

## Public Service Reform Board

<b>Date</b>	26 September 2019
<b>Report title</b>	West Midlands' Homelessness Taskforce: Establishing a Commitment to Collaborate Across Public Services to Prevent and Relieve Homelessness
<b>Portfolio Lead</b>	Councillor Yvonne Davies - Public Service Reform & Social Economy
<b>Taskforce Leads</b>	Cllr Sharon Thompson - Chair of the Homelessness Taskforce Members Advisory Group  Jean Templeton – Independent Chair of the Homelessness Taskforce
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### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

### The Public Service Reform Board is recommended to:

- (1) Note and endorse the progress made by the West Midlands Homelessness Taskforce on establishing a voluntary commitment to collaborate across public services to prevent and relieve homelessness across the region.

- (2) Agree to the development of a practical toolkit which can be implemented by public service partners, and to the active championing of this toolkit and commitment to collaborate within member local authorities, public sector agencies with a view to making a meaningful and public commitment as a region.
- (3) Delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder, Members Advisory Group Chair and Homelessness Taskforce Chair to sign off this toolkit before launch and wider circulation within the WMCA area.

## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to update and engage members in the progress made to date by the West Midlands Homelessness Taskforce on establishing a voluntary 'commitment to collaborate' across public services to prevent and relieve homelessness across the region.
- 1.2 This is a bold regional initiative – building on the statutory 'duty to refer' to create a regional commitment that would represent best practice nationally, and would make a real difference to homelessness outcomes across the region. It would see public services – across local government, health, welfare and justice, for example – commit to proactive ways of identifying and addressing the risks of homelessness, and in doing so create a culture of public service collaboration that can better support vulnerable people.
- 1.3 The 'commitment to collaborate' initiative was endorsed by WMCA Board in June 2019, and is a key plank of the commitment made by local partners – via the Taskforce and Members Advisory Group chaired by Cllr Sharon Thompson – to working together to address the root causes in a difficult financial and policy context.

## **2. Background – West Midlands Homelessness Taskforce**

- 2.1 Homelessness is the ultimate form of exclusion for citizens. Its determinants are complex – a mix of funding cuts, policy choices, local circumstances and the ability of the system to come together in preventing and relieving its effects. The Homelessness Taskforce was established in May 2017 with the aim of 'designing out' homelessness in all its forms across the region - that is, to remove those structures, systems and processes that lead to homelessness and 'design in' prevention. Its goals are about systemic change; recognising the constraints on achieving this from fiscal austerity, welfare policy and a fragile economy for those on low pay and insecure conditions.
- 2.2 The West Midlands Homelessness Taskforce was adopted by the WMCA Board on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019 and placed within the remit of the Public Service Reform Portfolio. The Taskforce's focus is on actions that can add value to local authority practice, and which can realise the value of collaboration across the region. The Taskforce contributes to the WMCA's policy of supporting a more deliberate and socially purposeful model of economic growth, by ensuring that designing out homelessness is everyone's responsibility. It is cross-party, cross-sector, independently chaired, and is made up of stakeholders from key institutions with oversight from lead local authority members.
- 2.3 The Taskforce is Chaired by Jean Templeton, CEO of St Basils and comprises the seven local authorities and other agencies including DWP, National Housing Federation, Crisis, Women's Aid, Homes England, West Midlands Fire Service and Gowling CLG representing the business community.
- 2.4 The purpose of the Taskforce has been to ensure we are drawing on all of our collective resources and partnerships; working as collaboratively as possible across the region, across sectors and disciplines to tackle the systemic issues which contribute to homelessness and replace with approaches and processes which prevent and design out homelessness.

- 2.5 The Taskforce has received the support of Portfolio Holders for homelessness within each of the constituent Local Authorities with representation from non-constituent members within a Members Advisory Group.

The Taskforce follows the key principles of:

- Achieving System Change
- Working Collaboratively
- Connecting Mainstream Strategies
- A People Centred Preventative Approach

- 2.6 In its first year, the Taskforce undertook a review of homelessness using the positive pathway model of prevention, relief and recovery. Due to the varying nature of homelessness and how the law varies in the way in which it affects homeless people, Task Groups (reporting to the Taskforce) were set up reflecting the primary affected groups – Rough Sleepers; Children & Families; Young People (16-25) and Older Singles (25+). These groups do not exclude other cohorts of homelessness, nor cross cutting issues, which are picked up within the Task Groups or the work of the Taskforce.

