

HILLINGDON HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING REVIEW AND STRATEGY

Cabinet Member	Councillor Philip Corthorne
Cabinet Portfolio	Social Services, Housing and Health and Wellbeing
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Papers with report	Appendix 1: Consultation Report Appendix 2: Hillingdon Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy 2019 to 2024

HEADLINES

Summary	In October 2019, the draft Hillingdon Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy 2019 to 2024 was approved for consultation by the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Social Services, Housing, Health and Wellbeing. Cabinet is now asked to consider the outcome of the consultation process and to formally adopt the strategy.
Putting our Residents First	This report supports the following Council objectives of: <i>Our People; Our Built Environment and Strong financial management</i> . The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy will complement the wider Housing Strategy and contribute to the delivery of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
Financial Cost	There are no direct financial costs in the updating and revision of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Social Care, Housing and Public Health
Relevant Ward(s)	All.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

- 1) Consider the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken in relation to the Council's Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy and has full regard to it in deciding whether to make changes to the strategy;**
- 2) Approve the revised Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Review and Strategy as appended to the report;**
- 3) Agree that the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Care, Housing, Health and Wellbeing approve an updated action plan for the strategy on an annual basis.**

Reasons for recommendation

Hillingdon Council has a statutory obligation to produce a strategy to tackle and prevent homelessness based on a review of all forms of homelessness in the Borough.

Alternative options considered / risk management

No alternative option has been considered. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory obligation on Hillingdon Council to produce a strategy to address homelessness at least once every 5 years. However, housing authorities can conduct homelessness reviews and publish homelessness strategies more frequently if circumstances change. In November 2017 Cabinet agreed that an early update of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy should take place in light of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA). Subsequently, in August 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published a Rough Sleeper Strategy. This requires local authorities to update and make their Homelessness Prevention Strategies available online by winter 2019 and rebadge them as Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies. MHCLG will consider the strategy to be submitted once it is available online and this commitment is to be achieved by 31 December 2019.

Risks in not updating the strategy relate to meeting the requirements of Statutory Guidance and accessing future funding opportunities.

Policy Overview Committee comments

On 23rd September 2019, the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee considered the consultation report and thanked officers for their work and hoped that the suggestions raised at the meeting and comments made would be taken into consideration by officers.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background and Legislative Context

1. The 2002 Homelessness Act made it a statutory requirement for local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness and to publish a homelessness strategy at least once every five years. The homelessness strategy must include a strategy for preventing homelessness in the local area.
2. The homelessness review is about understanding the picture related to homelessness in Hillingdon. Its purpose is to determine the extent to which the population in the district is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, assess the likely extent in the future, identify what is currently being done and by whom, and identify what resources are available, to prevent and tackle homelessness.
3. The draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been informed by the review and sets out Hillingdon Council's approach, working with our partners to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in Hillingdon over the next five years.

Progress in delivering the previous Homelessness Prevention Strategy

4. Although it is a relatively short time since the last strategy was published, there have been a number of achievements made throughout 2018 and 2019:
 - The implementation of the HRA marked a wholesale change in the way that local authorities deliver housing advice. This resulted in a complete re-think of how front-line services are delivered and the Homelessness Prevention Service was well prepared for implementation;
 - New IT software was commissioned, staff trained in its use and data submitted to meet new reporting requirements. A richer body of data to provide intelligence regarding homelessness in Hillingdon is now analysed on an ongoing basis to inform future action. Residents are able to self-refer via an online portal through the Council's website;
 - The HRA Duty to Refer came on stream in October 2018. Arrangements have been made for homelessness prevention staff to attend the Job Centre Plus (JCP) for half a day on a weekly basis. This enables the Duty to Refer cases to be identified at source and dealt with efficiently. A reciprocal arrangement has been agreed which will assist homeless clients with job and benefit related issues;
 - A successful bid for funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Rough Sleeper Initiative was secured in 2018/19 and has been extended into 2019/20. A dedicated team of Council officers work alongside staff from Thames Reach, Trinity Homeless Project and Heathrow Travel Care. They work with rough sleepers at Heathrow Airport and across the borough by providing assessments and support in moving into settled accommodation;

