

Focus on Homelessness

Introduction (Sheila Davison)

1. The priority theme for today's meeting is Homelessness. Three presentations are being given. In order to help members to prepare for the meeting, a brief summary of each presentation is provided below along with specific recommendations for the Ashford Health & Wellbeing (HWB).
2. The link between poor health outcomes and the type of housing (or lack of housing) is well acknowledged. Housing factors that can influence health inequalities include being homeless, living in poor quality or stressful housing conditions; living in communities that make health lifestyle choices difficult or living in relative poverty with expensive housing and high living costs
3. While homelessness is a specific priority for the Ashford HWB, taking action to deal with poor housing will have a positive outcome for other Ashford health and wellbeing priorities. It is suggested that the Board examines the recommendations in this light.
4. The purpose of the presentations is to help the Ashford HWB identify progress and gaps in service provision and to question how the information provided can be used to influence future projects and inform commissioning decisions.
5. Members are also asked, in advance of the meeting, to consider how the subject of homelessness links to their sphere of influence, to ask what more they believe could or should be done and to think about how the Lead Officer Group might assist the Board in terms of this priority.

Mind the Gap (Richard Robinson, Housing Improvement Manager, Ashford Borough Council)

6. This report presents 'Think Housing First', a strategy to reduce health inequalities in Kent through access to good quality and affordable housing.
7. The report requests that partners of the Ashford HWB support implementation and delivery of the 'Think Housing First' and associated action plans. The action plans have a countywide focus and it is acknowledged that some parts of the plan will have greater relevance within Ashford than others.
8. Focusing more locally the report makes additional recommendations for Ashford as follows:
 - Making available additional funding (s.106 and BCF) to help deliver remodelling of sheltered accommodation
 - Making available additional funding to delivery more disabled adaptations
 - Expanding the handyman service within sheltered schemes
 - Exploring how better support can be provided for young homeless people in order to reduce the negative impacts on their health
 - Exploring how better joint working would help to improve standards in private sector accommodation

KCC Accommodation Strategy (Christy Holden, Head of Strategic Commissioning Accommodation Solutions, Social Care)

9. This presentation is an information item that provides an overview on the Accommodation Strategy that is being developed by KCC. It will look at the future accommodation based services required for all adult client groups reviewing key considerations from the evidence base.

Ashford's Homelessness Strategy (Sharon Williams, Housing Operations Manager, Ashford Borough Council & Sylvia Roberts, Senior Housing Options Officer, Ashford Borough Council)

10. This report and presentation concerns Ashford's Homelessness Strategy. The key elements to the strategy are as follows:
 - Giving commitment to preventing homelessness wherever possible. This involves having a clear understanding of the homelessness situation in Ashford, having a commitment from all agencies to recognise homelessness triggers and supporting referral to services and providing housing advice aimed at preventing homelessness.
 - Ensuring quality housing services and suitable accommodation is provided for people for whom homelessness cannot be prevented. This involves providing quality homeless services and provision of suitable temporary accommodation.
 - Securing settled and sustainable homes, with access to housing support if needed.
11. Much of the emphasis within the strategy is on preventing homelessness, early intervention and developing housing pathways.
12. The importance of partners working together on homelessness is considered vital and having the support of the Ashford HWB is an important part of this.
13. The report raises particular issues for discussion including the following:
 - How to encourage partners to refer those under potential threat of homelessness to the Housing Options Team as soon as possible
 - Whether partners could work together in terms of securing local private rented accommodation
 - What mechanism can be employed to open and then maintain dialogue between partners over the re-fresh and subsequent updating of the Homelessness Strategy
 - How to jointly identify clear housing pathways for vulnerable people
 - Can we develop a rapid response service for young people early intervention or adolescent teams to make the maximum joint effort to keep a young person at home, with support to sustain them at home
 - How does the Council further develop links with the health & social care in relation to preventing people from becoming homeless and what are the communication networks to achieve this.

Recommendations to the Board (Christina Fuller)

14. The AHWB is asked to:

- a) Support the implementation and delivery of the 'Think Housing First' and agree a further report is presented to the Ashford HWB where detailed costs and benefits of delivering the action plans are presented together with recommendations as to how Ashford intends to take the actions forward.
- b) Note the information provided within the KCC Accommodation Strategy and provide feedback as appropriate.
- c) Support the implementation and delivery of the Homelessness Strategy and to address as part of that process up the issues highlighted within the report. Progress to be reported to a future Ashford HWB.