

To: HOUSING AND SOCIAL WORK SERVICES COMMITTEE		Subject: SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSING ACTION – VOLUNTEERING TO TACKLE AND PREVENT HOMELESSNESS
From: HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES		
Date: 21 OCTOBER 2009	Ref: MP/JH	

## 1. Purpose of Report / Introduction

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Committee to engage with Scottish Churches Housing Action (SCHA) in mobilising and building the capacity of local volunteers to assist people who are vulnerable and at risk of homelessness in North Lanarkshire. This work will be carried out by the organisation under its well-established Churches Homelessness Initiatives Programme (CHIP) and can be delivered within a modest budget framework. The programme works with church congregations of all denominations.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 Scottish Churches Housing Action is a charitable voluntary organisation, launched in 1995. It brings together the major Scottish Christian denominations to promote practical responses to homelessness in Scotland. The organisation has been involved in developing locally-based responses to homelessness since 1997, when they established the CHIP.
- 2.2 Through the involvement of the organisation, various practical initiatives have been established throughout Scotland including within Angus, Moray, East Dunbartonshire, Highlands and the Western Isles. Initiatives include Starter Pack Schemes, offering basic household essentials to people moving on from homelessness, Wellbeing Packs, providing items of personal hygiene, Children's Activity Packs for children in temporary accommodation to encourage constructive activity, Befriending and Mentoring to counter social isolation and encourage social integration and Annual Giving Appeals.
- 2.3 SCHA already has regular contact with the main churches in North Lanarkshire and they would like to develop this further with the aims of mobilising support, raising awareness of the nature and scale of homelessness locally, explaining the potential for church congregations to make a difference and assessing what related activity is already underway involving local churches to identify gaps in services.
- 2.4 The next phase of development would involve working with an identified group who have expressed a commitment to establishing a clear plan of action by assisting the group to develop a viable sustainable local project. Thereafter, the organisation would work with the local volunteers to establish the range of activities identified to meet local needs, assist them to set up initiatives and encourage them to get used to working independently.
- 2.5 In order to take the work forward in phases the organisation will require funding of £9,480 in total over two financial years to cover basic administration and expenses during the 18-month development period. The costs can be met from existing budgets dedicated to preventing and tackling homelessness.

### 3. Proposals / Considerations

- 3.1 Scottish Churches Housing Action is a reputable and respected charitable organisation with well established relationships with the main Scottish Churches, including church congregations within North Lanarkshire.
- 3.2 CHIP applies a community development approach to its work in local areas and this could assist the Council in its efforts to raise public awareness of the scale of homelessness and the legal obligations placed on the Council to respond to it effectively.
- 3.3 During the current economic climate, any initiative designed to galvanise local volunteering and self-help approaches to alleviating homelessness could be extremely valuable. The development of a local Starter Pack Scheme, as a volunteering initiative, could for example create and improve employment opportunities in the longer term.

### 4. Financial / Personnel / Legal / Policy / Equalities Implications

- 4.1 The anticipated total costs of £9,480 over two financial years can be met from within current budgets dedicated to preventing and tackling homelessness.
- 4.2 Scottish Churches Housing Action recognises all faiths and seeks to work non-denominationally in recognition of the current diverse Scottish culture.

### 5. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Approves the proposal to engage with Scottish Churches Housing Action in mobilising local churches to tackle homelessness in the North Lanarkshire area.
- (ii) Approves the proposal to meet the development costs of £9,480 from existing budgets dedicated to preventing and tackling homelessness.



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