- A cross-service project team, which includes representatives from DWP, Citizen's Advice and Hillingdon MIND, meets on a monthly basis to coordinate the response to Universal Credit (UC) and to mitigate adverse impacts. The Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee has conducted a Major Review into UC, recently approved by Cabinet;
- The Council worked with Trinity Homeless Project to provide the Winter Night Shelter facility during the coldest months of the year from 21 January 2019 up to 3 March 2019;
- The number of households in temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast accommodation reduced during 2018, and has reduced further in 2019;
- Establishment of a Resettlement Team to increase links between homeless households and the Private Rented Sector. The team assists with move-on of homeless households from temporary accommodation and also assists other service areas, such as Children's Social Care teams to resettle households;
- A successful bid has been made to the MHCLG's Rapid Rehousing Pathway for a Local Lettings Agency in partnership with Trinity Homeless Project;
- A further successful Rapid Rehousing Pathway bid has been made to employ two 'navigators' to develop relationships with and help people who sleep rough to access appropriate local services, get off the streets and into settled accommodation. The two navigators will work with rough sleepers with higher and more complex needs;
- Grant funding from Public Health England (PHE) is funding a Welfare Pathway for homeless people and rough sleepers with alcohol problems, multiple risks and complex needs. This includes a Fibroscan to provide rapid and non-invasive assessment of liver damage;
- The Council worked in partnership with St Mungo's and the GLA to make available a short term, 'pop up hub' providing a period of intensive support to make an impact in reducing rough sleeping;
- A dedicated social worker has been employed using Department for Education (DfE) funding to work with a cohort of care leavers considered most at risk of sleeping rough.

Key findings from the review

5. A variety of Council services and external partners were consulted to help inform the development of the homelessness review and the draft homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy. The informal consultation included:
 - A front line staff workshop
 - A dedicated staff working group
 - Individual interviews with a variety of key delivery partners
 - A Homelessness Forum event with external stakeholders
 - An internal stakeholders event
6. The findings of consultation sessions considered alongside available data fed into the review and have assisted in the development of the consultation draft. Key issues and challenges identified include:
 - Numbers of rough sleepers at Heathrow Airport remain stubbornly high;
 - The main impact of the HRA on the homelessness service, has been to increase the number of homelessness assessments, the time they take, case-loads and the amount of time that a case remains in the system;
 - Over half of homeless applicants are aged under 35;
 - Those owed a prevention or relief duty are split almost 50/50 between families with children and single people and couples without children. Of the former 70% are single parents;
 - Almost 60% have no support needs, rising to 70% of families with children, indicating that their homelessness is primarily concerned with difficulty accessing or sustaining their position in the housing market;
 - The most common support needs are physical ill health and disability, mental health problems and experience of domestic abuse;
 - By far the most common reason for homelessness is the ending of a private sector tenancy, followed by the family no longer being willing to accommodate and then by domestic abuse;
 - Affordability is an increasingly significant issue; compounded by the gap between market rents and the amount that the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates will cover;
 - A general lack of access to a supply of affordable housing is a key issue;
 - There is also a need to provide housing with low to medium level support and floating support;

- Partnership working in the Borough would benefit from greater sharing of information on services available and referral routes;
- Partnership working with Housing Associations would benefit from being reinvigorated;
- Prevention, early intervention and partnership working are considered priorities;
- Support in learning how to manage a household budget is needed;
- Other priorities are referral systems for prison and hospital release and mental health support

Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Vision and Priorities and Actions

7. The strategy has been developed with the following vision, priorities and headline actions

Our vision is to:

Prevent homelessness and improve life chances by acting early, improving access to housing and supporting individuals

Our priorities and key actions are:

- **Priority One: Ensure that residents are able to access good quality, clear housing advice regarding their housing options;**
 - Review the quality and consistency of the advice offer
 - Ensure good access to housing advice
 - Ensure good communication with organisations representing specific vulnerable groups to assist in effectively tailoring the advice offer
 - Provide holistic multi-partner services for homeless households
- **Priority Two: Prevent earlier;**
 - Streamline internal processes to resolve potential homelessness early
 - Move prevention upstream
 - Develop focussed plans for the top three most prevalent causes of homelessness:
 - Private sector evictions
 - Family and friend evictions
 - Domestic abuse
 - Review and enhance working arrangements concerned with preventing homelessness amongst vulnerable groups;
- **Priority Three: Eliminate the need to sleep rough in Hillingdon;**
 - Complete short term funded Rough Sleeper projects
 - Assist rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping to access the private rental market
 - Provide additional support to assist rough sleepers

