Part I – Release to Press

Agenda item: ##

Meeting	Cabinet
Portfolio Area	Housing and Housing Development
Date	19th November 2026

HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN (2025-2030) - OCTOBER 2026 REVIEW

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KEY DECISION

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To seek Cabinet approval for updates to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025–2030 and its associated action plans, following a review of the Strategy to reflect recent legislative changes, including the Renters' Rights Act 2025, developments in the Council's approach to homelessness prevention, rough sleeping and support for vulnerable residents, and the Government's National Plan to End Homelessness, published in December 2025.

1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on housing authorities to publish a homelessness strategy, based on the results of a homelessness review, every five years.

1.3 The proposed amendments will ensure the Strategy remains relevant, reflects the changing legislative landscape and supports the Council's priorities for preventing homelessness, improving access to suitable accommodation and helping residents sustain their housing.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Approve the proposed amendments to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025–2030 (Appendix A), the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Plan 2026/27 (Appendix B), and the draft Ending Rough Sleeping Action Plan 2026/27 (Appendix C).

2.2 Approve the updated approach to homelessness prevention and support, including arrangements relating to care leavers and the Temporary Accommodation Notification Duty (TAND).

2.3 Note the Council's ring-fenced Rough Sleeping Programme grant allocation of £328,346 over three years, supporting the Government's ambition to end rough sleeping by enabling rapid access to accommodation and support, clear pathways into settled housing, and the wraparound support needed to help people sustain their accommodation and prevent a return to rough sleeping.

2.4 That the Strategy outcomes and associated Action Plans are reviewed annually by the Executive Housing Working Group.

2.5 That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development, to approve any amendments to the strategy and action plans.

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 As part of any homelessness strategy, the Homelessness Code of Guidance says local authorities should have a homelessness action plan that underpins their strategy to ensure that the priorities set out are achievable.

3.4 The Councils Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025–2030, which was approved by Cabinet in December 2024 sets out the Council's approach to preventing homelessness, reducing rough sleeping and supporting residents to access and sustain suitable accommodation.

3.5 The Strategy was supported by a Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Plan 2024/25 with priorities to prevent and relieve homelessness as early as possible, provide good quality temporary accommodation, provide new and affordable social rented homes and to support homeless households.

3.6 Since the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy was published, the Council has progressed several projects, including;

- Introduction of a Triage Team within Housing Options to speed up the customer journey
- Opened the Homelessness Hub in the town centre
- Employed a dedicated support worker for Housing Futures customers
- Introduced an eviction portal with Public Health to provide early and holistic intervention for households with complex needs to get early and preventative support
- Introduced housing customer events in the town centre to promote the services offered and to capture those at risk of homelessness much earlier
- Launched a Temporary Accommodation project to help new tenants when they move into their own home
- Employed a Team Leader to support the Next Step Lets Teams with accessing private rented housing
- Continued with the AFEO (Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Scheme)
- Received funding for the Adult Offender Protocol scheme through Probation
- Expanded our training offer for Housing teams and other teams within SBC
- Embedded the Temporary Accommodation Notification Duty (TAND) Legislation
- Embedded Docusign into Housing Options, Temporary Accommodation and Allocations teams

3.7 In 2023 the Council developed and implemented a hybrid Housing First model called Housing Futures in line with the development of the Community Advice and Support business unit. The project provides independent, stable housing provision for non-priority homeless individuals who are rough sleepers, or at imminent risk of rough sleeping. The accommodation also provides wrap-around support provided jointly by the Council's Rough Sleeper team, the No More Service and external agencies such as Change Grow Live and MIND to help residents with issues surrounding substance misuse and mental health. This is used as a platform to enable individuals with multiple and complex needs to begin recovery and move away from a

cycle of homelessness and ultimately into permanent, secure, and safe housing.

3.8 Since the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy was approved by Cabinet in December 2024, there have been significant legislative developments, particularly the introduction of the Renters' Rights Act 2025. These reforms will change the operation of the private rented sector which have implications for homelessness prevention, tenancy sustainment, landlord engagement and the Council's wider housing responsibilities.

3.9 The Renters' Rights Act 2025 is expected to influence homelessness prevention by strengthening tenant protections, changing the circumstances in which possession action can be taken and improving housing standards. In response the Council is adapting its prevention approach, strengthening landlord engagement and monitoring the impact of the reforms on private rented sector supply, affordability and homelessness risk.

