.

Question 16: Where there is effective partnership working in your area, what are the characteristics of this and what makes the partnership effective?

The Council has developed strong working relationships with many partners in the borough over time. The Council's Housing Needs Officers, for example, regularly work with Registered Providers and the voluntary sector to support residents in housing crisis. The effectiveness of these relationships relies of a mutual understanding of priorities and constraints, clarity of purpose and open communication.

Question 17: What data exists locally to help delivery partners design services and interventions to reduce homelessness and monitor implementation, and how effectively do you think the data that is available is used?

Data is available from multiple sources including H-CLIC (P1Es), local authority housing statistics data returns, homelessness reviews and Northgate reporting tools. This data is used to design services and interventions to reduce homelessness, and to monitor progress against the Council's current strategies and action plans.

Question 18: Are there good examples of how data is being used effectively in your area and what do you think prevents the effective use of data?

The Council routinely reviews data on key issues such as the causes of homelessness in the borough, the number of 16 and 17 years olds in housing crisis, and the number of applicants presenting with substance misuse issues.

The Council considers that there is more to do to access and use external data effectively, particularly form voluntary sector partners.

Question 19: What do you think we should consider and include in the design of the data pilots?

The Council understands that the government has committed to establish data pilots to explore what data exists, and the definitions and standards of that data as part of the Rough Sleeping Strategy. The Council also understand that the Government plans to develop and test an outcomes framework. The Council agrees that a consistent method of collecting and reporting data on rough sleeping will enable better analysis at both a local and national level.

The Council wishes to ensure that the resulting outcomes framework remains relevant at a local level, and represents data and priorities that are pertinent to and reflective of Wokingham Borough.

Question 20: Do you think a Duty to Co-operate should be introduced and, if so, how do you think a Duty to Co-operate could be designed to work in practice, and what steps can we take to ensure that a duty is practical and effective?

The Council is supportive of this suggestion, providing that the duty does not become prohibitive and act as a hindrance, rather than a catalyst, for effective collaboration. The Council would welcome the introduction of a national minimum standard for cooperation with local authorities, and request further details from Government on this proposal.

Question 21: What else could the Government be doing to support partnership working across local delivery partners in an area to systemically reduce homelessness?

The Council would welcome long term funding and support from Government, based on an understanding of the local issues and priorities affecting the borough. If Homelessness Reduction Boards are imposed, the Council will require the tools to service that structure.

The Council awaits the outcome of the Government's work with the Local Government Association to develop a package of support as part of the Rough Sleeping Strategy. The Council would welcome initiatives to increase training opportunities for Officers and Members. The Council requests an opportunity to comment on plans for additional benchmarking once further detail can be shared.

Equalities

Question 22: Do you think that any of the issues discussed in this consultation could or already do have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on any individuals, in particular those with 'relevant protected characteristics' (i.e. age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation)? Please provide evidence to support your response.

The Council aims to be as open and accessible as possible. All cases are assessed on a case-by-case basis, with relevant trends and analysis feeding into wider strategic planning and policy decisions. If identified, the Council is able to address any disproportionate impact via existing structures and mechanisms

Question 23: How could any adverse impact be reduced and are there any ways we could better advance equality of opportunity? Please provide evidence to support your response.

If implemented, Homelessness Reduction Boards could play a role in addressing incidents in which homeless individuals have been harassed, discriminated against or victimised. Homelessness Reduction Boards could also become responsible for identifying and addressing challenges that apply to particular groups of homeless individuals, including those with protected characteristics. However, it is worth considering that the Council's current structures are already carrying out these roles when required.

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