

Meeting Executive
Portfolio Area Housing & Investment
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HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek adoption of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 - 2024. It is a statutory requirement to publish this strategy and it has been agreed with the Ministry of Communities Housing and Local Government that the Council will publish its new strategy by 31 December 2019.
- 1.2 The priorities for this strategy are;
 - a. Prevention and Relief of Homelessness
 - b. Provision of Temporary Accommodation
 - c. Housing Development
 - d. Support of Homeless Households

These priorities will be met through the actions detailed in the action plan at Appendix 1 of the strategy and in Executive summary on pages 4-7 in the strategy. This Executive Summary will be provided as short 4 page document for the public.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024, attached as Appendix A to this report, be adopted.

- 2.2 That delegated authority is given to the Strategic Director (RP) to make minor revisions to the draft Strategy, having consulted the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People.

3 BACKGROUND

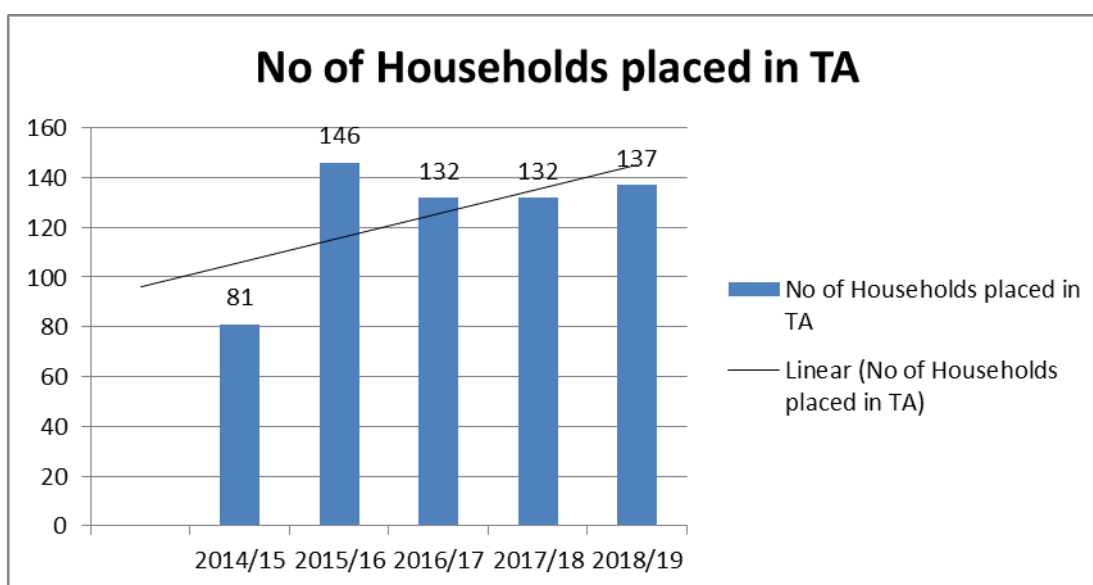
- 3.1 Local Authorities have a statutory duty, under the Homelessness Act 2002, to carry out a review of homelessness in their local area and to formulate a homelessness strategy every five years. Detailed guidance on this is provided in the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.
- 3.2 The Homelessness Code of Guidance was last updated in April 2019 and gives detail to assist the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17)
- 3.3 The HRA17 introduced additional powers and duties for Local Authorities for the prevention and relief of homelessness and augmented the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) In particular the HRA17 introduced additional duties to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- 3.4 The period of time when a prevention duty is owed to a homeless applicant was increased from 28 days to a minimum of 56 days. This means that the period in which a person at threat of homelessness can approach the Council for assistance would start earlier.
- 3.5 If alternative accommodation is not found during this 56 day period, and/or the applicant becomes homeless, the duty to relieve homelessness is triggered. This applies for a minimum of 56 days from the date the Council is satisfied that the applicant is homeless and eligible for assistance. At this point if the applicant is assessed as being in priority need they are placed into Emergency Accommodation. This extended duty period increases the length of time the Council has to accommodate applicants whilst a decision is made on their homelessness.
- 3.6 Local Authority homelessness acceptances have continued to rise nationally and since 2011, the long-term downward trend in the number of households in temporary accommodation has ended.¹
- 3.7 Government figures show that the number of families considered homeless in England has increased by 11% in a year. In the first three months of financial year 2019/2020, there were 25,130 families with children identified as homeless, compared with 22,700 the previous quarter. The data also reveals that the number of children living in temporary accommodation hit a 13-year high at 126,020, up 83% since its lowest point in June 2011. Stevenage has a high level of housing need with a number of demand and supply pressures contributing to a growing difficulty in meeting need. The HRA17 has increased this pressure with a 33% increase in customers requiring Housing Advice or

¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-councils-warn-rise-temporary-accommodation-use-homelessness-reduction-act>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

presenting as homeless compared to the year prior to the implementation of the HRA17.

- 3.8 The estimated Objectively Assessed Housing Need for Stevenage is 7,656 dwellings over the period 2011-2031.² This report was commissioned in 2015 and updated in August 2016
- 3.9 The current Homelessness Strategy indicates an upward trajectory of homelessness acceptances in Stevenage and a significant increase in the number of people in the Council's temporary accommodation. There was an increase in placements from 2014/2015 to 2015/2016 and since this time there has been a steady level of Temporary Accommodation placements. Although placement numbers may not have greatly increased for 2018/2019, applicants are staying in temporary accommodation for longer periods of time and this is owing to the 56 day relief period.



- 3.10 Whilst Stevenage has an ambitious new build programme, with additional social rented units being provided by 2030 this does not provide enough affordable housing to meet the demand and consideration will be given to how best to provide emergency and temporary accommodation for the future.
- 3.11 The number of prevention of homelessness cases that has been achieved since the implementation of the HRA17 has increased by 73% across the Prevention and Relief duty periods. Based on the H-CLIC data (see paragraph 4.7 below), which has been listed as experimental data, the Council appears to out-perform other local authorities in its region and nationally in terms of homelessness prevention.

² <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/Stevenage%20%20North%20Herts%20Vol%20%20August%202016.pdf>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2018>

- 3.12 The Prevention figures for the service evidence the hard work that has been completed. There were **231** cases where homelessness was prevented in 2017/2018 and **399** cases where homelessness was prevented in 2018/2019
- 3.13 Following the publication of the Rough Sleeper Initiative the Council has incorporated Rough Sleeping into the 2019 – 2014 strategy; the aim is to eradicate rough sleeping within Stevenage. The table below shows the number of people estimated as sleeping rough in the last five years ⁴. This estimated count has been verified by Homelesslink, the charity that submits Local Authority rough sleeper findings to MHCLG.

Year	Estimated Count
2014	8
2015	5
2016	17
2017	6
2018	11

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 Stevenage Borough Council has a statutory duty to develop and publish a strategy for tackling and preventing homelessness in its area.
- 4.2 The Council's current Homelessness Strategy is due to expire at the end of December 2020 however needs to be updated prior to this to comply with the deadline set by MHCLG following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Rough Sleeper Initiative 2018.
- 4.3 The main changes in this updated strategy is a focus on rough sleeping, innovative work, and an emphasis on working with customers to inform service provision. The priorities are to reduce homelessness, ensure there is an increase in the provision of accommodation and to ensure there is support for homeless households. These priorities are themes that have been carried forward from the previous strategy.
- 4.4. To ensure the service delivery model was fit for purpose to deliver the requirements of the HRA17, the Homelessness and Housing Advice service was redesigned to provide a more personalised approach where the client has one case worker from their first approach to the Council to the point where they are accommodated. The structure of the Housing Options and Housing Supply team and change in approach has reduced the number of complaints received in relation to handover and the client feeling that they have received varying information.