### **3. The Five Objectives**

- 3.1 The Task Groups undertook extensive scoping of the gaps and opportunities for designing out homelessness for the four cohorts utilising the positive pathway model, resulting in the identification of five key objectives represented on the 'plan on a page' below.
- 3.2 The diagram makes clear the 'life cycle' approach taken by the Taskforce, and the extent to which a whole system approach will be needed to make a long-term impact on the issue.

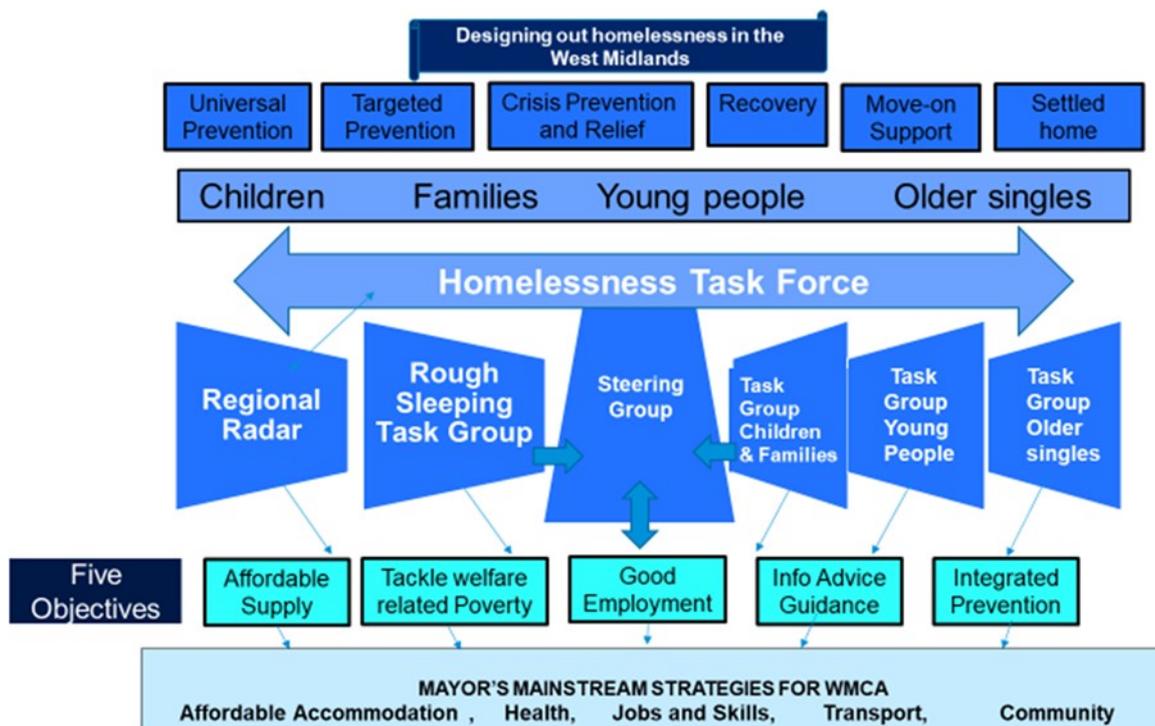


Figure 1 Homelessness Taskforce Plan on a Page

3.3 The Taskforce has been clear that, to be as embedded and effective as possible, its five objectives must be built into the mainstream strategies of public services and must draw from and be reflected across regional practice.

**The Five Objectives:**

- 1) **Accessible, Affordable, Accommodation;** actions for the WMCA include:
  - Establishing a West Midlands definition of ‘affordable’ that designs out homelessness
  - Housing development enabled by WMCA maximises affordable homes aligned to need
  - Promoting the aspiration amongst social landlords that no one is made homeless
  
- 2) **Tackling Welfare Related Poverty;** actions for the WMCA include:
  - Supporting the case for reform of evidenced negative impacts arising from Universal Credit
  - Supporting the early review of Local Housing Allowance rates with a view to preventing and alleviating homelessness
  
