

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-048-2021/22

Date of meeting: 7th March 2022



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Housing Services – Cllr H Whitbread

Subject: Review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 - 2027

Responsible Officer: Jennifer Gould Director of Communities and Wellbeing (01992 564073)

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/decisions required:

- (1) That Cabinet considers and agrees the five proposed priorities and associated themes within the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 – 2027 at Appendix 1.**
- (2) That Cabinet considers the findings and approves the publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2020/21 at Appendix 2.**
- (3) That Cabinet considers the findings and approves the publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Stage 2 Consultation Report at Appendix 3.**
- (4) That Cabinet delegates authority to the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services to consider and approve the annual update of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan.**
- (5) That the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2022-2027 is reviewed no later than 5 years after the date of publication.**

Executive summary:

Cabinet is being asked to accept the recommendations set out in this report and approve the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2022 - 2027 (the Strategy) and the evidence base that supports the Strategy including the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping review (the Review) and the Stage 2 Consultation Report. (the Consultation report).

The current strategy was published in August 2018 and is due for renewal in April 2022 as is the Housing Allocations Scheme, the Tenancy Policy and the overarching Housing Strategy .

A review of all four strategies and policies commenced in May 2021 the draft Strategy is being presented to Cabinet along with the draft Allocations Scheme and draft Tenancy Policy for the same 5-year period.

The issue is a key decision.

The review of the overarching Housing Strategy is due to be presented to Cabinet in July 2022.

Reasons for proposed decision:

To enable the Council to publish the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 - 2027, along with the review and the consultation report.

Other options for action:

- (i) Not to agree the recommendations for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027
- (ii) To make alternative recommendations for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027 (subject to further consultation where appropriate).
- (iii) Not to approve the publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review
- (iv) Not to approve the publication of the Public Consultation Outcome Report

Report:

1. Under section 1(3), (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities have a duty to review and publish their Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy on at least a 5-yearly basis.
2. The current Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was published in 2018. It set out the achievements since 2015/16, incorporated the needs and demands on the service and an action plan to address these needs.
3. The review identified:
 - Achievements and outcomes to date
 - Causes of homelessness
 - Profile of applicants
 - Current demand
 - Current supply
 - Pipeline supply
 - Anticipated demand
 - Shortfall / resources

Style and format of the Strategy for 2022-2027

The current strategy is a text rich document over 52 pages covering detailed requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 as it had just been introduced at the time of publication and was therefore relevant to that document.

It is recommended that the Strategy for 2022-2027 is a streamlined accessibility compliant publication and that the associated policy and procedure for preventing and relieving homelessness and rough sleeping are produced as separate stand-alone documents.

Synergy with the overarching Housing Strategy 2022-2027

The critical part of the Strategy will be the associated action plan, which sets out how the objectives and intended outcomes will be delivered and measured via SMART targets.

If a consistent approach is taken to the formulation of the overarching Housing Strategy (which is due to be presented at July Cabinet subject to Stronger Communities Select Committee approval) the proposed objectives and outcomes contained therein can be delivered and measured in the same way.

The action plans can then create the cascade from the Corporate Plan, Community Safety Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Local plan - with coordinated links to associated Housing and Property and Community and Wellbeing strategies and policies - to feed into service plans, team plans and individual one-to ones.

Priorities and themes

It is recommended that the draft Strategy is presented as a set of 5 strategic priorities and associated themes framed within the national context, the local context, and Epping Forest District Council's Corporate Objectives. Each priority and theme will have a corresponding set of outcomes and targets.

The five proposed priorities and themes are:

Priority 1 Working Together

Theme: Make every contact count

Priority 2 Preventing Homelessness

Theme: Early intervention

Priority 3 Building Resilience

Theme: Positive mental health, positive activities, positive community

Priority 4 Access to Suitable Accommodation and Support

Theme: More than bricks and mortar

Priority 5 Ending Rough Sleeping

Theme: Proportionate prevention, intervention and recovery

Priority 1: Working together

This will focus on making every contact count, multi-agency interventions and referrals, maximising the take-up of a range of services aimed at levelling up, maximising opportunities for grant funding and partnership bids, pooling resource and training, skills shortages and employment opportunities.

Priority 2: Preventing homelessness

This will focus on the importance of early intervention, access to information and advice, digital inclusion, communities supporting mental health, landlord incentives, education, mediation and money advice, holistic services for people leaving institutions, and raising awareness of homelessness in schools and colleges.