- 4.5 Knowing that the team would require additional resources to meet the additional demands placed on the authority by the HRA17, the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant has been used to fund 3 extra posts within the team. These posts are on fixed term contracts until March 2020 as the grant funding is only guaranteed until this point.
- 4.6 The proposed Strategy is linked to the Council's budget setting process and the pressure of unconfirmed funding has been highlighted as a risk. A review of the team is currently being undertaken to ensure that adequate resources are in place and the evidence of the demands on the service will be considered. This may include further growth in resources if the increase in presentations continues as well as continuing with the Rough Sleeper post if the pilot initially funded by government is successful to continue for a second year.
- 4.7 To enable the reporting on the HRA17 to be more informative to local authorities as well as to Government, a new reporting system has been put in place. This is called H-CLIC and is more of an automated process than the previous P1E returns. The information that is provided includes data not previously submitted – particularly relating to applicants' Support needs. This will hopefully influence decisions made in funding of support services going forward such as Mental Health and Drug/Alcohol services.
- 4.8 As a co-operative Council, in producing the 2019 – 24 strategy, consultation has been carried out with stakeholders, users of the service, those in temporary accommodation, residents in Stevenage's single person homeless hostel (Haven) including those who have previously slept rough and those that approached SBC for housing assistance who have had no fixed address or have slept rough.
- 4.9 The consultation sought to identify the priorities that the Council should focus on over the period of the strategy. Analysis of the results indicated that the priorities should be:
- Prevention and Relief of Homelessness
 - Provision of Temporary accommodation
 - Housing Development
 - Support for Homeless Households
- 4.10 These priorities are to achieve the outcomes detailed on the Plan on a Page at Appendix B.
- 4.11 The Strategy's aims and outcomes will be monitored via the action plan shown at Appendix 1 of the Strategy.
- 4.12 The strategy seeks to consider innovative approaches to reach the Council's aspiration to eradicate homelessness. The Council will explore the implementation of a Housing First approach based on the Finland Model and the investigations into the feasibility of this will start in financial year

2020/2021. This model is an approach to housing provision however the actual provision will remain the same.

4.13 The Strategy has been developed giving consideration to the following:

- Stevenage Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020
- Various Government Legislation
- Central Government Guidance
- The Corporate Plan, "Future Town Future Council"
- SBC Allocations Policy last updated 1st June 2018
- SBC Tenancy Strategy 2013 onwards

4.14 The Strategy has been presented to the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group on 11 July 2019 and the Housing Management Advisory Board on 18 July 2019. Both groups were broadly supportive of the proposed strategy and their feedback has been incorporated into the strategy.

In addition to consulting with both these groups, consultation has been undertaken with service users and professional stakeholders as identified in the glossary of the strategy and mentioned at paragraph 4.8 above. Delivery of the Strategy will be monitored and evaluated at Operational Manager level and through regular meetings such as the Providing Homes managers' meetings, the joint Homelessness forum meetings with partners and by the Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB). This will be achieved by reporting progress against the action plan detailed in Appendix 1 of the strategy.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 The Homelessness function is a cost to the General Fund and as such the net cost of the service is funded via Council Tax.
- 5.1.2 There are a number of posts which are currently funded through the flexible homelessness support grant funding. There are 4 fixed term posts (1 Housing Supply Co-coordinator, 1 Reviewing Officer and 2 Housing Options Caseworkers) are currently funded using the grant. The government announced on the 6 November 2019 that the 2020/21 funding levels will be maintained in line with the 2019/20 award, however there is no certainty beyond March 2021.
- 5.1.3 In October 2019 an informal review was completed of the service and has identified that a further post of a Housing Options Case Supervisor is required to meet the demands on the service and this will also be funded from the Flexible Homeless Support Grant for a 12 month period. .
- 5.1.4 In addition the Rough Sleeper co-ordinator started in October 2019 and is a one year post funded by central government. Subject to the success of this post in delivering the aspiration to eliminate rough sleeping in Stevenage, there is the option to bid for a second year's funding.
- 5.1.5 In the Temporary Accommodation and Lettings service the demand for accommodation provision and the management of additional accommodation

has also meant that an additional fixed term Tenancy Support Officer has been required and will be recruited to this financial year and funded from grant funding available.

- 5.1.6 If funding does not go beyond 2020/21 then the impact on the service and any consequent growth bid will need to be
- 5.1.7 Whilst looking to increase the accommodation level generally within Stevenage it should be noted that research shows, as expected, that another hostel or equivalent is required. This could divert money from delivering increased general needs accommodation paid for by the Housing Revenue Account however would be a lesser spend than long term placement into Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Investigations are currently being completed in order to inform the best structure and accommodation type to meet the demands for the service. Hostel accommodation will be built or provided and other options for provision will also be explored bearing in mind that how this accommodation is structured and the length of tenure given to residents will dictate how it is funded.
- 5.1.8 The EA/ TA action plan identifies what steps are being taken to reduce the spend for Bed and Breakfast accommodation and to increase supply of EA/ TA. The long term plan to build a hostel or equivalent would be far more cost effective than continuing to use costly bed and breakfast accommodation which also poses a legal challenge to the authority. The cost of growth would be against the general fund as this is work relating to homelessness provision.

