

## **Economy and Growth Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> September 2021
<b>Report Title:</b>	Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2025
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Growth & Enterprise – Peter Skates
<b>Report Reference No:</b>	EG/05/21-22
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All Wards

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### **1. Executive 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. There is also a further requirement to incorporate how the Council intends to assist the Government to end Rough Sleeping by 2027 within the strategy.
- 1.2. On the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021, Cabinet provided approval for a period of consultation on the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2025. This draft strategy was considered by Cabinet and approved for consultation.
- 1.3. Consultation on the draft strategy took place between 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021 and 14<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and this report provides a summary of the responses and presents the final version for approval and adoption.
- 1.4. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan as follows:
  - 1.4.1. **Open** – The draft strategy was subject to a period of consultation, providing an opportunity for the community and stakeholders to review and provide comments. These views have been taken into consideration when producing the final version. The strategy clearly articulates the way in which the Council will respond to Homelessness and Rough Sleeping providing a detailed action plan which will be made public once adopted.
  - 1.4.2. **Fair** - Homelessness or the threat of homelessness can have a detrimental impact of the lives of our residents. The strategy outlines

the actions to address homelessness, ensuring that some of our most vulnerable residents have a safe, affordable home, enabling them to have the same life chances as other residents.

- 1.4.3. Green** - There are no direct impacts of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy with regards to the Council's ambition to be 'green'.

## **2. Recommendations**

### **2.1. Committee are recommended:**

- 2.1.1.** Note the consultation responses and amendments made to the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021–2025
- 2.1.2.** To approve and adopt the final version of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2025
- 2.1.3.** To note that the funding arrangements are in place to enable the delivery of the strategy
- 2.1.4.** To note that the delivery of the strategy will be overseen by the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group.

## **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, including Rough Sleeping.
- 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 in formulating the final version.
- 3.3.** Following consultation we have ensured that the Council has identified any gaps and issues in the draft strategy and this has led to the formulation of a robust action plan which is appropriately supported and adequately resourced to address any issues and delivery of the service.

## **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1.** This section is not applicable. It is a statutory requirement for the Council to have a Homelessness Strategy in place, which now incorporates rough sleeping.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1.** In April 2021, the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was presented to the former Cabinet, seeking approval to consult and ascertain the views of residents and stakeholders.
- 5.2.** The aim of the consultation was 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

**5.3.** The process of consultation and the outcomes and amendments to the draft strategy are detailed below in Section 6.

## **6. Consultation and Engagement**

**6.1.** Following approval, the draft strategy was subject to a period of 12-week consultation, which ran from 21st April 2021 to 14th July 2021. Consultation took the form of:

- Online questionnaire and survey seeking views of residents and stakeholders via the Cheshire East Council website
- Presentations to a number of groups including The Adult Safeguarding Board and local registered providers to encourage participation in the consultation
- Correspondence sent to all Members, stakeholders and third sector organisations to advise of the consultation and encourage participation
- Comprehensive social media and website campaign to advise local residents of the consultation

**6.2.** The responses to the consultation were collated by the Research and Intelligence Team and the results provided to enable the further development of the final strategy.

**6.3.** In total, there were 28 responses received via the online questionnaire/survey and these have been collated into a Summary, outlined in Appendix 1.

**6.4.** The responses ranged from general comments about the strategy, positive feedback on the proposed actions and some specific comments regarding key areas. The amendments to the strategy included:

- a) Clarifying the new arrangements for priority banding for persons who present as homeless due to domestic abuse. This is a direct result of the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and allows the local authority to prioritise homelessness assistance and accommodation to those who have experienced domestic abuse.
  - b) Generic contact details added to the draft strategy. This is to assist residents in making referrals for homelessness and rough sleepers to be made to the local authority.
  - c) Greater detail added regarding what steps the local authority will take with regards to engagement with the private rented sector and how this will expand the number of housing options available to households experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
  - d) Additional action added to map the Single Point of Access support services and tenancy sustainment activity, as well as to further promote the support offered by the local authority via the Housing Related Support contracts.
  - e) There were a number of comments with a similar theme, namely the issue of 'rural homelessness'. Whilst the draft strategy already included reference and actions relating to rural homelessness, the number of responses received (14 in total) which mentioned this issue mean that we have committed to exploring this item further during the lifetime of the strategy.
  - f) A small number of responses were submitted regarding the situation with Covid-19. It was felt that the local authority's Homelessness team have managed exceptionally well during this time, and that no Covid-19 specific actions were needed. This is subject to change as the situation progresses and any further national guidance is proposed.
- 6.5.** In summary, the draft strategy was well received with high levels of agreement in relation to the Council's priorities and evidence base. Further details regarding this are outlined in Appendix 1 which sets out the responses to consultation and the Council's responses.
- 6.6.** The actions identified within the strategy will be monitored and taken forward by the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group. This is an Advisory group which has been established to include a number of internal and external services who are dedicated to the reduction of homelessness including Probation, Housing Related Support Providers and Public Health.

## **Implications**

### **6.7. Legal**

- 6.7.1.** Adoption of the draft Strategy is not contentious. Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to have a strategy in place to prevent and deal with homelessness and rough sleeping,

aimed at preventing homelessness in the local area and to ensure that sufficient accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless. It is a requirement of the Act that a new Homelessness Strategy must be published every five years.

- 6.7.2.** The draft Strategy does not impose any additional legal duties on the Council toward the homeless over and above what is already required by Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 as amended.
- 6.7.3.** Any additional legal obligations to the homeless arising from adoption and implementation of the draft Strategy are likely to come from action plans involving the sharing of information with partner agencies or the gathering of information for implementation purposes, and the Council's obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018. Such information will need to be managed in accordance with the Council's statutory obligations.
- 6.7.4.** 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. It is likely that increased engagement in homelessness in the area will see a rise in prevention and relief duties which in turn may also lead to an increase in challenges to either the scope of the duty or the discharge of it.

## **6.8. Finance**

- 6.8.1.** 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.
- 6.8.2.** 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.

## **6.9. Policy**

- 6.9.1.** 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.
- 6.9.2.** 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.

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

## **6.10. Equality**

- 6.10.1.** An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) 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.

## **6.11. Human Resources**

- 6.11.1.** 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.

## **6.12. Risk Management**

- 6.12.1.** 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.
- 6.12.2.** 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.
- 6.12.3.** 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.

## **6.13. Rural Communities**

- 6.13.1.** Homelessness and rough sleeping can affect all communities, however the implications within rural communities will be subject to an ongoing review throughout the strategy. This will aim to identify and address any specific issues relating to rural homelessness.

## **6.14. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

- 6.14.1.** Homelessness and rough sleeping can have a significantly detrimental effect on children and young people. The draft strategy takes into account the specific needs of these groups and any specific actions within the strategy would result in positive implications and outcomes for children and young people.

## **6.15. Public Health**

- 6.15.1.** 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”.
- 6.15.2.** 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,<sup>3</sup> 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”
- 6.15.3.** 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.

## **6.16. Climate Change**

- 6.16.1.** 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.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Christopher Hutton Christopher.hutton@cheshireeast.gov.uk 01270 685642
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Summary of consultation responses Appendix 2 – Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-25 Appendix 3 – Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Equality Impact Assessment
Background Papers:	The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer.