

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 19 December 2019
Title of report:	Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy
Report by:	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services, and community safety

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose and summary

To approve the council's strategy to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Rough Sleeping Strategy, published August 2018, requires all local authorities to update their existing strategies to homelessness and rough sleeping strategies. By 31st December 2019 housing authorities are required to:

- make available their strategies online and submit them to MHCLG and;
- publish annual action plans.

The MHCLG Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018, requires local authorities to develop and publish an annual improvement plan for the strategy.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy at appendix 1 be approved.**

Alternative options

1. Not to adopt a Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Herefordshire. This is not recommended as the strategy is a statutory document, which requires updating in accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002 and the MHCLG Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018.

Key considerations

2. The strategy ambitions are in keeping with the increased emphasis on early intervention and prevention in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and are reflective of the three key themes of prevention, intervention and recovery identified in the national Rough Sleeping Strategy.
3. Our review of homelessness in Herefordshire identified that we have been successful in preventing people from becoming homeless. It is recognised, however, that we need to do more, particularly in our response to rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping who have complex and challenging needs. Our Health Needs Audit¹ showed that participants' physical and mental health, in all dimensions, is extremely poor compared to that of the population as a whole. In addition, the financial costs of homelessness and the costs to health and wellbeing are considerable.
4. Our homelessness review also showed that the main reason why people were at risk of homelessness in Herefordshire was the termination of a private rented sector tenancy. This occurred most often because the landlord wanted to sell the property. The next most frequently occurring reasons, in order, were; family or friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate the household; non-violent relationship breakdown and domestic violence/abuse. The strategy action plan will also need to consider approaches which best tackle the risk and impacts for people living in overcrowded and unsuitable accommodation. This will form a part of the ongoing work that will be done in partnership with statutory and voluntary services in developing a coordinated approach to preventing homelessness.
5. Significant numbers of households seeking help identified one or more support needs. A history of mental health issues was the most frequently declared support need, with physical health or disability marginally lower than this.

¹ 102 health Needs Audits, using Homeless Link's template, were undertaken to capture the health needs of people sleeping rough, sofa surfing or living in specialist supported accommodation. The results of the audit were presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board on 5th March 2019 and all the recommendations were approved.

6. In some circumstances we have a duty to provide temporary accommodation for households that have become homeless or are at risk of homelessness. As at 31st March 2019 there were 30 families with children in self-contained temporary housing. No families with children were in B&B.
7. The strategy development and the improvement plan for the first year of the strategy, has been informed by:
- the results of the stakeholder consultations;
 - the review of homelessness in the county;
 - the results of the homeless health needs audits; and;
 - our close working relationship with the multi-agency Herefordshire Homelessness Forum.
8. From this, seven improvement priorities for the first year of the strategy have been developed. These have been set on the basis of most urgent need and the greatest potential positive impact, as below:
- i. We will review and develop our current operational structure to ensure that homelessness preventative activity is central to everything we do.
 - ii. We will investigate opportunities for entering into a long term lease with a private landlord to develop bespoke good quality temporary accommodation for accepted vulnerable homeless households, where required. We will ensure that this accommodation is accessible to people with a mobility issue or a physical disability.
 - iii. We will seek external funding to enable the implementation of a homelessness health improvement project, as detailed in the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
 - iv. We will reduce rough sleeping through strengthening the Rough Sleeper Outreach and Resettlement Team through the recruitment of additional outreach workers specialising in support for rough sleepers, or those at risk, with mental health issues, substance misuse or offending histories.
 - v. We will reduce rough sleeping through strengthening the Rough Sleeper Outreach and Resettlement Team through the recruitment of a rough sleeper 'Navigator' post and a Supported Lettings Floating Support Worker.
 - vi. We will work with key partners to investigate how a pilot Housing First project for Herefordshire can be delivered.
 - vii. Through 'Team Herefordshire' sponsorship a cross- sector systemic approach that makes rough sleeping and sofa surfing rare, infrequent and then, non-reoccurring will be developed. This systemic approach will be important in recognising and assisting those who are sofa surfing who can represent hidden homelessness that can be difficult to identify.
9. For the longer term we have identified a number of high level key strategic opportunities, as follows:
- i. Further develop our engagement and relationship with private sector landlords, focusing on providing support and advice to help reduce the level tenancy terminations in this tenure.

- ii. Continue to develop close collaborative working with voluntary and statutory sector partners in support of homelessness prevention and to ensure the triangulation of services particularly in the relation to the prevention of rough sleeping.
- iii. Develop an evidence base of the factors which contribute to levels of homelessness in Herefordshire, the impact of our partnering interventions and emerging risks, including the impact of the continuing roll-out of Universal Credit.
- iv. Continue to build on our success in securing grant funding to support homelessness prevention initiatives in the county.
- v. Explore the potential for expanding the registered provider portfolio of private rented sector tenancies in Herefordshire through new-build or property purchase.
- vi. Develop a homelessness prevention 'toolkit' for use in the community hub approach.

Community impact

10. Through implementation of the annual improvement activities adoption of the strategy will contribute to the council's corporate plan, which includes community actions relating to:
 - Protect and improve the lives of vulnerable adults.
 - Join up health and social care services in communities.
 - Create environments that make wellbeing inevitable.
11. Adoption of the strategy will contribute to the vision in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which is:

'Herefordshire residents are resilient; lead fulfilling lives; are emotionally and physically healthy and feel safe and secure.'
12. The Health and Wellbeing Board have approved all the recommendations made in the Homeless Health Needs Audit Report presented 5th March 2019. Adoption of this strategy will support implementation of these recommendations.

Equality duty

13. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

14. The Equality Act 2010 established a positive obligation on local authorities to promote equality and to reduce discrimination in relation to any of the nine 'protected characteristics' (age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation). In particular, the council must have 'due regard' to the public sector equality duty when taking any decisions on service changes.
15. A Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out. The EIA found that strategy implementation would have a positive impact in relation to age; on 'other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups,' which includes homeless households and in relation to the 'health inequalities.' A 'neutral' impact was found in relation to the other protected characteristics.

Resource implications

16. There are no resource implications in the strategy document itself. The resource implications arise from the implementation of the annual action plans, which are required to be developed and published in compliance with the MHCLG Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018.
17. Improvement plan actions i – vi for the first year of the strategy (set out in 'key considerations' section above) will require officer time and will be delivered within existing resources. A partner agency has undertaken to lead on the delivery of improvement action vii. If council officer support is required this will be delivered within existing resources.

Legal implications

18. There are no specific legal implications in the report. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places legal duties on councils so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of whether they are judged to be in priority need, as long as they are eligible for assistance.

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on the council to undertake a review of homelessness and publish a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years

Risk management

19. The council has a statutory duty to carry out a review of homelessness every five years and to publish a homelessness strategy based on the findings of the review, as required by the Homelessness Act 2002. To fail to do so could result in considerable reputational damage to the council.
20. Any risks to the implementation of annual improvement plan actions will be identified and mitigated against as part of the operational process.

Consultees

21. During August and September 2019, we undertook four separate interest group consultations, as follows:
 - service provider consultation.
 - accommodation provider consultation.
 - public consultation.

- service user consultation.

In total 92 responses were received. In addition, substantial engagement has been carried out through our close working relationship with the Herefordshire Homelessness Forum.

22. The results of the service provider and the accommodation provider consultations have been analysed and the report sent out by email to consultees. The results of the public and the service user consultations have been analysed and are published on the council's website.

[Consultation Report - Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025](#)

23. There was a significant consistency in identified issues across the consultations with the main 'themes' relating to:
 - The need for improved physical and mental health support and service access. There is an action in the strategy improvement plan relating to this.
 - The need for improved provision and service access for people with substance addictions. There is an action in the strategy improvement plan relating to this. In addition, there is an intention to recommission the council's current treatment system and a public drug and alcohol consultation has recently taken place to inform this process.
 - The need for more affordable housing provision and more support / supported provision for vulnerable people. Actions in the strategy improvement plan to strengthen the Outreach and Resettlement Team will improve support provision for rough sleepers and those at risk. In addition, the council will be developing its new Housing Strategy over the course of the next year. This will include analysis of housing need.
 - The need for more effective partnership working, particularly in relation to interventions to prevent rough sleeping and support for existing rough sleepers to access and maintain a home away from the streets. There is an emphasis on improved multi-agency partnership working in the strategy.
24. Political groups have been consulted with and no comments were received.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025.

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment.

Background papers

None identified.