

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019 - 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report proposes a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to respond to the current homelessness situation in the district, new legislation and Central Government Policy. The strategy provides a statistical review of the current housing and homelessness situation in the district and sets out the key priorities the Council will action to reduce homelessness and the use of external temporary accommodation.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002 all local authorities are required to publish a homelessness strategy. As the last homelessness strategy was approved in 2003, it is important that an up to date strategy is in place. A strategic approach to tackling homelessness is required to ensure the service is focussed on early intervention and has the tools and resources to try and prevent homelessness in the first place.
- 2.2 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed new duties on local authorities to provide effective advice and assistance to all applicants who approach whether they are vulnerable or not. It also introduced new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness by helping applicants to secure their accommodation through a set of steps agreed with the applicant.
- 2.3 Approaches to the homelessness service are increasing in both numbers and their complexity. Many applicants have multiple needs to resolve as well as housing in order for them to locate and sustain accommodation. The use of external temporary accommodation is increasing along with associated costs to the Council in funding this accommodation.
- 2.4 In August 2018 the Government published its new Rough Sleeping Strategy which declared an intention to end rough sleeping by 2027. In doing so it requires local authorities to amend existing homelessness strategies by the end of 2019 to include specific measures to address rough sleeping.

3. NEW HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

- 3.1 The new proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The aim of the strategy is to put in place specific measures to reduce homelessness and implement early intervention practices with our partners to prevent homelessness. The strategy is part of an over-arching strategic approach to tackling housing issues in the district; led by the Housing Strategy, and alongside the proposed social housing Allocation Policy, which will help maximise the outcomes achieved by the Housing Service over the next few years.

- 3.3 The strategy identifies four key priorities:
 - 3.3.1 Invest in and improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of front line services to prevent homelessness.
 - 3.3.2 Work with partners and stakeholders to identify issues early on and prevent homelessness by working together.
 - 3.3.3 Ending the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation through investing in and facilitating the development and use of good quality affordable housing and temporary accommodation.
 - 3.3.4 Bring rough sleeping to an end.
- 3.4 The strategy summarises the key challenges faced in the New Forest against the backdrop of the national situation. The strategy demonstrates how the national policy and legislative framework has placed a large focus on the local authority response to homelessness with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which places new duties on local authorities to provide effective and consistent service offerings to all those who approach for assistance.
- 3.5 Locally, the strategy demonstrates how the numbers of households becoming homeless and placed in temporary accommodation has increased over the last few years, bringing about an even greater demand for social housing. The impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is also shown as officers are now able to accurately record all approaches for assistance to the service for the first time. Based on actual figures to date, projected figures for the first 12 months of the Act show that over 2,100 households are likely to approach the service for help. Many of these households have complex needs such as mental health conditions and drug and alcohol abuse.
- 3.6 Through its key priorities the strategy will respond to such demand and the complexities of the caseload through a series of key actions designed to increase support and accommodation provision and create joined up responses with our partners, both statutory and voluntary, to effectively respond in preventing homelessness.
- 3.7 The priorities recognise the need to increase the provision of Council owned emergency accommodation across the district to minimise the disruption to households at their most vulnerable time and to reduce the costs currently borne by the council in providing this through external providers.
- 3.8 These key priorities include a response to end rough sleeping. This will require an enhanced approach involving a pathway of accommodation with support to ensure rough sleepers with complex needs have the opportunity to address health and welfare issues and sustain tenancies in the long term.
- 3.9 The Executive Head of Governance & Regulation and Service Manager – Housing Options will lead the delivery of the strategy which will be reviewed by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel annually.
- 3.10 Before adopting a new strategy, the Council needs to consult with authorities and organisations it deems appropriate. It is intended that the proposed Strategy is published on the Council's website for four weeks and appropriate organisations are made aware of the consultation.

- 3.11 Responses to the consultation will be reported to Cabinet and Council in February 2019.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 An increased focus on early intervention and partnership working resulting from the actions in both the homelessness and housing strategies, along with the Council sourcing more of its own emergency temporary accommodation should bring about a more efficient use of the current homelessness budget including a reduction in external Bed & Breakfast spend.
- 4.2 To achieve a number of the key actions contained within the strategy there is a requirement to complement the existing Homelessness and Advice Officer Team with Support Officers who will provide more dedicated welfare support to guide applicants along a pathway to sustaining accommodation and to support rough sleepers through accommodation pathways. These additional resources are likely to be met from within the overall homelessness budget which will be kept under careful review.

5. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Ensuring that the right support is provided to homeless people at the right time will reduce any real or perceived crime and disorder issues that may arise from time to time.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are none.

7. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 This strategy is for the benefit of all of the Council's residents as set out in the key objectives above and will have a positive impact by focusing the Council's resources to take a more proactive approach to the prevention of homelessness. Consideration has been given to the needs of those who identify with protected characteristic groups; in particular those with disabilities (both physical and mental health) who may find it difficult to access the Council's services. However, the Council has implemented partnership working with other agencies through the Multi-Agency Homelessness Forum and will develop further pathways which seek to identify and work with those who require support and assistance to prevent or relieve their homelessness.
- 7.2 This strategy must be read alongside the Council's other key housing initiatives including the Housing Strategy, the Tenancy Strategy and the new Allocations Policy which will all provide a means to meet the housing needs of those within these protected characteristic groups. It is recognised that the way in which the strategy is implemented and the impact on those with a protected characteristic will need to be regularly monitored to ensure that those residents are able to take advantage of the strategy's key objectives.

8. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 8.1 In leading the Homelessness Task and Finish group over the last year I have understood first-hand the huge impact homelessness has on the people of the New Forest and on the Council in responding to the issue. I have called for measures to be put in place to address this impact and I welcome the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy; with a set of key priorities that aim to end rough sleeping, increase access to suitable accommodation and which review frontline services to the betterment of those who approach for assistance.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel consider the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

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Background Papers:

Public documents