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 Section 3 Homelessness Act 2002 requires the Council to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy for:
 - (a) preventing homelessness in its district;
 - (b) securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in its district who are or may become homeless;
 - (c) securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in their district—
 - (i) who are or may become homeless; or
 - (ii) who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless againand to keep the strategy under review
- 5.2.2 Section 3 (7A) Homelessness Act 2002 provides that in formulating or modifying a homelessness strategy, the Council must have regard to
 - (a) its current allocation scheme under section 166A of the Housing Act 1996,
 - (b) its current tenancy strategy under section 150 of the Localism Act 2011
- 5.2.3 Section 3 (8) Homelessness Act 2002 provides that before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy the authority shall consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate.

- 5.2.4 In exercising its functions relating to homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, including the development of its Homelessness Strategy, the Council must have regard to the Homelessness Code of Guidance Guide for Local Authorities issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

5.3 Risk Implications

- 5.3.1 The identified risk within the strategy relates to the budgets available and continuing government funding. If funding is no longer available and there is no growth in relation to the staffing levels that are currently being covered by grant money the Council would not be able to maintain a staffing level which can match the current case level demands. This will affect the Council's ability to provide a full service which is a statutory obligation.

Due to Stevenage's location and good transport links there is a risk of an increase of homeless people coming to the area from London including those placed here by other local authorities. This could reduce the number of properties available in the private sector and could create a shortfall and consequently increase of cost of supply.

5.4 Policy Implications

- 5.4.1 The Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy outlines the Council's approach to tackling homelessness in its local area. It is consistent with the Council's Corporate Plan objectives to promote sustained economic growth, job creation, provision of affordable homes and housing growth and to deliver value for money. The strategy also fulfils the Council's co-operative principles through partnership working and inclusivity; and upholds the Council's values by responding to homelessness through group problem solving, innovation and openness.

5.5 Staffing and Accommodation Implications

- 5.5.1 Staffing implications relate to funding and growth bids - reduced staff levels could lead to increased caseloads, failure to deliver an effective service and staff dissatisfaction.

5.6 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.6.1 A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed, considering the implications of the Strategy for all communities. A copy of this Assessment is attached at Appendix C.

5.7 Service Delivery Implications

- 5.7.1 Service delivery relies on grant funding. If this grant funding is reduced, the delivery model may need to be reviewed and the service tailored accordingly. This in turn may impact on service delivery and the Council's ability to retain staff.

5.8 Community Safety Implications

5.8.1 Rough Sleepers tend to be more obvious in the Town Centre and Old Town during the winter months. Members of the public frequently raise their concerns and the team have a dedicated resource in the Rough Sleeper Coordinator post to regularly walk the town to offer support and advice. Concern has been raised around doorways of unused shops being used as places to bed down for the night. As the town begins to gain momentum through the regeneration programme it is unlikely that this will offer such an attractive place to sleep. The Housing Options team is also working with Operation Urban which is a Hertfordshire Police and Stevenage Borough Council initiative which seeks to better connect local services to help combat homelessness and the associated crime and anti-social behavior.

5.9 Information Technology Implications

5.9.1 Through the transformation work in the Housing and Investment team “forms” are being developed to enable staff to provide an agile service with access to Northgate data whilst out delivering services in the field. There is no additional cost to enhancing service delivery through IT aside from the tablets/laptops which will be covered through Housing budgets. It is anticipated that use of technology will eliminate duplication of effort.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

All documents that have been used in compiling this report, that may be available to the public, i.e. they do not contain exempt information, should be listed here:

- BD1 Housing Act 1996
- BD2 Homelessness Act 2002
- BD3 Localism Act 2011
- BD4 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- BD5 Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities 2019

APPENDICES

- A Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024 (including Action Plan at Appendix 1)
- B Plan on a Page
- C Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment