

## **Cabinet**

**17 December 2024**

### **Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Louwella Prenter, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness

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#### **Summary**

This report introduces the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030 which replaces the 2019-2024 Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy approved by Cabinet in 2019. The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out Medway's strategic approach for homelessness services and details how the Council will enable the delivery of these services. This paper sets out the background to Medway Council's Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030, the consultation process, and the refinement of the strategy based on feedback received to date.

The report was previously considered by the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the comments of which are set out at section 9 of the report.

#### **1. Recommendations**

- 1.1. The Cabinet is requested to note the comments of the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in section 9 of the report.
- 1.2. It is recommended that the Cabinet agrees adoption of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

#### **2. Suggested reasons for decision**

- 2.1. 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. The strategy must be renewed at least every 5 years. As the previous Strategy was agreed in 2019, agreement of a new Strategy is now required.

### 3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030 has been developed in line with the Council Plan and sets out the Council's contribution to meeting the aims of the One Medway Council Plan with respect to preventing and relieving homelessness and rough sleeping. The approval of a Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a matter for Cabinet.

### 4. Background

- 4.1. Medway Council's current Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Housing Strategy was agreed in 2019.
- 4.2. Under the Homelessness Act 2002 *all housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their district. The strategy must be renewed at least every 5 years.* In addition, it was recognised that an updated strategy was required to reflect the changes in local demand and national legislative changes.
- 4.3. The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030 details the Council's planned response in meeting the needs of Medway's residents with regards to Homelessness, in all forms. To ensure that the Council captured a broad spectrum of views on the local picture, with its pressures and opportunities, a stakeholder event was carried out on 15 July 2024 to confirm what the updated priorities should be.
- 4.4. This span of stakeholders recognises the impact housing has on a wide range of areas including social care, public health, support services and the wider community and conversely the positive role which all of these partners have in the prevention and relief of homelessness.
- 4.5. This input has allowed officers to better understand these interrelationships and look to agree how best to work together to achieve positive outcomes for Medway residents. Input was sought during the process of drawing up the strategy and an iterative process was used to develop the current draft version. Medway Housing's Portfolio Holder, Councillor Prenter, has been involved through the process and the Council publicised the draft for consultation with Medway residents from 9 September 2024 until 31 October 2024.
- 4.6. Responses to the strategy consultation have been analysed by officers within strategic housing services, supported by Business Intelligence colleagues and potential changes to the draft identified and a log of responses to consultation and any answers to questions raised is summarised in an Appendix to the report to Cabinet. This is attached as Appendix 4.

## 5. Options

- 5.1. The options are:
- 5.2. To adopt the proposed Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030 (included at appendix one).
- 5.3. To propose amendments to the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030 and have the strategy re-presented to Cabinet at a later date.
- 5.4. To not agree to the progression of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030 and carry on business as usual without a new strategy in place.

## 6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. The draft strategy has been developed based upon a comprehensive review and consideration of:
  - The national and local context.
  - Achievements and progress of the 2019-2024 Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
  - Consultation with stakeholders (detailed in section 7).
  - Homelessness review 2024.
  - Commitments made by Medway Council during the Participatory Democracy Event in February 2024.
- 6.2. The strategy is designed around five key priorities:
  - Using information to prevent homelessness - what do we know, what do we need to know and how can we use this information to help reduce the risk of homelessness?
  - One Medway Approach – working across partners, sharing expertise and resources.
  - Solution focused support -intervening quickly and effectively.
  - The right accommodation - people have safe, secure and appropriate accommodation options.
  - Informing everyone about homelessness and housing rights - making knowledge about homelessness prevention mainstream.
- 6.3. The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be delivered by Housing Services in partnership with a range of internal Medway Council Service areas and external stakeholders including Supported Housing Providers, NHS services, Criminal Justice services, Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services, private landlords and the local Voluntary and Community Sector, organisations whose work focuses on housing issues. Each of the priorities will be accompanied by progress indicators and practical actions to meet the aims of the Strategy. Throughout the lifetime of the strategy, Housing services will work with partners to take advantage of new

opportunities for funding and with stakeholders to take advantage of resources not available to the Council.

- 6.4. The Officers bringing the Strategy into operation will remain responsive to the issues which provide challenge or opportunity to the authority, examples include:
- 6.5. The relative affordability of accommodation of Medway, within the Southeast region means that other authorities use accommodation in Medway to place households. This practice reduces availability for Medway residents and drives up costs, particularly for temporary accommodation.
- 6.6. The Deputy Prime Minister has warned authorities that this practice is illegal unless placing authorities inform the host authority that they are placing a homeless household. The MP for Gillingham and Rainham, Naushabah Khan, has long lobbied the Council and Central Government on the adverse impact the placement of households by other authorities has. In response Medway has made representation to Kent Housing Group and a Pan London consultation arguing that this practice is unfair and damaging to Medway.
- 6.7. The removal of the local connection or residency test requirement for application to social housing for armed forces veterans, and further measures to increase access to accommodation for care leavers and victims of domestic abuse, giving local authorities more flexibility to help these groups. These groups have long been championed by Medway with location connection or residency tests not required for armed forces veterans under our existing Allocations Policy 2019.
- 6.8. A Diversity Impact Assessment has been carried out and no adverse impacts were identified with advancement of equality identified in the categories of Age, Disability, Sex and Low Income. The Diversity Impact Assessment is included as Appendix 2.
- 6.9. Sustainability is a key issue across all Medway's activity. There are limited options to drive this through the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy aside from procurement activity and supporting the application to Sustainable Warmth grant funding, but this will be reviewed regularly for additional options to increase the work towards a carbon neutral Medway.
- 6.10. Included within the strategy priorities are measures which support Medway Housing's ongoing commitment to include the needs of Looked After Children, this will include seeking additional support and accommodation to meet the needs of this group where possible.

## 7. Risk Management

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>	<b>Risk rating</b>
That the actions required by the strategy are not carried out.	The actions which support the commitments are used to derive an action plan which will have indicators of progress which will need to be achieved to meet the outcomes required by the strategy.	Monitoring of progress against the actions agreed will be carried out by the Senior Housing Management Team within Housing Services. Overall progress by individual officers will be managed under the PDR process across the Housing Services. A quarterly analysis of progress will be uploaded on to Pentana.	CII
That agencies do not work in a coordinated fashion to achieve the aims of the strategy.	Actions detailed to fulfil the aims of the strategy will need the input of statutory and voluntary partners.	Officers across Housing Services will ensure that updates are timetabled to progress specific elements of the strategy and that all relevant agencies are regularly met with. Any issues with this will be picked up in quarterly Pentana monitoring commentary and addressed.	CIII
That the decision is made not to update the 2019-24 Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to this draft version, leaving the Council open to challenge as not having a current strategy.	The strategy has been written to take into account recent legislative changes and the national picture (e.g. the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act 2023 and the cost of living crisis) and the evolving needs of Medway's residents.	The direction outlined in the strategy is a shared vision across strategic housing and partner agencies. Should the strategy not be agreed, the work areas would continue under the aims of the previous strategy.	CII
<b>Likelihood</b>		<b>Impact:</b>	
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare		I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor	

## 8. Consultation

- 8.1. Consultation started with the Participatory Democracy Event in February 2024, facilitated by Arts and Homelessness International. The event saw a team of people with lived experience of homelessness and Medway Council frontline staff build a play reflecting their experiences and challenges in homelessness, housing, and rough sleeping services in Medway. Through audience participation (including elected members), priorities and commitments were identified and refined. These priorities and commitments have been embedded throughout the strategy.
- 8.2. Prior to drafting the strategy, further consultation was carried out through a detailed workshop session across internal stakeholders from housing and public health, and children's services, and external bodies including health services, registered providers, support providers, voluntary and community sector providers.
- 8.3. This outlined the key priorities that the group on stakeholders saw as key to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in Medway. The draft Strategy was discussed at Medway's Homelessness Forum and with a range of staff from Housing Options, Rehousing, Private Sector Team and the Rough Sleeping Initiative.
- 8.4. The Strategy was also shared for comment with managers from the Culture Team, Adult Social Care and Children's Services. This allowed for a refining of the draft strategy to the point where Housing Services were able to send the strategy out to public consultation. This ran from 09 September 2024 to 31 October 2024. The strategy was also sent to Children and Adults Directorate Management Team (DMT), Place DMT and Corporate Management Team (CMT) for review and comment.
- 8.5. There were 47 submitted responses to the consultation. The results were positive in the majority of responses with over 90% of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing to each of the priorities. (91% agree with Using Information to Prevent Homelessness; 92% agree with the One Medway Approach; 96% agree with Solution Focused Support; 92% agree with the Right Accommodation; 93% agree with Informing Everyone about Homelessness and Housing Rights).
- 8.6. The main reasons and comments given for disagreement were; Using Information to Prevent Homelessness (4% disagreed) – there is not enough information available, information not currently accessible e.g. to the deaf community, One Medway Approach (4% disagreed/strongly disagreed) – the deaf community have not been sufficiently communicated with about the approach, general communication about One Medway needs improving; Solution Focused Support (4% strongly disagreed) – not enough support, it needs to be more accessible and delivered faster; The Right Accommodation (4% disagreed/strongly disagreed) - there is not enough 24 hour high need support, people should get more help in finding accommodation; Inform Everyone about Homelessness and Housing Rights (4% strongly disagree) -

