

Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2023

Report of the Housing & Environmental Health Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

That Cabinet approve the Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2023 and associated Delivery Plan as shown at Annex 1 and Annex 2 to the report.

SUMMARY:

- The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a range of duties on local housing authorities. Those duties included the duty to undertake periodic reviews of homelessness, and to develop strategies for preventing and tackling homelessness based on the outcomes of those reviews.
- The Act requires the outcomes of homelessness reviews to be made available publicly for inspection, and that before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy, the local authority must consult.
- The Act further requires local housing authorities to publish the resulting homelessness strategies, and that these strategies must be reviewed periodically (but not longer than every 5 years).
- The Council must also have regard to its Allocations Policy and its Tenancy Strategy when formulating a new homelessness strategy.
- Building on the Council's Corporate Plan consultation in 2018, the Housing & Environmental Health Service completed a comprehensive Housing Strategy Evidence Base & Review of Homelessness during 2019. This work included consultation with stakeholders and residents, and meets all legal requirements in the context of developing a new strategy for tackling homelessness in the borough.
- The draft Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy (Annex 1) also fulfils legal requirements, and has been augmented by a detailed delivery plan (Annex 2).
- For Test Valley, homelessness is a priority issue and the production of periodic homelessness strategies is not just about meeting legal imperatives; it is about best practice and striving to deliver effective and efficient services.
- The Council is committed to preventing and relieving all forms of homelessness and the new draft Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2023 reflects this commitment.

- The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2023 has been developed around four key themes and will be monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2023 will deliver initiatives designed to meet locally identified need. It sets out that we will:
- Improve health & wellbeing, building on skills, empowering communities to thrive.
 - Drive innovation across the local system of public services through effective partnership arrangements.
 - Support people to remain in their homes, or to move into the right accommodation at the right time.
 - Develop local partnerships to ensure no-one has to sleep rough in Test Valley.
- 1.2 The Delivery Plan provides a detailed roadmap setting out how the Council will work with partners to deliver its aims. It will develop further during the life of the strategy.

2 Background

- 2.1 Since the last Preventing Homelessness Strategy was developed, there have been huge changes in the national policy landscape including changes to primary legislation and to guidance.
- 2.2 The strategy has been developed taking into account the national direction of travel and any potential opportunities or pressures that may arise from future change. It has also been developed in the context of our operational experience of administering applications under the Housing Act 1996, Part 7, since it was substantially amended by the commencement of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018.
- 2.3 Tackling homelessness remains part of a constantly moving policy agenda, and hence the strategy and associated Delivery Plan will need to be adjusted accordingly, from time to time, to ensure they remain up to date and to reflect the Council's evolving approach to tackling emerging pressures and developing innovative solutions.
- 2.4 The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2023 will deliver on a key Housing Strategy priority, and contribute directly to meeting corporate aims.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 3.1 The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2023 was developed in light of the new Corporate Plan “Growing Our Potential” and with due regard to the outcomes of the extensive consultation undertaken in 2018.
- 3.2 The Corporate Plan contains a number of elements reflecting a commitment to provide adequate advice and support to both residents and to stakeholders, and also, to meeting the identified housing needs of the borough through the prevention and relief of homelessness, using strengths based approaches to build on people’s skills and capability.
- 3.3 In this way, the Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy will directly contribute to delivering the following corporate objectives to grow the potential of:
 - (a) Town centres – to adapt and be attractive vibrant, and prosperous places
 - (b) Communities – to be empowered, connected and able to build upon their strengths
 - (c) People – to be able to live well and fulfil their aspirations
 - (d) The local environment for current and future generations

4 Consultations/Communications

- 4.1 The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy has been drafted using the results of research, data analysis and benchmarking.
- 4.2 It has also been developed through extensive consultation, including with service users, stakeholders, elected members and staff.
- 4.3 This is demonstrated in the Housing Strategy Evidence Base and Review of Homelessness 2019, which is available to download from the Council’s website at www.testvalley.gov.uk.

5 Options

- 5.1 The Council is required to have a published strategy setting out its plans for preventing and tackling homelessness in the local area. Such a strategy is required to be developed using the results of a local homelessness review, and must be kept under review. The strategy must be updated and revised at least every 5 years.
- 5.2 In light of legal requirements, there is no sensible argument for the Council not to publish a Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. The primary option is whether the Council should publish the Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy *as it has been proposed in this report* or not.

