

Cabinet – 4 March 2026

Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The Homelessness Act 2002 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 legislates that local authorities must carry out a homelessness review of their district at least every five years and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on that review.</p> <p>Following consultation with staff, external stakeholders, EMT and the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel it is recommended that Cabinet support the progress of the strategy before public consultation and subsequent review.</p> <p>The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be a public facing document highlighting the key pressures faced by NFDC and our plans to provide solutions to these pressures and the presentation of housing need in the area.</p>
Recommendation(s)	That Cabinet approves the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for public consultation.
Reasons for recommendation(s)	<p>The Housing Act 2002 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 legislates that local authorities must conduct a homelessness review and publish a strategy at least every five years outlining how they will prevent homelessness, provide suitable accommodation, support those affected and offer early intervention and cross-agency collaboration.</p>

	<p>The previous homelessness strategy ran from 2019 to 2023 and focussed heavily on addressing rough sleeping in the area.</p> <p>Although the strategy period expired many of the pressures and priorities remained the same and work continued to focus on homelessness prevention.</p> <p>The service and the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness took stock of a change in Government homelessness grant focus, the significant reduction in rough sleeping and increase in family homelessness to develop a new strategy, which will now progress through the Council's decision-making process and public consultation.</p>
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Steve Davies - Housing and Homelessness
Strategic Director(s)	Peter Matthew – Housing & Communities
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Introduction and background

1. The Council's previous Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy was last published in 2018. This strategy has delivered key successes, including the increase in Housing Revenue Account owned temporary accommodation, and a significant reduction of rough sleeping from around 20 rough sleepers to an average of 2 at the time of the last annual count. These successes followed significant investment in the resident-facing support teams managing homelessness and in housing development and acquisition.
2. The landscape for homelessness in the district has changed significantly since 2018, and specialist consultants and data analysts

were commissioned to produce a comprehensive review of homelessness and existing support services across the district. This review was undertaken during spring and summer 2025 with consultation held with all key stakeholders across the district including NHS, National Probation Service, Hampshire County Council (HCC) Care Leavers team, HCC social services, housing associations, NFDC staff, the Portfolio Holder Cllr Steve Davies and the Tenant Involved Group of NFDC tenants – see Appendix 2.

Key findings of the review (appendix 2)

3. Homelessness pressures in the New Forest have remained broadly stable in recent years. Statutory homelessness levels are approximately 8% higher than the Hampshire district average, but remain significantly below regional averages for both the South East and South West.
4. The district faces structural challenges, including:
 - a. High house prices and limited availability of social housing.
 - b. Low levels of supported housing provision.
 - c. Areas of deprivation.
 - d. Geographic constraints due to the National Park designation, which restricts new development opportunities.
5. The Council has achieved a near elimination of rough sleeping, contrary to national trends, through targeted outreach and specialist officers for mental health and ex-offenders.
6. Use of hotel style Emergency Accommodation (TA) has declined against national and regional increases, but emergency accommodation usage remains high. The Council has invested in high-quality, purpose-built or converted TA and operates a substantial private sector leasing scheme, contrasting with other authorities' reliance on nightly paid accommodation.
7. External agencies report strong collaboration and professionalism across all levels of the homelessness service.
8. A higher proportion of applicants seek assistance before becoming homeless, creating opportunities for prevention. Prevention success rates are slightly below average, with most cases resolved through moves to private sector tenancies rather than sustaining existing accommodation.

