



## **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**24 OCTOBER 2019**

### **DRAFT HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY 2019-2024**

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#### **Summary**

This report seeks Members' views on a draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-24, which responds to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, government guidance on homelessness and rough sleeping and current practice in Medway. It replaces the previous Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 Approving the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024 is a matter for the Cabinet.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to carry out a Homelessness Review and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review.

2.2 The Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-19 to cover the time while the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was introduced and the government guidance was released and implemented. In the last two years the way homelessness services are provided has changed significantly. This has been driven by direction from the Portfolio Holder, changes in legislation and the rough sleeper initiative work. Some voluntary sector organisations have also changed the way they support homeless people and co-operation and collaborative working has been strengthened through the Homelessness Forum. Key achievements include:

- Developing, agreeing and reviewing protocols to support vulnerable people at risk of homelessness or who are homeless
- Providing all eligible households with housing options advice, including those with no local connection and the intentionally homeless
- Making the Landlords Hotline available to all landlords

- Updating the website with easy to understand information
- Ensuring the Homelessness Forum partners know how to identify households at risk of homelessness and how to refer them
- Agreeing a Homelessness Charter between statutory and voluntary sector organisations
- Creating a guide for young people to set up their home and budget
- Supporting households in temporary accommodation to understand their tenancy and to access a wide range of support services
- Working with the rough sleepers winter shelters to help signpost clients to relevant services and housing advice
- Continuing to work with developers to provide affordable housing
- Assessing the feasibility of a Housing First pilot and beginning the pilot
- Reviewing the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol with partners and using the big TV screen by Chatham Bus Station to tell people when it's running
- Commissioning floating support and supported housing to support vulnerable households maintain a home
- Using the Quality Assessment Framework to assess all commissioned supported housing providers and finding all services to be satisfactory
- Increasing the amount of preventative options available for households at risk of homeless and stabilising the amount of households in temporary accommodation.
- Successfully rolling out a range of initiatives associated with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) Rough Sleeping Initiative contributing to moving over 90 people into accommodation.

2.3 Significant changes introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 were to extend the duty to work with households at risk of homelessness to prevent homelessness to 56 days, to work with homeless households to help them relieve their homelessness for 56 days and to create a personalised housing plan to help each household find settled accommodation.

2.4 The Government released its Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2018 which sets out its vision for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. This strategy includes the Rough Sleeper Initiative and Medway Council was invited to bid for funding. We were successful and a Rough Sleeper Initiative has been running in Medway since July 2018. The government's Strategy also required local housing authorities to call their new strategies Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategies and to have annual action plans. We have been aware of significant issues impacting on Medway's homeless situation and these have been included in our planning. For example; our day to day experience and periodic research shows that a significant proportion of people begging in Medway are not homeless. Housing Services are planning a communications campaign to detail the range of provision available to people who are sleeping rough and so address the notion that people are begging in Medway due to lack of available food or lack of support. Ongoing concerns around people living in tents are recognised and a meeting is booked to seek a Council wide agreement on ways of tackling this. We accept the need for more support around mental health and are working with partners on ways to address this.

- 2.5 A Homelessness Review (Appendix 3) highlighted;
- The significant gap between the local housing allowance and the average private sector rents which creates affordability problems
  - The increasing number of households seeking assistance from the homelessness service
  - The significant increase in the number of households whose homelessness is prevented or relieved by Medway Council
  - The large number and variety of organisations providing support to rough sleepers
  - The new work of the Rough Sleeper Initiative
- 2.6 We have carried our further analysis since the Homelessness Review was completed and this shows these trends continue. There are 9% fewer households in temporary housing due to all the efforts of the housing service in preventing homelessness and helping households move on from temporary accommodation.
- 2.7 An engagement event was held with a wide range of partner organisations in October 2018. This identified what was working well, the challenges and areas to address and actions to complete going forward. The Citizens' Panel were consulted on their perception of homelessness and rough sleeping, the services available and how well they worked together.
- 2.8 Key changes between the current strategy and draft strategy reflect the new requirements of the Rough Sleeper Strategy, including the new title and annual action plan relevant parts of the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.
- 2.9 The draft strategy (Appendix 1) addresses five main themes, reflecting the advice of the current Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on writing a homelessness strategy. These are:
- Providing advice and information to prevent homelessness
  - Identifying households at risk of homelessness early
  - Intervening before homelessness occurs
  - Preventing recurring homelessness
  - Working with partner agencies

### **3. Options**

- 3.1 The options available are:
- To recommend the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-24 to the Cabinet.
  - To propose amendments to the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-24 for consideration by the Cabinet.

### **4. Advice and analysis**

- 4.1 The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-24 responds to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, government guidance on homelessness and rough sleeping and current practice in Medway. It has an

annual action plan (Appendix 4) to address each theme and progress will be monitored every three months.

- 4.2 A Diversity Impact Assessment (Appendix 2) has been carried out. It identified impacts for this strategy relating to people with the protected characteristic of pregnancy/maternity in that under the previous legislation and under the current legislation, pregnant women will be found to be in priority need when homelessness. It also identified a potential benefit for rough sleepers as it may reduce stigma against them.

