

**Public
Key Decision - Yes**

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Homelessness & Rough Sleeping – Review & Strategy 2021

Meeting/Date: O&S (Customers & Partnerships) – 8th July 2021
Cabinet – 15th July 2021

Executive Portfolio: Executive Leader & Executive Councillor for Housing and Economic Development

Report by: Housing Needs & Resources Manager

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

The Huntingdonshire Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Review & Strategy sets out how the Council intends to address homelessness issues within the district. It is a statutory requirement to complete a review of homelessness and produce a strategy and it is a sub-strategy to the Council's Housing Strategy. It is also a statutory requirement to consult widely before formally adopting a Strategy. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to consult on this Strategy before formal adoption takes place.

A draft version of this Strategy was previously approved by the Cabinet in February 2020 but the consultation process planned for April and May that year was postponed as we responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Strategy has been updated in light of the response to the pandemic, in particular to the Everyone In initiative aimed at protecting vulnerable rough sleepers during the public health crisis.

The Review & Strategy has four main purposes:

- To address the causes of homelessness in the area;
- To introduce initiatives to prevent homelessness wherever possible;
- To ensure that the Council provides sufficient temporary accommodation for those households that are or may become homeless; and
- To ensure that appropriate support is available for people who have previously experienced homelessness in order to prevent it happening again.

The Strategy gives a national and local context to homelessness, explaining the main trends. It also explains the new legislative framework introduced in 2018 by the Homelessness Reduction Act, and the range of initiatives within the Council

as well as those being progressed with partners that aim to stem the flow of homelessness by earlier interventions through a range of prevention measures.

The Strategy, together with the Housing Strategy, explains the options that the Council will follow to deliver an adequate supply of housing providing a range of affordable tenures, to help meet local needs – another key component in the prevention of homelessness by helping households into new homes.

The Strategy identifies four main priorities that our work will focus on delivering. These are:

Priority 1: Preventing homelessness

Priority 2: Providing appropriate temporary accommodation and aiming to reduce its overall use by securing accommodation for people who are homeless.

Priority 3: Establishing effective partnerships, working arrangements and support to those who are threatened with homelessness, to improve their resilience and reduce the risk homelessness occurring.

Priority 4: Supporting rough sleepers to address their housing and other needs.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That Cabinet approves the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Review & Strategy 2021 as a consultation document; and
- b) That Cabinet give delegated authority for the Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the Executive Leader to adopt the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Review & Strategy 2021 after reviewing consultation responses.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Homelessness Strategy is a major policy item for the Council. The Strategy sets out the key role that the Council plays in preventing homelessness, assisting households where homelessness cannot be prevented and how homelessness can be resolved, primarily by ensuring that there are sufficient options within the private or social rented sectors to provide new homes.
- 1.2 Cabinet previously approved a consultation draft of the Strategy in February 2020 but the consultation period did not go ahead as planned as we responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Strategy has been updated in light of the response to the pandemic, in particular to the Everyone In initiative aimed at protecting vulnerable rough sleepers during the public health crisis.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to consult widely on this Strategy prior to formal adoption.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY

- 2.1 There is a statutory requirement for all housing authorities to publish a Homelessness Strategy every 5 years. Although the last review and strategy was completed in 2017 and is therefore not due again until 2022, it was timely to go through this process given that we are three years into a transformed way of working, as introduced by the implementation of new legislation, and we are just emerging from a pandemic that is likely to bring additional homelessness challenges as a result of the economic hardships that it brings. It also allows us to reflect on more recent changes within the national policy context as well as reflecting on emerging local issues and pressures.

3. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 3.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be circulated ahead of the Cabinet meeting.

4. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 4.1 Homelessness has a devastating effect on households and delivering on the priorities and objectives contained within the Strategy will help to prevent homelessness and mitigate against its causes. The potential risks are that prevention measures are not successful and that the Council delivers insufficient numbers of affordable housing solutions for households requiring new homes. The Housing Strategy focuses on the delivery of affordable housing, amongst other things, and ensuring that the objectives of that Strategy together with the new Homelessness Strategy are met, will help contribute to the health and wellbeing of our residents, especially those faced with the threat of homelessness..

5. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 A great deal of work has already begun as part of the joint working around earlier interventions that contribute to the prevention of homelessness. Much of this has been progressed through the Homelessness Trailblazer programme and the Housing Needs team reviewing protocols and pathways with partner organisations and we will build on many of the new ways of working preventatively that have been trialled.
- 5.2 This five-year strategy covers the period 2021-26 and from the review of homelessness in the area we have highlighted 4 broad priorities that will be the focus of our efforts over the life of this strategy. There are a range of objectives linked to each of these priorities and we will develop annual action plans around these objectives to help us, working with our partners and the wider community, achieve those objectives. By developing an annual action plan this will allow us to respond to the evidence base as this develops throughout the lifetime of the strategy as well as any emerging national and local policies.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 6.1 The Homelessness Strategy links to specific actions within the Corporate Plan:
- Continue to develop and support early homelessness prevention initiatives in line with the new duties contained within the Homelessness Reduction Act, to help residents remain in their current homes or find alternative housing
 - Ensure that the principles of earlier interventions aimed at preventing homelessness are embedded within public sector organisations and other stakeholder partners

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Council is required to consult widely prior to adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy. We will consult for a period of 8 weeks and responses will inform whether the priorities and objectives that we have identified are the correct ones.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Preparation of the Strategy involves staffing resource that is met within existing budgets. The annual Action Plans that will be developed will commit the Council to exploring and delivering on various activities that are likely to have resource implications, should the Council decide to pursue any of these options. These resource implications will be explored as part of the delivery against the Action Plan.
- 8.2 The cost of providing temporary accommodation for households that become homeless is a significant one. As homelessness has risen the Council has incurred increasing costs as more households have been accommodated in temporary housing. However the most significant resource implications are likely to be associated with the delivery of adequate numbers of affordable housing solutions through the Council's

Housing Strategy Action Plan. The cost of providing successful prevention measures, together with these affordable housing solutions will need to be considered as proposals are brought forward.

9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 9.1 The Council is required to publish a Homelessness Strategy every five years to review homelessness in the area and produce a strategy to say how it will prevent homelessness and fulfil its wider duties under the homelessness legislation.

10. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Homelessness & Rough Sleeping - Review & Strategy 2021

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities – MHCLG Feb 2018](#)

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