9. Relief performance is significantly below average, with only 23% of relief duties resulting in accommodation for six months or more. Consequently, the Council accepts 40% more main homelessness duties per thousand households than the Hampshire district average.
10. The leading cause is eviction by friends or family, rather than loss of private sector tenancy, which is less prevalent than in other areas, but still remains a high second to family and friend evictions.
11. TA numbers remain higher than other Hampshire districts, and the Council continues to face challenges in reducing the number of households placed in emergency accommodation, including some for more than six weeks. The quality of TA is high, and the Council demonstrates strong management and responsiveness to provider issues.
12. Supported housing provision is limited, resulting in very few homelessness duties ending in supported housing placements.
13. Engagement with Hampshire adult and children's services is strong, though some service users report unmet support needs.
14. Net expenditure on homelessness has increased significantly in recent years, despite additional grant funding, though a reduction is budgeted for 2025/26.
15. The greatest opportunity for cost savings lies in reducing reliance on emergency accommodation through improved prevention, relief, and supply of settled housing.
16. External agencies unanimously commend the professionalism and responsiveness of the homelessness service.
17. Service user feedback is mixed: while some report excellent, person-centred support, others felt unheard or treated insensitively.

Areas to progress

18. The homelessness and rough sleeping review, which supports this strategy, identified a number of areas where we want to improve over the life of the strategy, including:
 - a. A stronger housing advice offer for people who are not yet homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.
 - b. Better success rates for homelessness prevention, especially prevention which allows people to stay in their existing home.

- c. Earlier intervention to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, including reducing the number of households who become homeless through eviction by family and friends.
- d. More transparent communication to support people at risk of homelessness getting the information they need to help them, including online and in person.
- e. Improving the proportion of people owed homelessness relief duty who have homelessness relieved successfully within 56 days.
- f. Reducing the use of B&B to as close to zero as possible, including through more provision of better quality, more cost-effective TA.

Homelessness Strategy Priorities

- 19. The priorities outlined by the draft strategy are:
 - a. Preventing and relieving homelessness
 - b. Ending rough sleeping
 - c. Investing in accommodation
 - d. Providing support
 - e. Working in partnership
- 20. Pages 16 to 22 of the strategy cover the key commitments of the housing service to meet the vision (pages 14 to 15) of the strategy. Pages 23 of the strategy document lists the key deliverable over the life of the strategy.

Corporate plan priorities

- 21. This strategy establishes our vision for delivering Homelessness and Rough Sleeping services within the New Forest and its contribution in achieving the ambitions of the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-28 including: -

People Priority 1: Provide more quality, temporary accommodation for single people and households and work with our partners to tackle homelessness.

Ensure our strategies, policies and working practices support necessary adaptations and other support that enables people to stay in their homes and to live independently.

Support community engagement, working with partners and our town and parish councils to help resolve local issues, including those associated with the cost of living, homelessness and community, health, safety and resilience.

People Priority 2: Empowering our residents to live healthy, connected and fulfilling lives.

Work with our communities to understand their needs and empower them to influence the services and outcomes of their area.

Consultation undertaken.

22. Cllr S Davies, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness was consulted on the development of the strategy.
23. The Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel supported the report.
24. When carrying out the review of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping consultation was undertaken with stakeholders, including current and former service users, voluntary sector partners The Crossings, Youth and Families Matter, Citizens Advice Bureau, as well as Probation, Registered Social Housing Providers, NHS, HCC Care Leavers Team and Adult and Children's Services.
25. Housing Service staff participated in a homelessness workshop to feed their experience into the strategy, and the Tenant Involved Group met with the consultants and fed back their views on the services and the draft strategy.
26. Formal public and further stakeholder and service user consultation will take place to seek views on the proposed draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
27. Consultation methods will include:
 - Drop-in sessions at our community hubs, community days and coffee and catch-up sessions.
 - Face to face and virtual focus groups with residents, current housing register applicants, Tenant Involved Group, registered providers and stakeholders.
 - Online survey

Financial and resource implications

28. The total budget for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping is £2.9 Million per annum comprising of several income streams. The

Homelessness Prevention Grant of £1.3 million subsidises the costs of providing services across the district with additional contributions of £1.1 million from the Council General Fund, £438,450 from the Rough Sleepers Initiative as well as ad-hoc government payments and initiatives.