3.10 The Government's *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, published on 11 December 2025, sets a long-term vision for homelessness in England to become rare, brief and non-recurring. The Plan sets out new expectations for local authorities, including the publication and regular review of homelessness action plans as a condition of relevant funding. It also identifies minimum requirements covering local targets, governance, partnership working and temporary accommodation policies. The plan places prevention at the centre of public services while also addressing the underlying causes of homelessness, including housing supply, poverty, insecure tenancies and barriers to accessing support.

3.11 The national approach is structured around five pillars: universal prevention; targeted prevention for people at greater risk; preventing homelessness from reaching crisis point; improving emergency responses; and supporting recovery to prevent homelessness recurring. Delivery is intended to be cross-government and locally led, with stronger collaboration between councils, health services, criminal justice agencies, children's services, housing providers and the voluntary, community and faith sector.

3.12 The Plan also establishes cross-government objectives to reduce homelessness among groups at particular risk, including prison leavers and care leavers, supported by clearer national and local accountability and a shift in focus and investment from crisis intervention towards earlier prevention.

3.13 The Government's headline commitments also include building 1.5 million homes, increasing the proportion of households helped to remain in their homes or secure alternative accommodation, ending the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families except in very short-term emergencies, and halving long-term rough sleeping.

3.14 In August 2026, the Government announced a £442M Rough Sleeping Programme of funding over three years. Stevenage was subsequently confirmed an allocation of £328,346 over 2026/27 to 2028/29.

3.15 This funding is ringfenced to support the Government's ambition to provide people sleeping rough with a route off the streets through rapid access to

accommodation and support, alongside pathways into settled accommodation and wraparound support.

3.16 The additional grant is in addition to the core funding that the Council receives in the form of The Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) which is a ring-fenced or targeted financial resource provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

3.17 The Temporary Accommodation Notification Duty (TAND), introduced under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, came into effect on 1 September 2026. It requires local housing authorities to take reasonable steps, with parental or relevant young person's agreement, to notify the child's education provider, GP practice and health visiting service when a child is placed in temporary accommodation. The duty aims to strengthen information sharing and ensure children and families can access appropriate support.

3.18 In October 2026, Council agreed a motion that welcomed the Government's National Plan to End Homelessness and the additional national investment in homelessness prevention and rough sleeping services. It recognised the continuing high demand for homelessness advice and prevention in Stevenage, alongside the need to distinguish between rough sleeping and wider homelessness, while ensuring that both are addressed through coordinated, preventative and person-centred approaches. The motion also highlighted the particular risks and barriers faced by vulnerable groups, including women experiencing hidden homelessness, families with children, care-experienced people, Armed Forces veterans, older people and individuals leaving prison or other institutional settings.

3.19 The motion resolved that the Council committed to review its Homelessness Prevention Action Plan considering the Government's national strategy, with a renewed focus on early identification, prevention and making best use of available national funding. It also committed the Council to improving identification and support for women experiencing rough sleeping and hidden homelessness, strengthening support for people who have served in the Armed Forces, and reviewing housing allocation and homelessness policies to ensure appropriate recognition of care experience beyond the age of 25. In addition, the Council will work with the NHS, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and other partners to improve access to health and support services, strengthen hospital discharge pathways and promote a more joined-up approach to preventing homelessness across public services.

3.20 The Council already has strong foundations in place through its existing Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, established prevention activity and partnership arrangements. However, the changing national and legislative context provides an opportunity to build on these foundations and further strengthen the local approach. The refreshed Strategy and Action Plans will therefore place greater emphasis on early identification and prevention; strengthening pathways from public institutions; reducing reliance on unsuitable temporary accommodation; increasing access to settled, sustainable housing with appropriate support; and making greater use of data, performance insight and lived experience to improve outcomes and prevent repeat homelessness.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 The Government's National Plan to End Homelessness, published in December 2025, places new expectations on local authorities. In response, the Council has undertaken a mid-point review of its Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and Action Plan (Appendices A and B), building on the strong foundations already in place and taking into account the recent Council motion.

4.2 The revised Strategy and supporting Action Plan have been reviewed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and subject to Cabinet approval, MHCLG has requested that each council submit its published Ending Rough Sleeping Action Plan, as seen in Appendix C, by 1 December 2026.

4.3 As a condition of relevant grant funding, the Council will be required to keep its Action Plans under review and demonstrate compliance with associated funding, reporting and expenditure requirements. Subject to MHCLG feedback, local targets and Key Performance Indicators will be developed in line with national practise and linked to the funding requirements.

4.4 The enhanced Strategy and Action Plans are intended to make a tangible difference to the people of Stevenage by ensuring that residents at risk of homelessness are identified and supported earlier, before their circumstances reach crisis point. Through stronger prevention, improved partnership working and clearer pathways into accommodation and support, more residents should be helped to remain safely in their existing homes where possible, spend less time in temporary or unsuitable accommodation, or move more quickly into settled and sustainable housing. For those experiencing rough sleeping or multiple disadvantage, the strengthened approach will provide more coordinated and responsive support, helping to address the underlying causes of homelessness and reduce the risk of people repeatedly returning to crisis. Ultimately, the aim is not simply to respond to homelessness, but to prevent it wherever possible and help residents achieve greater stability, independence and improved wellbeing.

4.5 The refreshed Strategy and Action Plans build on the Council's existing approach to homelessness prevention, including support for care leavers and new work undertaken through TAND to identify and respond to housing risks at an earlier stage.

4.6 The strategy review has provided an opportunity to strengthen this approach further, with greater emphasis on early identification and prevention, effective pathways from public institutions, reducing reliance on unsuitable temporary accommodation, and improving access to settled accommodation with the support needed to sustain it. It also strengthens the use of data, performance information and lived experience to understand outcomes, target interventions and reduce the risk of repeat homelessness.

4.7 The new Ending Rough Sleeping Action Plan provides a particular focus on people sleeping rough and supports the ambition of ensuring that everyone sleeping rough has a route off the streets before Christmas 2026, with rapid

access to appropriate accommodation and support and clear pathways towards settled housing.

4.8 Together, these build on the Council's existing service provision while responding to the changing national and legislative context. They provide a clearer framework for prevention, partnership working and targeted intervention, with a stronger focus on achieving sustainable outcomes for residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The relationship between these areas of activity is summarised in the diagram below.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy – Key Differences and Updates

Comparison of the published 2025–2030 strategy (on the council website) with the 2026 review

Area	Published version (2025–2030, Jan 2025)	2026 review (Nov 2026)	Key change / update
Legislation	Based mainly on the Homelessness Act 2002, Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.	Adds the Renters' Rights Act 2025 and its implications (e.g. abolition of Section 21, assured periodic tenancies, PRS Ombudsman/Property Portal, Decent Homes Standard/Awaab's Law, stronger tenant protections).	Updated for new PRS legislation and stronger tenant protections.
National policy	Predates the government's new national approach.	Aligns with the National Plan to End Homelessness, including a stronger focus on prevention and the ambition for homelessness to be "rare, brief and non-recurring".	Reflects the new national plan and prevention focus.
Children in temporary accommodation	Not specifically covered.	Introduces the Temporary Accommodation Notification Duty (TAND) following 2026 changes, including notification to schools, GPs and health visitors when children are placed in TA.	New duty to notify key services when children are in TA.
Care leavers / vulnerable groups	General support for homeless households.	Greater emphasis on care leavers, prison leavers/ ex-offenders and people with complex needs, linked to prevention and multi-agency working.	More targeted support for key vulnerable groups.
Rough sleeping	Vision to eradicate rough sleeping, making it brief and non-recurring where it occurs.	More operational, with a dedicated Ending Rough Sleeping Action Plan 2026/27 and a route off the street for rough sleepers.	Clearer delivery plan and actions to end rough sleeping.
Funding	Notes uncertainty over future government funding.	Confirmed funding of £328,346 over three years (£194,531 year 1, £77,773 year 2, £56,041 year 3).	Concrete multi-year funding confirmed.
Accommodation	General commitment to temporary accommodation and housing development.	Specific plans include additional Julians Road bed spaces, consideration of high-risk provision and development/review of a Single Homeless Pathway.	More detailed plans for accommodation and pathways.
Hidden homelessness	Less explicit.	Stronger focus on sofa surfing and people not visibly sleeping on the street, with earlier intervention.	Increased focus on hidden homelessness (e.g. sofa surfing).
Access and support	Existing Rough Sleeper Service, advice and wrap-around support.	Includes a Homelessness Community Hub, expanded access, move-on support, help attending appointments and access to a postal address.	Enhanced access and support arrangements.
Governance and outcomes	Strategy to be reviewed annually by EHWG.	Retains annual EHWG review with stronger emphasis on measurable outcomes, performance information, customer/stakeholder feedback, surveys and case studies (including a new outcomes table).	More measurable outcomes and accountability.

4.9 A key area of development is strengthening the response to residents experiencing multiple disadvantage, where homelessness may intersect with mental ill health, substance misuse, involvement with the criminal justice system, domestic abuse or other complex needs. The Council and its partners recognise that these circumstances cannot always be addressed effectively by individual services working in isolation.

4.10 The Council will therefore continue to strengthen pathways for people who may be particularly vulnerable to homelessness, including work relating to Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AFEO), support for people moving into settled accommodation, and practical assistance for those who need help accessing appointments, services or a suitable address through which they can receive correspondence.

4.11 Planned activity includes maintaining additional bed spaces at Julians Road, reviewing provision for people assessed as "high risk", developing the Single Homeless Pathway, supporting residents to move into and sustain accommodation, providing assistance with appointments and access to a postal addresses, intervening earlier with people sofa surfing, expanding the

opening of the Homelessness Community Hub and continuing work relating to AFEO.

4.12 The Council is also working with partners to develop a more joined-up approach to multiple disadvantage. A Multiple Disadvantage Interim Panel has been established as an immediate mechanism to help identify and overcome barriers, coordinate organisational capacity and facilitate joint intervention for residents with the most complex needs.

4.13 Alongside this, work has commenced with Public Health and Hertfordshire County Council to develop a four-tier model linking front-door pathways, local multi-agency arrangements, county-wide escalation for high-risk cases and strategic governance. The proposed approach is intended to support timely resolution of barriers and, where necessary, enable senior-level decisions on complex or high-risk circumstances, rather than duplicating the operational management of individual cases.

4.14 The Council has also introduced central eviction reporting to provide better intelligence on the reasons accommodation is lost and identify opportunities for earlier intervention. Rent arrears are an important factor in some evictions from temporary accommodation, alongside more complex circumstances that can include antisocial behaviour, violence, criminality and police involvement. Evidence from individual cases also demonstrates how financial difficulties, administrative decisions and fragmented support can combine to worsen circumstances and contribute to deteriorating mental health, repeat homelessness or involvement with the criminal justice system.

4.15 Taken together, these activities will enable earlier identification of risk, better coordination between services and stronger support for residents to move into and sustain settled accommodation. This should help prevent avoidable evictions, reduce repeat homelessness, create greater capacity within temporary accommodation and support delivery of the Ending Rough Sleeping Action Plan.

4.16 The Council's wider homelessness prevention and relief activity is supported by the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG), a ring-fenced funding allocation provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Over the three-year period 2026/27 to 2028/29, the Council is expected to receive £3.54 million in core HPG funding, supporting the delivery of its statutory homelessness responsibilities and wider preventative activity.

4.17 In addition to the core HPG allocation, the Council will receive £66,758 of Renters' Rights new burdens funding in 2026/27. This additional funding will support the Council in responding to the implications of the new legislation and anticipated additional demands on homelessness prevention services. This brings the total funding identified over the three-year period to £3,606,758, as summarised below.

Financial year	Core grant allocation	Additional Renters' Rights new burdens funding	Total funding shown
2026–27	£1,170,000	£66,758	£1,236,758
2027–28	£1,180,000	£0	£1,180,000
2028–29	£1,190,000	£0	£1,190,000
Three-year total	£3,540,000	£66,758	£3,606,758

4.18 Alongside this funding, the Council has secured a separate £328,345 Rough Sleeping Programme allocation over three years, providing targeted investment to prevent and respond to rough sleeping. This will support delivery of the Housing Futures project, access and pathways into accommodation, and the wraparound support required to help individuals sustain their accommodation and reduce the risk of returning to the streets. Taken together, these funding streams provide the financial foundation for the strengthened preventative, accommodation and support interventions set out within the refreshed Strategy and Action Plans.

4.19 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the refreshed Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and associated Action Plans. This will ensure that the Council's strategic framework remains up to date, responds to the changing legislative and national policy context and provides a clear basis for the effective use of available funding to strengthen homelessness prevention, tackle rough sleeping and improve outcomes for vulnerable residents.

