

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Housing
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HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY 2025-2030

AUTHORS: SARAH PATEMAN / KERRY CLIFFORD
CONTRIBUTOR: WILL PETERS
LEAD OFFICER: KERRY CLIFFORD

KEY DECISION

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present a final version of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030 and associated action plan for approval, following consultation with residents and key stakeholders.
- 1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a homelessness review, every five years. The Council's current Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy expired at the end of March 2024.
- 1.3 The Council has continued to implement the current strategy during 2024, and it has been agreed with the Ministry of Communities Housing and Local Government that the Council will publish its new strategy by 31st December 2024.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the duty placed on the Council to publish a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy every five years.
- 2.2 The Cabinet notes the outcome of public consultation of the Strategy with residents and key stakeholders.
- 2.3 That Cabinet approves the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030 and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Plan, attached at Appendix A & C.
- 2.4 That Cabinet recommends that the Action Plan and Strategy outcomes to be reviewed on an annual basis by the Executive Housing Working Group.
- 2.5 That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP) after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to approve any amendments to the strategy and action plan, post the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

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 Homelessness strategies should also have regard to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which 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) including additional duties to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- 3.3 Housing authorities must consult with key stakeholders before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy and may also wish to consult service users and specialist agencies that provide support to homeless people.
- 3.4 As part of any homelessness strategy, housing authorities are also required to develop effective action plans to ensure that the priorities set out in the Strategy are achieved.
- 3.5 In July 2024, Cabinet was asked to consider a draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030 and agreed the recommendation that the draft strategy be put out for public consultation before the final strategy be presented back to Cabinet for approval and adoption.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Council's current Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy expired at the end of March 2024. The Council has a statutory duty as per the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002 to develop and publish a new

Strategy for tackling and preventing homelessness. The Council has continued to implement the current strategy during 2024.

- 4.2 Throughout June 2024, a consultation took place with key stakeholders, targeting the partner list of the Rough Sleeper Team as well as a wider cohort of partners who help to deliver the aims of the Strategy. The consultation focussed on what the core priorities of the Strategy should be and helped to frame the vision for the Strategy.
- 4.3 The Strategy retains a clear focus upon early intervention to prevent homelessness; or if prevention is not possible, to end homelessness at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.4 The vision of the draft Strategy is: ***Working co-operatively to prevent and reduce homelessness and to end rough sleeping in Stevenage.***
- 4.5 Stakeholders also helped to develop the following four summarised priorities and key commitments for the Strategy over the next five years, which are:

Priority 1: Prevention and Relief of Homelessness

- Work collaboratively with strategic partners at a strategic and operational level to improve homelessness prevention and relief services. This includes working with Change Grow Live and Mind in Herts to ensure support and advice is provided to vulnerable clients, many of whom have complex needs.
- Avoid unnecessary evictions and recurring homelessness by maintaining a dedicated resource to provide private rented sector tenancy sustainment support.
- Ensure that all customer contact is managed effectively and advice and support is provided in a timely manner.
- Ensure the viability and ongoing delivery of the Council's Housing Futures (Formerly known as Housing First) Scheme, which provides accommodation for rough sleepers and wrap around support.

Priority 2: Provision of Good Quality Temporary Accommodation

- Enhance the Council's emergency and temporary accommodation portfolio to ensure needs are met and to reduce the use of inappropriate bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Deliver a new specialist emergency and temporary accommodation scheme in Dunn Close, which will provide suitable accommodation for those with physical disabilities.
- Provide debt and financial advice and support to clients in temporary accommodation so they can manage their finances more effectively.
- Deliver value for money services and increase the transparency of service charges.

Priority 3: The Delivery of new Affordable and Social Rented Homes

- Deliver 500 new Council owned social and affordable rented properties over the next 10 years.

- Utilise private sale schemes within the HRA to cross subsidise other affordable housing schemes.

Priority 4: Support for Homeless Households

- Provide targeted welfare and debt advice and support that enable families and vulnerable adults to maximise their household income and mitigate the effects of welfare reforms.
 - Provide tenancy sustainment support to reduce incidences of homelessness.
 - Continue to provide specialist support through the Council's Housing Management, Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse and No More Services.
- 4.6 Following the July Cabinet, public consultation of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy took place during August and September and received an additional 38 responses. Consultation was completed via an on-line survey which was promoted through social media and during face-to-face interactions with service users.
- 4.7 During the consultation period, the Council also collected transactional service and satisfaction data to help understand customer journey and perceived gaps in service provision.
- 4.8 Consultees were asked to provide what they believed the three main challenges were in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. The responses indicated that alcohol and drug use, adverse experiences and trauma as well as lack of affordable housing were challenges. These challenges have been reflected in priorities 2 and 4 as well as within the Strategy itself.
- 4.9 Consultation also sought to identify what the public perceive the potential causes of homelessness were, with lack of affordable housing, drug use, mental health issues and lack of available support services in the community being considered the main drivers.
- 4.10 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy has been updated to reflect the consultation that has been undertaken and it is recommended that the Strategy is approved by Cabinet prior to being formally published before 31st December 2024.
- 4.11 Following consultation there has been a review of the information available to those experiencing homelessness on the council's website to ensure that it is easy to follow and up to date. This was also a recommendation from the Community Select Committee, when the Allocations Policy was considered in June 2024.
- 4.12 Further insight will continue to be gained from service users as to how easy or difficult it is to contact the council, to ensure that the service offered is accessible to all and quick to respond.
- 4.13 To successfully implement the Strategy, a review of resources will be undertaken to align activities and identify pathways of support to effectively deliver the aims of the Strategy.

- 4.14 For 2025/26 the new Government has announced that it will be consolidating the rough sleeping and single homelessness grant (Rough Sleeping Initiative, which includes Housing First and Accommodation for ex-offenders) to run alongside the Homeless Prevention Grant. It is not yet known what the funding settlement for the Council will be, therefore services and resources will be further reviewed to ensure that statutory services can continue to be delivered whilst recognising the impact a reduction in funding could have on the ability to deliver the range of discretionary services currently in place.
- 4.15 It may be necessary for the Council to undertake a further review the Strategy once the Government publishes it's anticipated 10 Year Housing Strategy, which is expected in 2025.
- 4.16 The Council will continue to monitor and report on a range of key performance indicators to assess the demand for services related to the delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.
- 4.17 It is recommended that the Action Plan and Strategy outcomes are reviewed on an annual basis by the Executive Housing Working Group.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 It is important to ensure that the Council has sufficient arrangements in place to prevent homelessness and to ensure that it reduces the costs associated with providing emergency and temporary accommodation and to limit the use of hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 5.2 The Homelessness function is a cost to the General Fund and as such, the net cost of the service is funded via Council Tax and direct Government grants.
- 5.3 The delivery of the Housing Futures (Housing First) Scheme and the expansion of the Council's Homelessness, Housing Options and Rough Sleeper services has been heavily reliant on external Government funding which runs to March 2025. At the point of writing this report the Government has not given any funding guarantees post this date, and therefore consideration to funding these services will need to be considered as part of the General Fund and HRA Budget setting process for 2025/26 and the ability to deliver key elements of the Action Plan.

Legal Implications

- 5.4 Section 3 of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires the Council to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy for:
- a) Preventing homeless 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 again.
 - d) Keep the Strategy under review.
- 5.5 **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
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 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.

Risk Implications

- 5.8 The identified and continuing risk within the Strategy relates to the budgets available and continuing Government funding. If funding is no longer available, 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.
- 5.9 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.
- 5.10 There has been an increased demand for services due to the use of hotels to house Asylum Seekers and Refugees, to mitigate against this a contracted post for an initial 24 months will be created during 2024.

Policy Implications

- 5.11 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.

Staffing and Accommodation Implications

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

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.13 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 B.

Service Delivery Implications

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

Information Technology Implications

- 5.15 There are no implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 1.1 **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 [Homelessness Code of Guidance](#)

BD2 [Cabinet Report – draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030](#)

APPENDICES

- A Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030
B Equality Impact Assessment
C Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Plan 2024-2025