29. It is expected that the future Homelessness Prevention Grant from April 2026 will be reduced, however the settlement has yet to be confirmed at time of report publication.

Legal implications

30. Failure to provide effective homelessness advice and services can result in legal challenges through costly judicial reviews, compensation claims from affected individuals and increased scrutiny by central government leading to potential loss of funding or grants tied to performance.
31. There is a legal requirement for councils to carry out a homelessness review in the area at least every five years and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on that review as outlined.

Risk assessment

32. Failure to deliver adequate homelessness advice services can result in several consequences both legally and reputationally. **Legal challenges** through costly judicial reviews, **compensation claims** from affected individuals and **increased scrutiny** from oversight bodies such as Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and fines or reduced grants from central government can impact future service delivery.
33. Fragmented, or poorly coordinated, services pose a risk of harm to vulnerable individuals. Gaps in housing, health, and support provision can lead to delays, inconsistent care, and increased chances of safeguarding failures, health deterioration, and repeat homelessness. A joined-up approach with clear accountability and strong partnerships is essential to mitigate these risks.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

34. Whilst the report has no direct implications, it will align with local climate action plans, biodiversity strategies, and net-zero goals. Work with environmental agencies, health services, and housing providers to ensure joined-up responses.

Equalities implications

35. This policy includes the key components to ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty to ensure diverse needs are considered including protected characteristics, language barriers, and additional support needs and assess whether all residents have fair access to, and equitable outcomes of, homelessness services.
36. The main considerations for the Equalities Impact Assessment are ensuring fair and inclusive access to housing and support, removing barriers such as language, disability, and digital exclusion, providing suitable accommodation for vulnerable groups, and integrating health and wellbeing services. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy addresses risks for households, young people, victims of domestic abuse, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with complex needs, while committing to safeguarding measures, accessible communication, and robust data monitoring to prevent discrimination and promote equality through coordinated service delivery.
37. A full review of equalities implications assessment has been undertaken. Refer to Appendix 3

Crime and disorder implications

38. Homelessness can sometimes be associated with visible street activity that some communities perceive as anti-social, such as rough sleeping in public spaces or substance use. This strategy aims to provide compassionate support for individuals experiencing homelessness, while proactively identifying people sleeping rough and responding promptly on reports from the public.
39. There is a common link between homelessness and petty crime. The strategy commits to strong partnership working with police, social services, specialist support and the community safety team/partnership to reduce the risk of offending including any safeguarding concerns. Homeless support staff also provide support for households to understand how behaviours impact others and to help reduce ASB.
40. A risk-based approach is used for placements of households into TA to ensure community cohesion is at the forefront of decision making.
41. Staff are trained on early intervention and safeguarding.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

42. The collection, retention and deletion of data is governed by GDPR and associated guidance. All data will be collected and maintained in line with the required legislation.
43. Data will be shared only when necessary to fulfil statutory homelessness duties under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Information may also be shared where there is a legal obligation to do so (e.g. safeguarding concerns or referrals), where it is in the public interest to prevent serious harm or protect vulnerable individuals, or where the individual has provided explicit consent, particularly for non-statutory referrals or support services.

New Forest National Park / Cranborne Chase National Landscape implications

44. Priority 5 of the draft strategy sets out our proposal of working in partnership, including with the National Park Authority.
45. The new approach to ensuring the housing service positively contributes to housing neighbourhoods may involve increased partnership working with the National Park Authority, whilst partnership work with the NPA and Forestry England supports work with rough sleepers and vulnerable people in remote settings.

Conclusion

46. This draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy consolidates findings from the comprehensive review of homelessness services and sets out a five-year vision focused on preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity and strengthening collaboration with the voluntary and statutory sectors across the district. It is recommended that Cabinet supports progress of the draft strategy for public consultation and subsequent review.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Appendix 2 – Review of Homelessness in New Forest

Appendix 3 – Equalities Impact Assessment

Background Papers:

None