6 Option Appraisal

- 6.1 For the Council to fail to develop and publish a homelessness strategy, it would be at risk of legal challenge. Indeed, its decision making under the statutory homelessness framework could be challenged at individual level by dissatisfied applicants, on the basis that the authority did not have a current homelessness strategy in place. Moreover, preventing and relieving homelessness is a priority for this Council and it would therefore be a dereliction of our commitment to deliver high quality and effective services for local residents, were the Council to fail to do so. It is recommended that the Council does publish such a strategy.
- 6.2 The strategy presented in this report has been developed through a careful review of homelessness, through evidence that has been developed in partnership, and through detailed analysis. The Review of Homelessness has considered the views of service users, and it has looked at what has been successful and what could be improved in the local network of services. It has also benchmarked the Council's activity under the new statutory homelessness framework, making best use of available experimental statistical releases, to measure itself against its neighbours, county, region and national performance.
- 6.3 The proposed Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy draws on the successful developmental work undertaken by the Council's Housing Services and through significant investment in front line service delivery. It meets all legal requirements and represents a best practice strategic plan that will inform the local approach to preventing and relieving homelessness for the next 3 years.
- 6.4 Whilst some local authorities have opted to incorporate their preventing homelessness strategies within their overarching housing strategy, the homelessness strategy remains a standalone legal requirement. There is merit to ensuring it stands alone among local policies and plans to ensure that it can be consulted on in a focused way and that homelessness remains a visible high priority, not only for the Council, but for the wider system of public services in the local area.
- 6.5 It is therefore recommended that the Cabinet approves the proposed Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy and associated Delivery Plan.

7 Risk Management

- 7.1 A risk assessment has been completed in accordance with the Council's risk management process and has identified 2 amber risks.
- 7.2 In both cases the risks themselves are beyond the Council's control and relate to:

- (a) Future funding decisions that may be taken by Hampshire County Council (and which could impact on local services), and
- (b) The potential for economic factors leading to an increased demand on statutory services.

7.3 The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy includes actions to support risk management in this context, and the risks will be managed as part of the delivery of the strategy and in the wider context of the Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025.

8 Resource Implications

8.1 There are no additional resource requirements arising from the approval of the strategy. All immediate activity summarised in the strategy is accounted for within existing budgets. Any additional activity identified as part of the Delivery Plan will be considered for feasibility within the normal yearly budgeting activity.

8.2 The Housing & Environmental Health Service will continue to seek to make use of central government funding opportunities as they may arise in order to deliver robust local services that meet identified need.

9 Legal Implications

9.1 The Council has a range of statutory duties relating to homelessness. The proposed strategy meets all legal requirements as set out in the Homelessness Act 2002, and furthermore, it will assist the Council in meeting all duties enshrined in the (now substantially amended) Housing Act 1996, Part 7.

10 Equality Issues

10.1 The strategy will impact positively on significant numbers of individuals in housing need by preventing and relieving homelessness and rough sleeping, and through its contribution to creating sustainable and diverse communities.

10.2 The EQIA has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.

11 Other Issues

11.1 Community Safety – the Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy will directly contribute to social cohesion and sustainability.

11.2 Environmental Health Issues – the Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy includes actions that will ensure rough sleeping and homelessness are minimised, which will have a positive impact in terms of local environmental protection services.

- 11.3 Sustainability and Addressing a Changing Climate – The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy will directly contribute to the delivery of the overarching Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025, which includes actions to ensure homes are built to a high standard and are as energy efficient as possible. It also includes actions to promote available help to local residents.
- 11.4 Property Issues – aspects of the Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy include actions around the Council’s use of temporary accommodation to meet homelessness duties. Whilst it is not anticipated this will have any immediate impact on Property, the Housing & Environmental Health Service regularly liaises with both Registered Provider partners and Estates colleagues on any matters that may arise.
- 11.5 Wards/Communities Affected – All wards.

12 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 12.1 The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2023 has been carefully developed through an inclusive process to ensure it has, as far as possible, taken into account a range of views and the results of considerable evidence and analysis.
- 12.2 The strategy is a key document that details the Council’s priorities for enabling vulnerable residents to remain in their homes and to supporting people to prevent and relieve all forms of homelessness.
- 12.3 The Delivery Plan will directly support the Council to meet the aims of both the Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025 and the aims of its Corporate Plan.

<u>Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)</u> Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025 and associated Delivery Plan.			
<u>Confidentiality</u> It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.			
No of Annexes:	2	File Ref:	N/A
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