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CABINET MEETING

Officer response to recommendations in the Homelessness Task and Finish Group Report

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Introduction

Officers welcome this report and the effort that was put into producing it. It provides valuable insight and the Group has managed to include people who are not normally engaged. It has also raised awareness of the issues about and amongst different agencies and voluntary groups.

Comments on Recommendation 1

Officers believe this provides an opportunity to explore ways of delivering a co-ordinated model described in the report. We also welcome the Group's intention that this report should inform the Council's future housing policy.

We need to emphasise, as does the report, that this is not just about housing and we would seek to influence wider policy discussions and developments.

It is our view that the key issue is not so much about co-ordination as about engagement. Co-ordination needs to be tailored to the needs of individuals and a measure of success would be that people are able to sustain their housing and access mainstream services. We believe that a key element of a co-ordinated model would be targeted outreach.

The recommendation has not been costed and Cabinet Members and Councillors will be aware that we are struggling to meet the financial costs of delivering our statutory duties regarding homelessness and the recommended approach may require additional resource. Organisations already work together, but the creation of an "umbrella organisation" would need to be funded and managed.

MKC has commissioned HQN to carry out an independent Review of Homelessness (as required by Section 1(a) of the Homelessness Act 2002) and to write and consult on a Response to Homelessness Strategy for Milton Keynes (as required by Section 1(b) of the Homelessness Act 2001).

The Task and Finish Group has already met with the consultant from HQN and will be fully engaged in the work ahead. We will present the proposed strategy to Cabinet in the summer.

Comments on Recommendation 2

The Adopted Core Strategy includes a policy which says the Council will plan to meet specific housing needs including special needs in policy CS10 (pages 7-71 of

the CS). This provides the strategic context and a more specific policy can be prepared in Plan:MK. Given the strategic policy there is still the opportunity to prepare planning applications for the types of accommodation cited in paragraph 2 a) of the Task and Finish Group report, provided the land owner agrees and sites chosen are appropriate in planning terms.

The strict enforcement of the 30% requirement for affordable homes is supported but the current Government approach is to apply great significance to viability and the emerging Housing and Planning Bill could have greater implications for the delivery of affordable housing.

Planning and Housing teams already co-operate and the role of the Development Partnership provides opportunities although they must achieve optimum levels of development to satisfy their organisation's objectives. Joint work between the two Council teams and the Partnership is welcomed and an early meeting to agree a common set of targets seems a sensible way to progress.