4.20 The alternative would be to retain the existing Strategy without amendment. This is not recommended, as it would not adequately reflect legislative and national policy changes, including the Renters' Rights Act 2025 and the National Plan to End Homelessness, or developments in the Council's approach to homelessness prevention, rough sleeping and support for vulnerable residents.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

5.1.1 A total of £328,345.00 in additional funding is available over three years to support the delivery of rough sleeping initiatives.

The funding is allocated as follows:

Year 1: £194,531

Year 2: £77,773

Year 3: £56,041

5.1.2 The funding will support a range of measures to improve accommodation options, prevent homelessness and strengthen support for single homeless people and other vulnerable residents.

5.1.3 The funding profile and associated activity will be managed in accordance with the relevant funding conditions and Council financial procedures. Any ongoing costs beyond the available funding period will need to be considered through the Council's usual financial planning processes.

5.4 Activity will be reviewed over the funding period to assess need, delivery and outcomes, including the ongoing requirement for specific accommodation provision.

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 The Strategy must reflect the relevant statutory framework governing homelessness, housing allocation, housing conditions and the prevention of homelessness.

5.2.2 The Renters' Rights Act 2025 introduced significant changes to the private rented sector, including changes to tenancy arrangements, possession procedures and tenant protections. These reforms have implications for the Council's homelessness prevention activity and its wider housing and regulatory responsibilities. The Strategy will need to remain responsive to the implementation of the Act and any associated regulations, statutory guidance and commencement provisions.

5.2.4 The Strategy must also reflect the Homelessness Act 2002, Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and relevant provisions of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, including the Temporary Accommodation Notification Duty and measures relating to care leavers.

5.3 Risk Implications

5.3.1 Failure to update the Strategy could result in the Council's approach not adequately reflecting legislative changes, emerging housing pressures or the needs of residents at risk of homelessness.

5.3.2 Key risks include continued pressure on temporary accommodation, insufficient access to suitable accommodation for single homeless people, challenges in sustaining tenancies and changes in private rented sector availability or affordability.

5.3.3 There is also a risk that time-limited funding may not be sufficient to maintain all funded activity beyond the agreed funding period. The Council will monitor delivery, review service demand and consider future sustainability as part of its ongoing service and financial planning.

5.3.4 The proposed amendments provide a framework for responding to these risks through earlier prevention, partnership working, improved access to accommodation and regular review of service outcomes.

5.4 Policy Implications

5.4.1 The amended Strategy supports the Council's commitment to preventing homelessness, reducing rough sleeping and helping residents access safe, suitable and sustainable accommodation.

5.4.2 It will reflect changes to the private rented sector arising from the Renters' Rights Act and developments in support for care leavers, people experiencing housing insecurity and other vulnerable residents.

5.4.3 The Strategy will continue to guide the Council's homelessness prevention activity and support partnership working across housing, support services and relevant external organisations.

5.5 Staffing and Accommodation Implications

5.5.1 Delivery will be managed within available resources and funding arrangements. Any additional staffing or accommodation requirements arising from the implementation of the Strategy will need to be assessed through the appropriate service planning and approval processes.

5.6 Equalities and Diversity Implications

5.6.1 The Strategy seeks to address homelessness and rough sleeping among residents with differing needs and circumstances. A review of the Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed, considering the implications of the Strategy for all communities. A copy of this assessment is attached. (Appendix D.)

5.7 Service Delivery Implications

5.7.1 The amendments will inform the ongoing delivery of homelessness prevention and rough sleeping services, including adapting to legislative changes in the private rented sector.

5.7.2 Service delivery will focus on strengthening landlord engagement, improving access to suitable accommodation and support through the Single Homeless Pathway, Julians Road provision and Homelessness Community Hub, and providing earlier intervention for people experiencing housing insecurity, including those sofa surfing.

5.7.3 The Council will continue to support residents to move into and sustain accommodation, monitoring service demand, delivery and outcomes to assess the effectiveness of the Strategy.

5.8 **Information Technology Implications**

5.8.1 The implementation of the Strategy will utilise existing Council systems and reporting arrangements wherever possible. Any additional IT or information-sharing requirements arising from TAND, eviction reporting or partnership working will be assessed and managed through the appropriate Council processes.

Appendices

A Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030 - Review 2026

B Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Plan 2026-2027

C Ending Rough Sleeping Action Plan Draft 2026/27

D Equality Impact Assessment Two-Year Review 2026

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Homelessness Code of Guidance

A National Plan to End Homelessness

Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030