

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS STRATEGY 2023-2028

Council - 21 February 2023

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer People and Places

Status: For Comment

Also considered by:

- Housing & Health Advisory Committee - 7 February 2023
- Cabinet - 9 February 2023

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: Local housing authorities have a statutory duty to publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy every 5 years. This report presents the outcome of a public consultation and the resultant draft Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2023-2028, for consideration. The final Strategy document will require approval by Full Council so that it may be adopted and published.

This report supports the Key Aim of: The Housing Strategy 2022-2027

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Kevin Maskell

Contact Officer: Alison Simmons, Head of Housing, Extension 7272

Recommendation to Housing and Health Advisory Committee:

- (a) To note the feedback received from the public consultation;
- (b) To consider and recommend to Cabinet the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

- (a) To note the feedback received from the public consultation;
- (b) To consider the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy;
- (c) To recommend to Council that the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2023-2028 be adopted.

Recommendation to Council:

- (a) To note the feedback received from the public consultation;
- (b) That, subject to any amendments by Cabinet, the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2023-2028, be adopted.

Reason for recommendation: The District Council has a statutory duty to publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy every 5 years. Adoption of the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2023-2028 will satisfy the requirements of this duty, as well as providing a framework to the Housing Service in the prevention of homelessness and the provision of sustainable solutions to help those faced with homelessness.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Housing Strategy 2022-2027 recognises that housing, health, wellbeing and life chances are inextricably linked. The impact of homelessness has a devastating impact on those directly affected, a social cost that extends into the wider community and a financial cost that draws resources away from other key services.
- 2 A local housing authority is required to have a strategy in place which sets out how it will prevent homelessness and ameliorate its devastating impacts. The Council is developing a new, 5 year Strategy. The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2023-2028 is centred around 3 themes: prevention - we want to help residents before they go into crisis and focus on preventing homelessness from happening in the first place; intervention - the way we support and help people who have become homeless; and sustainable solutions - taking a long term approach to establishing a range of sustainable housing and housing options for vulnerable and homeless households and rough sleepers.
- 3 In the development of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and the Housing Strategy in 2022 both have identified the need to increase the number of affordable homes to meet the needs of the residents in the District.
- 4 The announced consultation through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill for a new NPPF weakens the policy requirements for Councils to plan for the delivery of more homes, however for the delivery of the Strategies and the Council's social responsibility the Housing Needs Assessment and Housing Register reflect the need for homes for local residents in the District.

- 5 Following completion and approval of the Homelessness Review (attached Appendix A) a first draft of the Strategy has been subject to public consultation (attached Appendix B). The recommendations within this report have all been subject to a comprehensive 2 stage public consultation exercise which included bite size briefings, forums, an online survey, small meetings and one to one conversation.
- 6 The Council is legally required to consult with partners, stakeholders and residents. The feedback received has enabled amendments to be considered for inclusion within the Strategy ahead of a final version being presented for adoption. The consultation feedback has enabled the completion of a thorough Equalities Impact Assessment.
- 7 The draft Sevenoaks District Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2023-2028 was subject to public consultation between 9 December 2022 and 5 January 2023. Over 100 responses were received to the online survey and the results are summarised, by question, below.

Please note “In agreement” refers to those respondents who either strongly agreed or agreed.

Theme 1 - Prevention

Question 1

We should work closely with statutory and voluntary sector partners to ensure residents can access suitable homeless advice and practical support.

In agreement - 98%

Question 2

We should promote an effective, value for money incentive scheme that encourages more private landlords to let homes to people on our waiting lists.

In agreement - 80%

Question 3

We should support education and awareness initiatives with partners to inform young people of the impact of homelessness, sources of advice and possible available housing options.

In agreement - 89%

Question 4

We continue to ensure our housing benefit, private sector housing, community safety and income teams work together to help resolve issues that may lead to homelessness.

In agreement- 98%

Question 5

Create a one stop shop for residents seeking housing advice through a dedicated hub of local partners.

In agreement - 94%

Question 6

Is there anything else you think we should be doing to prevent homelessness.

A summary of comments received is as follows:

- Deliver more social housing
- Bring empty homes back into use
- Provide and promote information and signpost to sources of help, ensure there are clear points of contact
- Help with debt management
- Provide face to face support

Theme 2 - Intervention

Question 7

Use Government grants to provide dedicated accommodation for homeless households such those from a care leaver background, young people and former rough sleepers.

In agreement - 94%

Question 8

Work with partners to ensure all households retain their tenancies and keep a roof over their heads.

In agreement - 89%

Question 9

Maximise the benefits of partnership working and contribute to Kent-wide initiatives to improve services and options for victims of domestic abuse.

In agreement - 97%

Question 10

Review emergency and temporary accommodation to ensure it provides value for money.

In agreement - 92%

Question 11

Increase the opportunities for residents to downsize and free up family accommodation in social housing (housing association) properties.

In agreement - 87%

Question 12

Is there anything else we should be doing to support people who are homeless.

A summary of comments received is as follows:

- Provide drop-in centres and night shelters
- Provide accommodation where people can keep their pets with them
- Provide a helpline/chat-line
- Give help and advice on retraining
- Provide advice on DHP
- Work with housing associations to make best use of affordable housing eg encouraging older people to downsize from family sized housing.

Theme 3 - Sustainable Solutions

Question 13

Ensure our new Local Plan (Local Plan 2040) delivers more affordable housing.

In agreement - 87%

Question 14

Investigate the options for the Council with its partners to acquire or build new affordable homes and temporary accommodation.

In agreement - 83%

Question 15

Work with housing associations and landlords to provide more temporary accommodation.

In agreement - 86%

Question 16

Bring more empty homes back into use that could be used as affordable housing.

In agreement - 96%

Question 17

Provide a support package to help homeless applicants live independently and sustain their tenancy.

In agreement - 92%

Question 18

Do you have any other comments or ideas that can be included in the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy.

A summary of comments received is as follows:

- Deliver more social housing that is genuinely affordable
- Consider cross boundary incentives to relocate
- Have a dedicated point of contact to access network of services
- Consider 'pod' type temporary accommodation
- Create employment opportunities for homeless people with Sevenoaks
- Involve people with lived experiences of homelessness within policy making

Question 19

Prevention, intervention and sustainable solutions should they be the key themes of the draft Strategy.

In agreement - 89%

Question 20

Do you feel we should include any other proposals in the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy to support homeless people.

A summary of comments received is as follows:

- Housing First and using our resources as best we can, replicate the conditions that are proven to deliver success in promoting recovery from homelessness and long-term tenancy sustainability
- How can the cycle of homeless becoming homeless again and again be prevented or supported
- Focus on young care leavers

Other general comments that have been submitted are:

- The requirement for some temporary accommodation units to accept pets
- Should we have a target number of temporary accommodation units at our disposal
- There is a need for more supported and move on accommodation

8 It is considered that a broad range of participants responded to the consultation. Attributes to highlight are:

- a wide ranging age profile of respondents, but no responses received from those age 18 - 24 years
- over 70% are female
- 30% have a caring function
- 19% have a long term health condition/disability

9 Overall, the consultation shows there is positive public support for the draft Strategy, which is attached as Appendix B.

10 The draft Strategy was presented to Members at 2 events. Members found the presentation very clear and informative and would assist them in the completion of the survey. The main area of concern was can the Council accommodate applicants with Pets and the suggestion that we investigate what other Councils do and in particular Maidstone.

11 The Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Forum held its inaugural meeting with the presentation of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.

The attendees were invited to review the Action Plan to see how they can assist the Council in the delivery of the Strategy. The offers of assistance have been included in the Action Plan to the draft Strategy.

- 12 The Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Forum will meet on a quarterly basis and will be used to share service updates, learn from current best practice, consider latest developments, arrange Task and Finish groups if funding bids have been invited and to track the progress of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Action Plan.
- 13 Subsequent to the consultation, the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2023-2028 will help to address the needs of homeless people or those threatened with homelessness, whatever their background.
An Equality Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix C.
- 14 The Action Plan will be monitored on an annual basis to maintain progress against the set objectives. If any minor changes are needed, these will be considered by the Head of Housing to ensure that the Strategy may be future proofed to changing legislation, circumstance and local identified needs. Authority to introduce the minor amendments is delegated to the Chief Officer, People and Places, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

None.

Key Implications

Financial

None.

Resource (non financial)

The Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2023-2028 will assist the Housing Service in delivery of its homelessness function. No additional staff resource is considered necessary in its application.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

The Council is required to have a Strategy that complies with the statutory provisions contained in the Homelessness Act 2002. Failure to have an adopted Strategy may lead to legal challenges that the Council would not be in a position to defend.

Equality Assessment

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and varies between groups of people. The results of this analysis are set out in Appendix C.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

The District Council has a statutory duty to publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy every five years. Adoption and publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2023-2028 will fulfil the requirements of this duty.

Appendices

Appendix A - Homelessness Review

Appendix B - second draft of the Sevenoaks District Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2023-2028

Appendix C - Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Background Papers

None.

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - People and Places