lack up support around accessibility and information, not enough help given. In summary, the disagree/strongly disagree responses mainly relate to dissatisfaction with the current position and the aims of the new Strategy should positively impact on the majority of issues raised.

- 8.7. The Strategy was presented to the Regeneration, Culture and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 October 2024, and was approved to move to Cabinet without amendment. The minutes of the discussion are set out below.

## 9. Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 9.1. The minutes of the discussion at the Committee were as follows:
- 9.2. Officers informed the Committee of the partnership working required to deliver the Strategy and the lived experience that had been used to influence the document.
- 9.3. Members discussed the differences from the last Strategy, the purpose of the lettings agency proposed and the impact of changes to the market regarding the availability of private rented property.
- 9.4. Officers explained that the proposed letting agency would provide a service that was not available on the High Street with regards to guaranteed rent and would assist with relationships with landlords and households allowing earlier intervention and better outcomes.
- 9.5. Future supply of properties was discussed, and officers explained how they were working with providers to progress this. In response to a query from Members regarding members of the Armed Forces, officers confirmed this was already a priority in the allocations criteria and we did not have any Armed Forces rough sleepers when the last count took place.
- 9.6. Members expressed concern about the impact of dispersals from Home Office funded accommodation and officers confirmed they were aware of this and work closely with the Home Office and South East Migration Partnership.
- 9.7. Members were keen to see the use of modular homes explored as well as the greater use of data to aid earlier intervention.

### 9.8. **Decision:**

The Committee recommended to Cabinet to approve the Draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

## 10. Climate change implications

- 10.1. Due to the type of activity which the Strategy focusses on, it has a limited amount of scope to address climate change directly but actions to reduce the carbon footprint of homelessness provision in Medway are detailed in the table below. It is recognised that the majority of Medway Housing's Partners (for example registered providers of supported housing) will have their own climate change strategies and we will seek to coordinate activity wherever possible. This is in line with Medway Council's target to become carbon neutral by 2050.

Positive Impact on Climate Change	Negative Impact on Climate Change
Ensure that commissioned services evidence their commitment to reducing their environmental impact, through our procurement process.	
Work with non-registered provider supported housing providers and landlords to improve their understanding of acceptable standards, available funding and any likely future requirements regarding the energy efficiency of their buildings. This will include referral to our Private Sector Housing Team where this becomes necessary.	

## 11. Financial implications

- 11.1. The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030 recognises the severe pressure that meeting statutory homelessness needs represents for Medway Council, currently projected to result in a budget pressure of c£3m in 2024/25 and between £3-5million in 2025/26, however this strategy aims to reduce the amount of homelessness and therefore lessen the impact on Medway Council's resources.

## 12. Legal implications

- 12.1. There is a legal requirement to have a Homelessness Strategy, as referenced in section 3.1. The strategy serves as a useful policy document setting out the Council's approach to homelessness and allows Members to scrutinise delivery. There are no other legal implications.

### Lead officer contact

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## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030

Appendix 2 – Diversity Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 – Medway Homelessness Review 2024

Appendix 4 – Summary of consultation comments and responses

## Background Papers

None.