## 5. Risk management

- 5.1 Please see details of the risks below.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
The strategy is not implemented	If the strategy is not implemented it will not meet the legal requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002 or the guidance in the government's Rough Sleeper Strategy	Implement the strategy and its annual action plan	D2
That the strategy does not remain relevant	New legislation or guidance could determine change is required	Regular contact with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government will ensure we know of any changes early. The annual action plan allows the strategy to be highly responsive	D2
That the needs of vulnerable groups (Pregnant women, 16/17 year olds, those significantly more vulnerable than others if made homeless etc.) will not be met.	New legislation protects vulnerable groups to the same level as previous legislation. They will remain a priority across all services.	Housing Options Service to continue respond appropriately to vulnerable households.	D2

## 6. Consultation

- 6.1 The consultation is being carried out on the strategy and not the annual action plan as advised by Legal Services. This also allows the action plan to be updated quickly and maintain its relevance.
- 6.2 The Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government's rough sleeper initiative adviser has agreed the strategy is suitable.

- 6.3 A lunch and learn session was held in June 2019 with 19 colleagues from housing, public health, adult and children's services, town centre management and environmental services to inform them of the consultation and seek their feedback on the themes. We analysed the feedback to identify any matters that were not covered in the strategy or action plan and this led us to add more detail to the action regarding a communications strategy and to add actions on increasing the range of options we have to current temporary accommodation provision (including e.g. assessing the feasibility of the Council running a lettings agency) and exploring opportunities to work more closely with colleagues in Adult Social Care and Children's Services. The draft strategy remains unchanged.
- 6.4 In June 2019 we held a consultation session attended by 12 male and one female service users of local charity which provides direct access accommodation to homeless single people and couples over 25. A short presentation was given on the need for a new strategy and the five themes and the group split into two to give verbal feedback to members of staff. All agreed with the five themes and the comments had either been addressed in the strategy or were not in the scope of the strategy.
- 6.5 The draft strategy consultation was posted on the Council's website from 5 July 2019 to 22 September. A social media campaign was run to encourage the general public to respond to the consultation. All members of the Homelessness Forum were informed of the consultation and invited to respond. We received 90 responses including two from local organisations.
- 6.6 78% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the theme 'Providing advice and information to prevent homelessness', with 11% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 10% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Most comments were supportive with some suggesting ways to ensure all knew of the homelessness service.
- 6.7 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the theme 'Identifying households at risk of homelessness early' with 10% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 1% disagreeing. One respondent suggested a way is found to store rough sleeper's possessions and an action will be added to the action plan to investigate options for doing this.
- 6.8 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the theme 'Intervening before homelessness occurs' with 9% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 1% strongly disagreeing. One respondent suggested we work with people being evicted, supporting them to challenge evictions and help with eviction and rent arrear proceedings in Court. The homelessness team provide support for this and we will add an action to the action plan to review the support provided and make recommendations. Many supportive comments were made and some suggested actions already in the action plan.
- 6.9 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the theme 'Working with partner agencies' with 10% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 4% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Many supportive comments were made and some suggested actions already in the action plan.

- 6.10 None of the responses raised issues that required amendments to the strategy.
- 6.11 During the consultation period we have also received feedback from elected members raising concerns around the street population (people who sleep rough and/or beg) and we will ensure that this is included in the year 1 action plan for the document.

## **7. Financial implications**

- 7.1 The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy does not entail any budgetary commitments above those already planned for. However, it should be noted that the review of ways to increase alternative provision may propose a 'spend to save' model at a future date.
- 7.2 The profile of funding for homelessness and rough sleeping services has changed considerably since the implementation of the previous 2017/19 document. The Council, through its medium term financial strategy, has sought to address the inherent demographic pressures associated particularly with the provision of temporary accommodation, a trend also seen nationally. This increase to base budget funding has allowed for further investment in preventative services the outcome of which be increase in preventative outcomes and a stabilising of the number of households in temporary accommodation.
- 7.3 Significant additional funding has also been attained from MHCLG in relation to Rough Sleeping (£478,000 in 2018/19, £767,500 in 2019/20) for in-house Rough Sleeper Coordinator, an Outreach team, specialist workers for vulnerable females, people accessing the private rental sector, people with mental health support needs, additional funding to assist people into accommodation and commissioned supported accommodation services. There is, however, a challenge in terms of future funding for these initiatives. Whilst positive comments have been made by the MHCLG there is still a risk their funding will cease for this activity.

## **8. Legal implications**

- 8.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local housing authorities to carry out a review of homelessness and provide and publish a strategy based on its findings.
- 8.2 This draft strategy meets that requirement and is named and planned in accordance with the government's Rough Sleeper Strategy 2018. There are no other legal implications for this draft strategy.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 Members are asked to scrutinise the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-24 and forward any comments to Cabinet.

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**Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024

Appendix 2 - Diversity Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 - Homelessness Review 2018

Appendix 4 - Year 1 Action Plan

**Background papers**

None