- 3) **Access to Good Employment;** actions for the WMCA include:
  - Promote and enable the Youth Housing Offer which supports work and independence
  - Align Employment Support Framework to enable access to work for homeless and vulnerable groups
  - Promoting to employers their role in preventing homelessness, supporting the homelessness sector and creating employment opportunities

- 4) **Information, Advice and Guidance**; actions for the WMCA include:
- Deliver a public facing, homelessness web resource (such as Street Support) of information and advice for the West Midlands
  - Support and develop Alternative Giving Schemes (Change into Action) across the WMCA area
- 5) **Integrated Prevention**; actions for the WMCA include:
- In partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing and Crisis work to build upon the new duty to refer within the Homelessness Reduction Act to promote and establish a voluntary commitment to collaborate across public services to prevent and relieve homelessness across the region through a series of sector specific roundtables.

#### **4. Homelessness Reduction Act and the Duty to Refer**

4.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) was introduced in April 2018 and extended the legal responsibilities of Local Authorities, especially around the prevention of homelessness. Anyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness should be able to access meaningful help, regardless of their priority need status. It also encourages local collaboration and a multi-agency approach to enable people to access the right support for them.

4.2 Since October 2018 the HRA has increased expectations of public bodies via the 'duty to refer' for homelessness assistance, of those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The public services which are subject to the duty to refer include:

- prisons
- youth offender institutions
- secure training centres
- secure colleges
- youth offending teams
- probation services (including community rehabilitation companies)
- Jobcentre Plus
- social service authorities
- emergency departments
- urgent treatment centres
- hospitals in their function of providing inpatient care

The Secretary of State for Defence is also subject to the duty to refer in relation to members of the regular forces. The regular forces are the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the regular army and the Royal Air Force.

4.3 The HRA requires these named public authorities to notify a local authority if they come into contact with anyone who they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. But as a region we can go further. The ambition of the Homelessness Taskforce is for a much wider voluntary commitment to collaborate to be adopted. This would see commitments made across our public services to work more closely together to ensure that no one is made homeless, and that Local Authorities are better supported by the system in discharging their HRA duties. Birmingham has achieved early adoption from Birmingham Social Housing Partnership, trialling the Pathway model as a template and currently consulting with the City's Health partners and are keen to use the framework on a broader basis.

4.4 The proposal to establish a voluntary commitment to collaborate to prevent and relieve homelessness offers an opportunity to integrate services to meet need and demand in a collaborative way and to build upon this new duty. It also enables more effective use of pressurised resources and promotes a collaborative approach to broader upstream inclusion, and thus prevention of the drivers which can result ultimately in homelessness. This will be a national first and has the potential to inform the region's public service reform approach.

## **5. Sector Specific Roundtables**

5.1 Over the past year, the Chartered Institute of Housing and Crisis have been supporting the Homelessness Taskforce to engage with a range of public sector organisations to identify opportunities to establish a voluntary commitment to collaborate across public services in the region. To achieve this, three sector (Health, Criminal Justice and DWP) specific roundtables were hosted with key sector professionals (senior decision makers) to explore ways to enhance the prevention and relief of homelessness through the development of a meaningful shared commitment. All three roundtables were hosted between May and July 2019.

5.2 Using the positive pathways model as a template, attendees at each roundtable were invited to explore and discuss what services were currently in place across their sector (in the 7 Met areas of the WMCA region) in each part of the positive pathway which can be attributed to preventing and relieving homelessness whether directly or indirectly. Attendees were encouraged to take a person-centred perspective, considering the system around the person. In the second half of each roundtable attendees were asked to think about the potential gaps which existed and what opportunities there were to do further work on preventing and tackling homelessness. A summary of the discussions from each roundtable can be found in Appendix 1.

## **6. Key barriers to collaboration identified in each roundtable**

### **Health**

- Lack of common terms and language across sectors
- Commissioning constraints
- Disconnect between policy and the reality of operational service delivery
- Thresholds to access services
- Cuts to funding for services
- Lack of access to mental health services including secondary MH services and rapid access to services other than psychosis diagnosis

### **Criminal Justice**

- Cuts – infrastructure eroded
- Keeping web platforms current – resourcing is an issue
- Eligibility criteria – e.g. housing allocations, age restricted accommodation
- Processes e.g. can't apply online to get on housing register when in custody
- Historic ASB, rent arrears – barriers to accessing social housing

- 2015 change to legislation – increase in short custodial sentences – short, sharp intervention is damaging Vs reduction in community orders which are less disruptive and keep people in the community
- Policy driven consequences
- Housing supply
- Pre-Sentence Reports not prepped in advance
- Friday releases (also weekend, bank holidays)
- Displacement of people
- ‘Market’ is driving the system – need to turn it on its head

## **DWP**

- Hostility around UC, Sanctions and DWP generally
- Policy
- DWP processes/systems not always helpful or understood
- Unregulated exempt ‘supported’ accommodation
- Hostility from private landlords
- Landlords not communicating with claimants re managing payments
- Hands tied re deductions (not always DWP deductions)
- Banks – rules around ID

## **7. Proposed Next Steps/Forward Plan**

- 7.1 To maintain the momentum created by the roundtables, it is essential now to develop and agree a forward plan to inform a series of commitments for organisations to sign up to as their voluntary commitment to collaborate. The following points outline the proposed forward plan. In identifying and presenting these the Homelessness Taskforce seeks the support and steer of the Board in achieving these.
- a) Commission an appropriate organisation to support the Taskforce and WMCA PSR team in creating a practical toolkit to support the Commitment to Collaborate. This will be within the scope of existing allocated budget, and overseen by the PSR team. We will seek to work with a nationally recognised organisation as a means of ensuring the credibility of the work, and its replicability outside of the region.
  - b) Use this product – and its roll-out within the West Midlands – to develop a clear ‘ask’ of government to review the Homelessness Reduction Act and move from a ‘Duty to Refer’ to a ‘Duty to Collaborate’ to Prevent and Relieve. This ‘ask’ will be developed in partnership with the Taskforce, Members Advisory Group and Mayor.
  - c) Through PSR Board, WMCA Wellbeing Board and the variety of local fora available (including Health and Wellbeing Boards, STP groups etc) promote use of Commitment to Collaborate toolkit to ensure prevention is built into developing strategies, policies and programmes.

7.2 These actions, alongside the ongoing work of local authorities and value-add from the Homelessness Taskforce, give us the possibilities of developing systemic practice across public services in the region through a 'Commitment to Collaborate'. The roundtable meetings undertaken this summer in partnership with CIH and Crisis show a real willingness to introduce services, approaches and processes which prevent, relieve and design out homelessness. The Homelessness Taskforce believes that the learning from this approach can be built upon to promote systemic inclusion and thus prevention and relief of exclusion and homelessness more broadly. The WMCA can be at the forefront of developing this approach and the learning can be used to promote good practice nationally.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 There will be a limited cost to externally commission support for this work. This will be contained within the Public Service Reform budget, overseen by the Director of PSR. The team will work with WMCA procurement to ensure that our processes reflect best value but also support social value goals.

## **9. Legal Implications**

9.1 The WMCA does not have specific statutory duties in relation to homelessness. These powers and duties remain with and are discharged by the Constituent and Non-Constituent Authorities. No legal implications have been identified in passing this report, however when public services across the region enter into new commitments to collaborate, any implications will need to be considered on a case by case basis by these services.

## **10. Equalities Implications**

10.1 The work of the Homelessness Taskforce targets some of the most vulnerable individuals in our communities and seeks to prevent homelessness in all of its forms. It has taken a person-centred life course approach to homelessness taking account of the demographics and equalities impacts for Children and Families, young people and older singles as well as those sleeping rough. We have specific expertise within the Taskforce looking at the root causes of homelessness for each group.

## **11. Inclusive Growth Implications**

11.1 The work of the Homelessness Taskforce addresses several of the indicators on the Inclusive Growth Framework. Its overall purpose is to strengthen the region's ability to support some of the most vulnerable people within the region and ensure that inclusive growth means inclusive for all, including those experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage.

## **12. Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

12.1 The work of the Homelessness Taskforce spans across all seven local authorities of the WMCA. The non-constituent members are represented through the Members Advisory Group, and all authorities will have access to the toolkit.

### **13. Other Implications**

13.1 No other implications have been identified in this paper.

### **14. Schedule of Background Papers**

14.1 See Appendix 1.