Priority 3: Building resilience

This will focus on positive mental health, positive activities and positive community. Developing a strong resilient and motivated workforce. Launching the 'Say Something' campaign for staff to be confident both about raising safeguarding concerns and talking about their wellbeing and career progression with their managers. Personal Housing Plans will be developed further to incorporate opportunities to engage in community initiatives, to assist homeless households or those threatened with homelessness to achieve their goals improve their overall life-chances and reduce the stigma of homelessness.

Priority 4: Access to suitable housing and support

This will support the Council's More than Bricks and Mortar campaign, and the role of the home as a place of safety - by making the best use of housing including adaptations, temporary accommodation, the private rented sector, the housing register, supported housing and affordable home ownership.

The focus on support will include accessing the right statutory and voluntary help at the right time. We will pursue Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation, and work collaboratively with Social Care and Health Care to promote independence - so that residents can access appropriate timely interventions to avoid or recover from crisis whilst remaining in their own home. We will also encourage multi-agency working to enable people to move both in to and out of supported housing when they are ready to do so.

Priority 5: Ending rough sleeping

This will include learning from lived experiences, and continuing to actively support and benefit from the strong working relationships across the County such as the Essex Rough Sleeper partnerships, pursuing joint funding initiatives such as mental health and substance misuse navigators, building on the success of the recently developed Houses in Multiple Occupation to accommodate people who had been sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough, and expanding the outreach service to former rough sleepers.

Resource implications:

The Strategy includes an action plan that is being produced in collaboration with named partner organisations listed at Appendix 2. They have all given an undertaking in principle to jointly own responsibility for driving the Strategy and achieving the agreed outcomes, including appropriate joint bid submissions for grant funding as it becomes available.

Delivery shall be managed within existing staff resources across the Community and Wellbeing Directorate and progress will be tracked by the Housing Strategy Team

Legal and governance Implications:

The draft Review and the draft Strategy enable the Council to fulfil its duties under the Homelessness Act 2002: to have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in the district, and to renew the strategy at least every 5 years.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2022 addressed the significant reforms that were introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This placed duties on local authorities to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness in their areas and provide relief services to all those affected (not just those who have 'priority need'). The draft Review provides evidence of how the Council is currently performing in this regard.

The draft Review and draft Strategy comply with the statutory Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities February 2018 as amended.

The draft Strategy incorporates the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 which amends Part 7 of the 1996 Act to strengthen the support available to victims of domestic abuse, extends priority need to all eligible victims of domestic abuse who are homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse, and brings in a new definition of domestic

abuse which local housing authorities must follow to assess whether an applicant is homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse.

The draft Strategy is consistent with the proposals being submitted to Cabinet in respect of the draft Allocations Scheme 2022 – 2027 and the draft Tenancy Policy 2022 -2027.

Legal Services have reviewed the draft report and have no suggested amendments.

Safer, cleaner and greener implications:

Climate change is expected to disproportionately affect those in more vulnerable positions such as the homeless. This is because they are generally less able to protect themselves from the effects of climate change expected in the area, which are more extreme temperatures, flooding and drought.

The development of the homelessness Strategy will therefore help to protect against the societal effects that climate change will have.

Consultation undertaken:

The recommendations within this review have all been subject to a comprehensive 2-stage public consultation exercise which included; bite-size briefings, webinars, workshops, surveys, on-line questionnaires, small meetings and one to one conversation.

In total 325 people were directly invited to participate in both stages of the consultation including:

- Council tenants, leaseholders and residents
- Partner agencies and community groups with an interest in housing
- Private registered providers of social housing
- EFDC staff and other statutory services
- Members of the Council
- Clerks of parish and town councils to forward to their respective elected members
- District, borough and city councils in the county

Risk management:

A number of significant risks are associated with the review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy including :

Disregarding the requirement to review the Strategy within the timescales and parameters set out in the statutory guidance may attract a reputational damage, and/or a penalty for non-compliance.

Responding to stakeholder consultation feedback mitigates the risks of dissatisfaction and failure demand.

Disregarding the requirements of or findings of an equalities impact assessment risks the provision of an unequitable housing service which may disproportionately affect vulnerable residents and those with protected characteristics.

Background papers:

Appendix 1 Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027

Appendix 2 Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2020/21

Appendix 3 The Big 4 Stage 1 Consultation Findings

Appendix 4 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Stage 2 Consultation Findings

Appendix 5 Equality Impact Assessment