

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 13th April 2021

Report Title: Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2025

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nick Mannion, Environment and Regeneration

Senior Officer: Frank Jordan - Executive Director Place

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty upon local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and formulate and publish a strategy for the future, based on the results of that review.
- 1.2. In 2018, The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launched their Rough Sleeping Strategy, which stipulates that Local Authorities should update their Homelessness Strategies to incorporate rough sleeping.
- 1.3. A full review was undertaken in 2019 in relation to the 2018 – 2021 Strategy to inform the priorities for the 2021 - 2025 Strategy.
- 1.4. This report outlines the key findings from this review and the priorities which have been set out within the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2025 (appendix 1) and seeks approval to go out to wider public consultation for a period of 12 weeks.

2. Recommendations

2.1. That Cabinet

- 2.1.1. Approve the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy as outlined at appendix 1 for the basis of consultation.

2.1.2. Following consultation, note that the final version of the strategy will be presented for approval to the Economy and Growth Committee.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty upon local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and formulate and publish a strategy for the future based on the results of that review. The strategy is required to set out how services will be delivered to prevent and relieve homelessness
- 3.2. As a statutory document, it was important that the Council can demonstrate that they have consulted widely with internal services, external agencies and residents.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. There are no alternatives to the recommendations as it is a statutory requirement for the Council to have a Homelessness Strategy in place, which now incorporates rough sleeping.

5. Background

- 5.1. Homelessness or the threat of becoming homeless can have a significant impact on the lives of individuals and families. It can have a detrimental impact on mental health and wellbeing.
- 5.2. Rough sleeping is the sharp edge of homelessness and the Government launched its Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2018, which set out its vision to half rough sleeping by 2022, ending it by 2027.
- 5.3. The Government's strategy outlines how it wants to support every person who sleeps rough to move into a home. The expectation from Government is that local government, business, communities, faith and voluntary groups and the general public work together in new ways to tackle the issue.
- 5.4. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has required local authorities to make significant changes in how they work and their response to ensure households who are homeless or facing homelessness are kept safe.
- 5.5. The Government's "Everyone In" programme required all local authorities to provide suitable accommodation for rough sleepers and those in shared accommodation. Cheshire East Council successfully accommodated 117 individuals under this programme. As a follow-up to "Everyone In", Cheshire East Council are now progressing with the "Next Steps" accommodation scheme, which seeks to deliver long-term accommodation in the form of

supported move-on homes for people recovering from rough sleeping. This will be delivered in partnership with a local housing provider.

- 5.6.** Cheshire East Council's ongoing response to the pandemic is detailed within the document. Additional learning and intelligence was reviewed throughout 2020 to ensure that the draft strategy provides the most up to date picture of homelessness and that the key objectives took this into account.
- 5.7.** Councils are expected to review their strategies to ensure they not only meet the requirements outlined in the Homelessness Reduction Act, but also how they are tackling rough sleeping.
- 5.8.** The existing Homelessness Strategy was adopted and launched in 2018 and set out a number of priorities including working towards ending rough sleeping.
- 5.9.** In 2019, the Housing team, started the review process, examining national and local data, reviewing evidence from other related projects including the recommissioning of the Housing Related Support contracts. The key objectives from the previous strategy were re-examined and an event was organised to challenge those objectives was undertaken in May 2019, to which over 50 people representing key stakeholders attended.
- 5.10.** The strategy review showed strong support from stakeholders that the current priorities and actions were working well and should be continued. As such, they have been replicated in this draft strategy.

Other comments throughout the review focused on:

- A greater need for all agencies to be working more closely – housing, hostels, social housing, health, mental health, drug and alcohol services, etc
- A mix of both generic and specialist services are required. Many people made homeless have had difficult lives and are often complex and chaotic. Having both specialised and generic services means the offer is more likely to fit the person rather than the person fitting the offer.
- There is value in providing specialist money advice services / dealing with debt issues but also financial capability that encourages, trains, and supports people to better manage and understand their finances.
- There is value in specialist mental health support for adults with mental health problems around managing their problems, as well working as an advocate when engaging with statutory services.

5.11. The data included within the draft Strategy covers the full year of 2019/20 (this the latest available data at the time of writing). Additional intelligence has been reviewed throughout 2020 to ensure that the draft strategy provides the most up to date picture of homelessness and rough sleeping in the Borough.

5.12. The key objectives which are outlined in the draft strategy are to:

- Enable more people to remain in their home and prevent them from becoming homeless
- Help people who are homeless to secure appropriate affordable accommodation
- Provide interventions so no one has to sleep rough in Cheshire East
- Ensure adequate support is in place to help people maintain and sustain accommodation

5.13 The aim of the consultation is to seek views on the strategy including:

- Whether the priorities and themes of the strategy accurately reflect the local picture and provide the right amount of detail
- To determine if the evidence base included within the strategy reflects other organisations understanding
- If the proposed action plans for each priority will achieve the aims of the strategy
- Are there other issues relating to homelessness which should be prioritised in 2021?
- Any further observations on the strategy as a whole?
- The contribution other services can provide to support the delivery of the strategy to provide wrap around support to some of our most vulnerable

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1. Legal Implications

6.1.1. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires that local authorities have a strategy in place to prevent and deal with homelessness. This strategy is not only aimed at preventing homelessness in the local area but to ensure that sufficient accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless.

- 6.1.2. The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy 2021 – 2025 outlines how the Council proposes to secure the appropriate support for people who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.
- 6.1.3. The Council as both the local housing authority and social services authority must take their Homelessness Strategy into account in the exercise of their functions.
- 6.1.4. Before adopting a Homelessness Strategy, the Council must consult with public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate.
- 6.1.5. This report requests authority to undertake the consultation process, such consultation process will require modification to ensure that it is approached in a COVID safe way, which is set out in section 8, below.
- 6.1.6. A new Homelessness Strategy must be published every five years.

6.2. Finance Implications

- 6.2.1. There are no additional financial asks of the Council within the draft strategy, and ongoing tasks will be met through existing budgets held within the department, along with Government grants which have been allocated to the department including Rough Sleeping Initiative funding, Next Steps, Flexible Homelessness Grant and Homelessness Reduction Grant.
- 6.2.2. There is a potential risk that strategically important external partners may be unable, through pressures on their service, to meet demand. In this case funding arrangements may be reviewed, or partners may be supported in exploring funding streams or shared services with other partner organisations. Budget holders and decision makers would be made aware of a lack of capacity in strategically relevant services.
- 6.2.3. The financial implications of the consultation for the draft strategy will be met within existing budgets for the Housing service.

6.3. Policy Implications

- 6.3.1. The strategy will contribute towards the vision of the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 to be an open, fair and green Council and help to deliver the priority to be a Council which empowers and cares about people.

6.3.2. The Cheshire East Council Housing Strategy 2018-23 details a number of key priorities for the Council's Housing service. One of these priorities focuses on 'Preventing Homelessness' under the remit of 'Health, wellbeing and quality of life'. This draft strategy seeks to set out the strategic direction of the Council in achieving this priority.

6.3.3. The development of a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a statutory requirement under the Homeless Act 2002.

6.4. Equality Implications

6.4.1. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the draft strategy and has been approved by the Council's Equality and Diversity Officer. The completed EIA is appended to this report.

6.5. Human Resources Implications

6.5.1. It is not anticipated that there will be any additional staff resources required to enact the actions in the strategy, and any resulting tasks and workgroups will be facilitated and completed within existing staff resources.

6.6. Risk Management Implications

6.6.1. It is not foreseen that the objectives set out within this strategy will cause significant risk to residents or the local authority. Priorities are derived from a strong evidence base which have taken consideration of resident requirements, as well as other local authority departmental ambitions.

6.6.2. A number of actions within the strategy will involve working with external partners, stakeholders and other CEC departments. This may assist in mitigation of risk due to a consistent and approved narrative taking place.

6.6.3. There is a risk that delivery of actions within the strategy may be delayed due to staff resources and availability. This can be mitigated somewhat via a robust action plan for the priorities and use of SMART objectives between projects.

6.7. Rural Communities Implications

6.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities, however the strategic priorities within the strategy will apply to all communities in the borough.

6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

6.8.1. There are no direct implications for children and young people

6.9. Public Health Implications

6.9.1. A report by Public Health England – Health matters: rough sleeping February 2020 indicates that “those who are rough sleeping or homeless experience some of the most severe health inequalities and report much poorer health than the general population”.

6.9.2. This was also highlighted in the Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 which states that “People who sleep rough regularly over a long period are more likely to die young than the general population. In an international review of all available evidence, homeless populations, along with other excluded groups (including sex workers and prisoners), are ten times more likely to die than those of a similar age in the general population. They are also much more likely to die from injury, poisoning and suicide (eight times greater risk in men, 19 times in women). In another report, the average age of death for a person who dies whilst living on the streets or in homeless accommodation in England was calculated as 47 years old compared to 77 for the general population,³ and it was estimated that around 35% of people who die whilst sleeping rough or living in homeless accommodation died due to alcohol or drugs, compared to 2% in the general population”

6.9.3. The strategic priorities within the draft strategy aim to benefit households and residents who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or those who are currently sleeping rough. These interventions are aimed to have a positive effect on the health of individuals.

6.10. Climate Change Implications

6.10.1. The Council has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2025 and to encourage all businesses, residents, and organisations in Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint. Whilst it is not the aim or remit of this strategy to address these issues specifically, the proposed strategic priorities aim to assist households who are homeless or facing homelessness to access suitable accommodation options and maintain their health and wellbeing throughout.

7. Ward Members Affected

7.1. All wards have the potential to be affected by this strategy. During the recommended external consultation period, Members will have the ability to provide comments on the strategy that are specific to their ward, as well as the wider borough.

8. Consultation & Engagement

8.1. Due to current and ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, the proposed method of consultation will entail a number of different approaches:

- A copy of the published Strategy will be made available at the Council's principal offices for inspection and copies can be provided on request, if the offices are open to the public.
- The Strategy will be published on the Council's website along with an online survey/questionnaire to receive and quantify comments.
- Relevant stakeholders, including partners, Members and town/parish councils will be notified of the consultation and encourage responses.
- A comprehensive social media campaign and press release will be launched to make residents aware of the Council's consultation and to encourage local people to engage with the Council's ambitions within the Strategy.
- An online meeting will be held, due to perceived COVID-19 restrictions preventing interaction with stakeholders. This will ensure that as many stakeholders as possible have opportunity to feed into the draft document.
- Staff will attend Stakeholder meetings to promote the strategy and seek views including the Adults Safeguarding and Self Neglect Boards

9. Access to Information

9.1. The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer.

10. Contact Information

10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Christopher Hutton

Job Title: Senior Policy Officer

Email: christopher.hutton@cheshireeast.gov.uk