

Health and Wellbeing Board

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Homelessness Prevention and Better Quality and Supply of Affordable Housing: Strategic and Operational Activity

Report from: Mark Breathwick, Assistant Director, Culture and Community

Author: Chris Giles, Housing Strategy and Partnerships Manager

Summary

This report provides an update on current activity by Housing Services and related partners around preventing homelessness, including the key priorities of the [Homelessness prevention and rough sleepers strategy](#) and relevant parts of the [Housing strategy to 2030](#).

The rationale for this report coming to the Health and Wellbeing Board is due to the subject area being a sub priority within **Theme 2, Reduce Poverty and Inequality: people living in affordable homes** and the links between where someone lives and the levels of health inequality they experience.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note the report and Members are asked to consider how they or the organisations that they represent can help to deliver the key priorities of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleepers Strategy to 2030 and relevant parts of the Housing Strategy to 2030.

2 Introduction

- 2.1. The need for action can be clearly seen. From the Homelessness Review, which was carried out prior to the development of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030, there has been a sustained and substantial increase in homelessness over the last five years. To further illustrate this, for the year 2019 -20, 2499 households approached for assistance, for the year 2023-24 there were 4760. This represents an increase of 90%.
- 2.2. There is a continued pressure on the limited amount of affordable housing in Medway and clear links between good, suitable housing and the well-being of Medway residents are demonstrable and understood.

2.3. Significant work has been put in to improving the quality of housing provided by Medway Council's own properties within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and work with partners to improve the standards within accommodation provided through other means is being carried out. The following sections will explain this in more detail with relation to the strategies in place and how they align to the priorities of the One Medway Council Plan.

3. Budget and policy framework

3.1. The activity around improving the housing situation in Medway, including the commitments within the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Housing Strategy has been developed in line with the Council's priorities and sets out the Housing Service's contribution to meeting the aims of the One Medway Council Plan.

3.2. This activity is driven by **Priority 5: Living in Good-Quality Affordable Homes**; increasing the supply of good quality affordable homes, assisting people with specific accommodation needs, including those with specialist support needs and those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, engaging with communities and ensuring that Medway's HRA Council properties are good quality with a high level of tenant engagement in decision making.

3.3. There are significant contributions to other One Medway Council Plan priorities within the scope of current and planned activity including: positive impacts on children, vulnerable groups and people seeking to live independently as they age and a collaborative approach to working in partnership with community organisations to address inequalities.

3.4. 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.* (Following the introduction of the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2018, this is now specifically referenced in Homelessness Strategies).

3.5. Homelessness is an indicator for the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, contributing to priority theme 2: Reduce Poverty and Inequality.

4. Background

4.1. Medway Council's previous Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Housing Strategy was agreed in 2019. In addition to being a legal requirement, it was recognised that an updated strategy was required to reflect the changes in local demand and national legislative changes. 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.

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 addressing homelessness, in all forms. The Strategy commitments, agreed with our stakeholders are:

- **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

Medway Council's Housing Strategy to 2030 was developed to respond to the housing needs of Medway residents. The Strategy commitments, again developed in a partnership approach, are:

- **Supply** – increase affordable housing supply.
- **Quality** – Driving up housing standards.
- **Participation** – involving Medway Housing Tenants and other residents so they have a say.
- **Independence** – helping people to stay living in their own homes.

4.2. A wide range of stakeholders engaged with the development of both these strategies, recognising the impact housing has on a widely encompassing, and interlinked range of areas including social care, public health, support services and the wider community and, conversely the positive role which all these partners have in the prevention and relief of homelessness.

4.3. Housing Services engages wider stakeholders through a full partnership approach. This includes a quarterly Homelessness Forum, to share information and good practice with multi agency attendance; a regular Landlord Forum looking at best practice, energy efficiency and legislative change. In addition to the forums, a variety of direct engagement and training e.g. combined delivery of training on housing needs assessments for 16- and 17-year-olds to front line Children's Services and Housing staff; training for professionals on working with people with complex needs who sleep rough; facilitating multiagency support, wellbeing and advice evening sessions for women who sex work and sleep rough.

5. Putting commitments into action

5.1. The commitments contained within the strategies are developed into action plans, which link into Housing's service plan [these are reviewed annually]. Examples of these actions include:

5.2. A capital investment programme of £42million was agreed by Council in January 2024, which will enable the purchase of approximately 150 good

quality properties to use as temporary accommodation for homeless households this is to support the reduction of nightly paid accommodation.

- 5.2.1. Nightly paid accommodation from external landlords varies in quality and accessibility for people with limited mobility, the capital investment programme will reduce the reliance of this type of accommodation that will both improve the standard of available temporary accommodation and reduce cost pressure to Medway. Consideration is being made to include properties with level access and suitability for wet rooms.
- 5.3. 355 Affordable Homes were delivered in 2024/25 (S106 required from developer's plus additional properties negotiated). This year we have 276 completions forecasted (subject to any delays on the builds etc.) This is against an annual target of 204 properties.
- 5.4. The HRA are due to deliver a minimum of 44 affordable homes this year and 37 next year, these homes will include 2 x two-bedroom accessible flats and a 6-bedroom house. [The HRA's annual delivery target is 1% per annum which is approximately 31 homes per year.]
- 5.5. Following a successful Wave 1 bid to the governments, Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) 88 HRA properties have been retrofitted with cavity wall insulation (CWI), loft insulation, new windows and doors, led lighting and increased ventilation in 2024/25. A further 20 properties are being fitted with external wall insulation (EWI), loft insulation, new windows and doors, led lighting and increased ventilation by the end of September 2025.
- 5.6. During the winter period 2024/25, a winter night shelter was provided through a partnership model, involving physical and mental health practitioners, drug and alcohol support services, housing advice, domestic abuse specialist support, amongst others, supporting people who sleep rough. Through combine funding opportunities the winter shelter was open for three and a half months from 01 January to 14 April 2025. One outcome noted from a number was that of the 128 people who accessed the shelter, 47 people moved into long term housing and a significant number received help with a range of health issues including 14 people entering drug and alcohol treatment services for the first time.
- 5.7. Housing have contributed to a homelessness and housing improvements chapter and action plan to the recent Medway Prevention and Early Intervention Plan, which in turn has been part of the development of Medway as a Marmot Place.
- 5.8. Development of a communications and training strategy to give non housing staff and the public information about housing rights and the actions to take when there is a threat of homelessness to get ahead of issues and prevent households getting to a point of crisis.
- 5.9. Engaging with partners across the Integrated Care Board, Kent and Medway Hospitals and mental health providers to review ways of improving outcomes for people currently on wards unable to be discharged, and alongside this,

working with Kent Housing Group on Housing and Mental Health Strategy development. This activity is firmly aligned with the issues highlighted by the ICB Mental Health and Housing Discovery Report and upcoming Housing and Mental Health Symposium.

6. Advice and analysis

6.1. The strategies were 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 and the 2018-22 Housing Strategy
- Consultation with stakeholders including elected members
- Homelessness review 2024
- Commitments made by Medway Council during the Participatory Democracy Event in February 2024

6.2. The Housing 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 and Housing 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.

6.4. 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 work with stakeholders to take advantage of resources not available to the Council.

6.5. Within the commitments of both strategies are a core thread of linking partners together to achieve greater synergies of outcomes for Medway residents, in line with the core value of the One Medway approach.

7. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
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
Likelihood		Impact:	
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare		I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor	

8. Consultation

- 8.1. A new and innovative type of strategy development was used for the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy through a Participatory Democracy Event in February 2024, facilitated by Arts and Homelessness International.
- 8.2. 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.

9. Financial implications

9.1. The report recognises the severe pressure that meeting statutory homelessness needs represents for Medway Council. Net expenditure on homelessness in 2024/25 was £4.7million, the net budget for 2025/26 is £4.6million. The commitments within the strategies aim to reduce the amount of homelessness and therefore lessen the impact on Medway Council's resources.

10. Legal implications

10.1. There is a legal requirement to have a Homelessness Strategy, as referenced in section 2.2. The strategy sets out the Council's approach to homelessness and allows Members to scrutinise delivery. There are no other legal implications.

Lead officer contact

Mark Breathwick, Assistant Director, Culture and Community, Gun Wharf 01634 333540 mark.breathwick@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030

Appendix 2 Housing Strategy to 2030

Background papers

None