O & S Panel (E, C & P) – 5th November 2026
Cabinet – 17th November 2026

Report by:
Housing Needs & Resources Manager

Lead Cllr:
Cllr N Hunt – Executive Councillor for Resident Services & Corporate Performance

Wards	Open / Exempt	Key Decision?
All	Open	Yes

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031

Executive Summary: This report sets out the statutory need to complete a review of homelessness and produce a strategy, explaining how the Council intends to address homelessness issues within the district. It is also a statutory requirement to consult widely before formally adopting a Strategy and the purpose of this report is to seek approval to consult on this Strategy before formal adoption.

The Strategy has four main purposes:

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

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

Priority 1: Prevent homelessness through earlier intervention and targeted support.

Priority 2: Provide high-quality, person-centred homelessness services.

Priority 3: Reduce rough sleeping and support recovery.

Priority 4: Increase access to safe, suitable and sustainable housing.

Priority 5: Develop strong partnerships and place lived experience at the heart of service delivery.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

1.1. Approve the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031 as a consultation draft.

1.2. Delegate authority to the Corporate Director – Communities, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resident Services & Corporate Performance, to:

a) adopt the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 unless there are major issues raised at the consultation stage that require reconsideration by Cabinet.

b) make administrative or minor changes to the Strategy, within the life of the Strategy. To include amendments in response to changes in legislation or Government programmes that do not constitute a major shift in the Strategy's direction.

c) approve an annual Action Plan that accompanies the Strategy. The Action Plan being an operational plan that has actions linked to the approved strategic priorities.

	Key Corporate Plan Priorities
1	**Improving quality of life for local people**
	Keeping people out of crisis *Helping people in crisis*

Report Author(s)

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy is a major policy item for the Council. It 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 in the private or social rented sectors to provide new homes.

1.2 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to consult widely on this Strategy prior to formal adoption.

2. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

2.1 There is a statutory requirement for all housing authorities to publish a Homelessness Strategy every 5 years. The Council's last strategy was completed in 2021 and is therefore due again. It was timely to go through this process given that there have been a number of policy announcements and legislative changes from Government over the last 12 months.

2.2 The main policy drivers that have informed the Strategy are:

- the Government's National Plan to End Homelessness, published in December 2025, establishing a vision that homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring; and

- the national Rough Sleeping Programme launched in August 2026. The programme combines immediate provision for a route off the street for everyone before Christmas this year, with longer-term settled accommodation and intensive support for people who have experienced long-term rough sleeping.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED & NOT RECOMMENDED

3.1 The Council must publish a revised Strategy every 5 years to fulfil its statutory duties. Having a current Strategy would mean that the Council is complying with the Homelessness Act 2002.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

4.1 The Overview & Scrutiny (Environment, Communities & Partnerships) Panel discussed the report at its meeting on 5th November 2026.

4.2 The Panel were advised that service personnel leaving the armed forces were not specifically mentioned within the strategy but that intervention and prevention was universal for all regardless of their circumstance and that there was provision for service personnel to gain priority through the housing register. Whilst acknowledging this, the Panel felt strongly that this group should be specifically identified, particularly due to the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces and it's Armed Forces Covenant. It was agreed by the Executive Councillor and Officers that this could and would happen and that the strategy would be updated to include this group prior to its consideration by Cabinet. The draft Strategy has been updated at paragraph 2.1 to reflect this commitment.

4.3 Whilst the good work of the Officers was noted, the Panel requested to have sight of the number of homelessness and homelessness prevention cases within the district, observing that this would allow residents and partners to make an informed decision when the Strategy moved to its public consultation stage. It was advised that this data was already being provided to the Ministry of Housing and some of the data was also reflected within the Corporate Performance Reports, it was also noted that the data could be broken down into detailed segments such as rough sleepers, homelessness prevention, families with children. It was agreed that a suitable vehicle would be found to provide this information to the Panel. The Panel heard that six new KPIs covering homelessness and rough sleeping were included in the Government's Local Outcomes Framework and that the new National Suite of data requirements would allow for consistency and benchmarking. It was also advised that all circumstances were recorded when homelessness presented in order to build a picture of household needs and that multiple factors were often involved rather than a solitary reason.

4.4 The Panel heard that the recently introduced multi year funding was welcomed but that in the main it was a combination of previously available grant funding schemes now packaged together, however the new system would allow for greater flexibility. It was advised that the Action Plan covered a year due to the fast changing pace of the area and would be developed as further direction from central government became available.

4.5 It was advised that Priority 4.2 of the Action Plan would address concerns relating to Private Landlords. It was further noted that work had previously been undertaken with private landlords and opportunities to reengage communications would be investigated, with the new national database of landlords being highlighted as a means to engage with landlords to review and develop potential incentives to help homeless households access the private rented sector. The Panel heard that affordability of rent was the greatest issue faced by residents facing homelessness.

4.6 The Panel were advised that there was a legal limit on length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation for households with children and that the Council aimed to not use this type of accommodation for these households and in the instance of being unavoidable it was short-term.

4.7 The Panel heard that in the event of severe weather, including both hot and cold conditions, offers of temporary accommodation were made to rough sleepers under humanitarian responsibility. It was further advised that further to a recent government announcement, it was expected for all rough sleepers to have an offer of support before Christmas 2026. It was noted that there were seven known rough sleepers in the district at this time and that none were long term rough sleepers. It was noted that those with no recourse to public funds did not fall under the Council's responsibility but rather under the County Council's Social Care responsibility, although the humanitarian assistance could still be provided under the severe weather provision. It was noted that instances of this nature were very low in Huntingdonshire and that those who did present to the Council were signposted for housing needs as well as receiving further support from the Resident Support Team in the guise of support such as food banks and Citizens Advice.

4.8 It was noted that the Risk Assessment tool kit was currently being trialled nationally by a number of local authorities with a view to being rolled out by the Government, but that some aspects were already being utilised by the Council.

4.9 The issue of long-term rough sleepers who choose a nomadic lifestyle was acknowledged as well as the issue of magnet towns such as Bedford or Cambridge with Huntingdonshire then becoming a transitory destination between the two, however it was assured that work was undertaken to reconnect individuals in this situation. The unknown challenge of Local Government Reorganisation was acknowledged with the Panel being advised that work on developing this would begin once the new boundaries were established.

4.10 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report.

5. POST-DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 The Council is required to consult widely prior to adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy. Consultation with partners and the public will take place for an eight-week period prior to the draft Strategy being adopted, subject to any necessary changes arising from the consultation. Should the consultation give rise to the need to make any significant changes to the Strategy, it will be brough back before Cabinet to discuss and approve any such changes.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

6.1 Council Key Priorities and Performance

The Strategy is aligned with the priorities within the Corporate plan.

Specifically, it aims to:

- Improve the quality of life for local people; by
    - Keeping people out of crisis
    - Helping people in crisis

Five additional metrics have been introduced by Government as part of the Local Outcomes Framework capturing: temporary accommodation, prevention and relief duties, and rough sleeping. The aim of including these outcome metrics is to encourage local authorities to change approaches and practice that will prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in their area. The Strategy and identified priorities align with these new metrics and performance against these will be captured as part of our annual performance report and the progress being made against the action plan.

6.2 Financial Implications

6.2.1 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. Many of these will be met through business-as-usual activities but

where resource implications are identified they will be explored as part of the delivery against the Action Plan.

6.2.2 Government awards local housing authorities an annual revenue grant to support homelessness prevention activities and contribute to the cost of temporary accommodation. These grants have been reviewed in 2026/27, with Government announcing for the first time, a three-year revenue funding commitment to local authorities attached to the delivery of the National Plan to End Homelessness. This funding is intended to support councils to deliver the vision in the cross-government strategy on homelessness and rough sleeping, which the priorities within the Strategy mirror.

6.2.3 2026/27 is the first year of this allocation and so the Council has some certainty of funding through to 2028/29. This funding means that it is unlikely that any growth bids will be required through the Medium-Term Financial Planning process during this three-year period to deliver on activities within the action plan.

6.2.4 The new grant combines several grant schemes into one, now called the Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant (HRSDAG). The purpose of the grant is to support local authorities to:

a. Discharge their duties under the Housing Act 1996, as set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities, and provide support for rough sleeping.
b. Deliver against local homelessness strategies and the metrics in the Local Outcomes Framework.
c. Focus on early intervention and maximising prevention activities.

6.2.5 The table below gives the Council's allocation of HRSDAG over the three-year period:

Year	HRSDAG Allocation
2026/27	£1,143,289
2027/28	£1,155,201
2028/29	£1,162,406

6.3 Policy, Legal & Constitutional Implications

6.3.1 The Strategy outlines the Council's priorities and strategic direction relating to homelessness and rough sleeping. This in turn is governed by the relevant homelessness legislation, placing various duties on the Council to provide homelessness assistance. The Strategy does not alter those duties, and it does not introduce any new policy or legal implications.

6.3.2 The adoption of a plan or strategy is the responsibility of Cabinet unless it falls within the documents named in Article 4 of the Constitution. The Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy is not named in Article 4 and thus is the responsibility of Cabinet.

6.3.3 The purpose of the delegations is to provide a more efficient way of making minor changes, saving council time and resources. The Cabinet can be

reassured that any major shift in the Strategy's direction would still require a new formal report and decision.

6.4 Community Impact

6.4.1 The Strategy sets out the Council's priorities and action plan, which are designed to deliver positive outcomes for residents faced with the threat of homelessness. By responding to residents faced with housing difficulties the Strategy aims to keep people out of crisis, or where homelessness cannot be prevented, aims to provide assistance to help people in crisis.

6.5 Equality & Diversity Implications

6.5.1 The Strategy is expected to deliver positive impacts across all protected characteristics by improving access to housing, support services, and early intervention to prevent homelessness. While no direct negative impacts have been identified, it is acknowledged that there is the potential for indirect or systemic barriers affecting certain groups that may face disproportionate challenges.

6.5.2 For example, individuals with disabilities, particularly those with mental health conditions, are overrepresented in homelessness statistics and will benefit from improved accessibility and tailored support. Ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ individuals may face barriers due to language, discrimination, or lack of inclusive services; these will be addressed through staff training, monitoring of outcomes, and culturally competent service delivery. Victims of domestic abuse, predominantly women, and single males experiencing rough sleeping will be supported through expanded support services and specialist accommodation.

6.6 Implications on Resources

6.6.1 As highlighted earlier, the Strategy will be delivered within existing resources and where additional resources are required, as emerges from the delivery of the annual action plan, these will be met from the Government grant allocation.

6.7 Health & Wellbeing Implications

6.7.1 Homelessness and rough sleeping can have a significant impact on a person's health and wellbeing, and many health issues may ultimately be a contributing factor leading to homelessness. The Strategy's priorities aim to provide enhanced support, identifying housing issues at the earliest opportunity so that homelessness may be avoided all together. Where this is not possible, the emergency response and the support to recover and move to safe, suitable accommodation will both directly and indirectly help to minimise the potential impact on someone's health and wellbeing.

6.8 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Implications4

6.8.1 There are no direct implications of the Strategy on LGR. Under LGR any newly created local authority would be required to publish its own Homelessness Strategy.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Document List	Custodian	File Location
National Plan to End Homelessness	Gov.uk	National Plan
Rough Sleeping Programme	Gov.uk	Rough Sleeping Programme
Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2031 – consultation draft.	HDC	Appendix 1 of this report
Action Plan Dec 2026 to March 2028	HDC	Appendix 2 of this report