

Item

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2021-26

To:

Councillor Richard Johnson, Executive Councillor for Housing
Housing Scrutiny Committee 19/01/2021

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All

Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council is required by law to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This requirement is provided for in the [Homelessness Act 2002](#) (as amended). Ahead of the revised strategy the Council published a [Homelessness Review](#) on 31st December 2019. This is a pre-cursor to the consultation and drafting of the 2021-26 strategy and is also an obligation conferred on local authorities by the Act.
- 1.2 The Council had intended to publish its new strategy in June 2020 but the Covid-19 pandemic and the requirement to provide emergency accommodation for rough sleepers under what came to be known as the Government's '[Everyone In](#)' programme meant that the resources required to produce the strategy were limited in the Spring of this year and it made sense to pause and understand more about the potential effects the pandemic would have on homelessness pressure and the lessons the Council and its partners have identified during this period.

This is especially true in relation to measures employed to tackle rough sleeping since March 2020.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2021-26) and the year one and two action plan as appended to this report.
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Head of Housing to approve annual reiterations of the strategy action plans at years 3,4 and 5 of the strategy in consultation with the Executive Councillor

3. Background

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- 3.1 In preparation for the publication of this strategy, the Council produced a Homelessness Review in December 2019. The Homelessness Review looks at homelessness data, analyses the Council's performance on homelessness and assesses the efficacy or otherwise of initiatives that have been introduced to prevent or relieve homelessness.
- 3.2 Homelessness is prevented via interventions that allow a household to remain in their current home. Homelessness relief occurs when the authority assists a household to find alternative accommodation. Sometimes homelessness relief is achieved prior to the household losing a home (usually where the loss of that home is inevitable). Where homelessness cannot be prevented, the Council needs to consider whether it has reason to believe the individual or family is in ['priority need'](#) and, if this is the case, establishes a 'relief duty' under the Act and offers the household a placement in temporary accommodation.
- 3.3 Preventing homelessness is less disruptive to the family or household threatened with such a scenario; it is also a less costly outcome for the Council because it means that the need for a placement in temporary accommodation is averted. Therefore, prevention is a fundamental tenet of the strategy

- 3.4 The Council's efforts to tackle homelessness in Cambridge are not all centred around its statutory homelessness duties. These duties start at a point where homelessness is within 56 days. However, the Council works to effect homelessness prevention and relief work for households who are threatened with eviction from points in excess of 56 days. An example of this is the work that has been done to encourage private rented sector tenants to come forward when they have been served notices (known as section 21 notices) on assured shorthold tenancies. Many of these notices are invalid and this has afforded officers the opportunity to engage with both landlord and tenant to find solutions to avoid an eviction or to buy time to seek an alternative housing option.
- 3.5 In the same way the Council does not have a statutory responsibility to house rough sleepers per se, but this authority has a long tradition of working closely with partners in both the statutory and non-statutory sectors to support rough sleepers into accommodation. There is more the Council and its partners can do to prevent rough sleeping too and this is reflected in the new strategy.
- 3.6 The strategy focuses on 6 key priorities, which are as follows:
1. Support those at risk of homelessness to remain in their homes where possible
 2. Improve access to a range of permanent accommodation
 3. Minimise the use of temporary and emergency accommodation
 4. Improve access to, and effectiveness of, support services
 5. Prevent rough sleeping
 6. Break the cycle of chronic and repeat street homelessness and rough sleeping
- 3.7 This Strategy is accompanied by a detailed action plan for years 1 and 2 of the strategy, which will be outcome focused, with clear targets for delivery.
- 3.8 A higher-level framework will be in place for subsequent years, with more detailed actions developed on an annual basis for the duration of the strategy. This approach is to allow flexibility in exactly how the objectives and priorities outlined in the strategy are to be achieved, accounting for changing needs and circumstances and the resources available over time. This is particularly important in the current context of uncertainty around the full impact of Covid-19 on homelessness and rough sleeping and on the funding available to tackle the issues involved.

3.9 Implementation of the Strategy will require close partnership working across a wide spectrum of partners. Achievement against the action plan will be monitored on an ongoing basis through the cross-partner Homelessness Strategy Implementation Partnership. An annual outcomes report will be scrutinised by the council's Strategic Leadership Team.

4. Implications

a) Financial Implications

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This is a five-year strategy; any financial requirements to support the strategy will be highlighted in annual budget setting reports. The existing funding mechanisms to fund work to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping are set out in the strategy itself (at appendix 1)

b) Staffing Implications

There are no immediate staffing implications, but the pursuance of objectives outlined in the strategy may prompt the need to undertake a review of the deployment of staffing across the five-year period.

c) Equality and Poverty Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is available as a background paper to this report. Tackling homelessness is a key tenet of the Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy

d) Environmental Implications

Nil. There are no direct impacts, but the Council's Affordable Housing Programme will support the strategy and decisions around the design and build of the existing and forthcoming programmes will have an impact and is reported to committee.

e) Procurement Implications

The strategy outlines proposals to develop a new Streets to Home Service, which will be jointly commissioned with the County Council.

f) Community Safety Implications

There are linkages between street life activity such as begging and anti-social behaviour and drug dependency and homelessness. These are picked up in the strategy.

5. Consultation and communication considerations

Extensive consultation with stakeholders has taken place. The responses to the consultation have been recorded as a background paper to this report

6. Background papers

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

- Summary of consultation responses
- EqIA

7. Appendices

- Appendix A – Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-26

8. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact David Greening, Head of Housing, tel: 01223 - 457997, email: david.greening@cambridge.gov.uk.