

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-007-2020/21

Date of meeting: 11 June 2020



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Housing and Community – Cllr H Whitbread

Subject: County-led homelessness recovery plan

Responsible Officer: Jennifer Gould (01992 564703)

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

Cabinet are asked to note the County-led post Covid-19 homelessness recovery planning that has taken place to date and approve the progression of EFDC's involvement in the drafting of a plan.

Executive Summary:

Local housing authorities face a potential surge in homelessness presentations once Covid-19 lockdown restrictions are lifted. The surge is likely to come in a series of 'spikes' for different cohorts of people experiencing homelessness for different reasons followed by a sustained increase in homelessness as the economic repercussions of Covid-19 are felt.

Whilst the impact will vary in intensity and timescale across the different Districts and Unitary Authorities in Essex, the challenges are likely to be broadly the same.

Consequently, the Essex Resilience Forum (ERF), in conjunction with Essex Housing Officers Group (EHOG), commissioned Essex County Council (ECC) to review the current position in relation to both rough sleepers and homelessness and consider the development of recovery plans and/or strategies to support measures that seek to mitigate the impact of additional pressures on homelessness services and the use of temporary accommodation as far as possible.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

For EFDC to benefit from the oversight of ECC in reviewing the current homelessness position across Essex; to, with an Essex collective, make more robust representations to MHCLG and Homes England on any agreed policy asks to support recovery; through partnership working seek to secure a more coherent support offer from ECC for the benefit of Epping residents.

Other Options for Action:

Not to approve the progression of EFDC's involvement in the drafting of a plan and to progress homelessness recovery planning in isolation.

Report:

1. Government introduced several policy changes within the homelessness arena to support lockdown. These policy changes included:
 - Everyone In: accommodating all known rough sleepers on a temporary basis for the lockdown duration; and
 - Measures to abate activities that lead to homelessness with a moratorium on evictions until the end of June
2. EFDC, like other districts across the County, has experienced a lull in homelessness presentations with a slight decrease in numbers presenting throughout the period of lockdown. A survey of (Greater) Essex local authorities, conducted by ECC, found a consensus that demand for homelessness services is likely to increase once lockdown is lifted and remain high for a considerable time after that.
3. Immediate impact is likely to come from those fleeing domestic abuse and friend/family evictions with a lag of 3-6 months on presentations as a result of an assured shorthold tenancy ending. In the longer-term economic challenges such as unemployment are likely to have an impact across all tenures, increasing presentations resulting in a strain on homelessness services and temporary accommodation with a corresponding financial implication.
4. While the levels of demand will differ across the districts in Essex the issues will broadly be similar. ECC's Housing Growth Team has reviewed the homelessness and rough sleeper position across the different local authorities in Greater Essex and using the partnership framework already provided by EHO, is looking to progress a recovery plan focussed on practical actions and policy recommendations.
5. The work will provide a basis on which EFDC can appropriately update the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (statutory document); strengthen EFDC's voice as part of a collective to lobby for central policy changes (if recommended and agreed); harness a more coherent support offer for residents and potentially enable positive protection of local housing market for local people.
6. Ratification of any plan is likely to progress through the Chief Executives Group followed by individual local council governance structures.

Resource Implications:

None

Legal and Governance Implications:

Ratification of any plan will be sought through the appropriate Council governance structure.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The Council has a statutory responsibility to prevent and relieve homelessness latterly strengthened by the *Everyone In* initiative as a result of the current public health emergency. EFDC's response to a potential surge in homelessness will need to be robust to minimise any further/ongoing risk to public health.

Consultation Undertaken:

Consultation is being sought with the Housing and Property Portfolio Holder.

Background Papers:

None

Risk Management:

Agreement on any plan will be sought at the appropriate levels ahead of any adoption.

Equality Analysis:

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report. The equality information is provided as an Appendix to this report.