- Host a temporary rough sleeper hub
 - Work with partners to provide supported housing for rough sleepers
 - Develop an agreed approach to enforcement
- **Priority Four: Increase the availability of affordable rented housing;**
 - Procure private rented sector housing for use as settled accommodation;
 - Seek to reduce competition for private rented housing from other organisations;
 - Make best use of existing social rented housing;
 - **Priority Five: Manage the quantity, quality and cost of temporary accommodation;**
 - Acquire additional units for use as temporary accommodation;
 - Use council owned stock creatively to support homeless households;
 - Move people on from temporary accommodation in a timely fashion;
 - Work to retain good quality existing landlords that work with homeless clients;
 - Review current private sector licensing arrangements;
 - Drive up property and management standards in the private rented sector;
 - **Priority Six: Bring greater purpose, clarity and focus to local homelessness partnership arrangements;**
 - Hold regular meetings of relevant partnership groups
 - Produce and update partnership resources
 - Review operational collaborative working arrangements between housing, health and social care.

Formal consultation on the draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy

8. The formal consultation process ran from 30th October 2019 to 26th November 2019. The consultation draft has been posted on the Council's website with an accompanying questionnaire and opportunities have been taken to draw attention to this, including via social media. Consultation events have also been held including:
 - A drop-in session for front-line staff and stakeholders from other council departments
 - A homelessness forum including both voluntary sector and housing association partners
 - Specific meetings for key partners and issues such as adults and children's social care and domestic abuse
9. A report on the findings from the consultation is included at Appendix 1. The responses show that there is considerable agreement with the priorities identified in the strategy. The highest level of agreement is with priority one concerning the advice offer with 98% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with this priority, but all priorities achieved at least 90% agreement. The majority of comments reinforce the approach of the strategy. Some of the comments most frequently made are summarised below and further detail is included in the appendix:
 - Clarity, consistency and accessibility of advice
 - Work with a wide range of partners and in a wide range of locations

- The importance of employment support
- Joint working around complex needs i.e. mental health drug and alcohol abuse
- The need for an in-depth and cross organisational understanding of the resident journey
- Mental health outreach for rough sleepers
- Pathways for those with a personality disorder or chaotic lifestyle
- Maintaining the close working across agencies that has developed through the rough sleeper initiative
- Accommodation with holistic support
- More active engagement of Heathrow Airport Limited to address rough sleeping
- Focus on releasing under-occupied properties
- Build close relationships with landlords both private and housing associations to both sustain tenancies and acquire additional properties
- Develop commissioning plans
- Consider loft extensions, and other extensions including additional storeys
- Consider whether existing provision for domestic abuse is sufficient
- Buy/build/convert and manage our own temporary accommodation
- Increase emphasis on the safety of temporary accommodation including via increased inspections
- Hold regular homelessness forums
- Formalise working arrangements with key internal and external partners i.e. social care, police, employment support, hospital discharge teams, mental health services
- Develop the existing performance metrics

Amendments made to the strategy following consultation

10. Comments received during the consultation process have been generally supportive and consequently there have not been significant changes made to the strategy. There have, however, been some minor amendments:

- The following text has been added to action 2.2 in the action plan ‘Complete customer journey mapping across organisations to better understand where an earlier intervention might be made’;
- The following text has been added to action 3.2 in the action plan ‘Actively engage with Heathrow Airport in Limited in developing future plans for alleviating rough sleeping at the airport’;
- The following text has been added to action 4.1 in the action plan ‘Develop a commissioning plan to meet the needs of homeless households’;
- The following action has been added to the action plan ‘Develop performance metrics’.

Financial Implications

There are no immediate or direct financial implications arising from the revision and updating of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy.

The Council is committed to tackling the causes of Homelessness and will provide advice, support and services to those affected, within the available General Fund budget and central Government grant.

The General Fund budget for the Homelessness Prevention & Lettings service meets the costs of the Council's statutory duties in this area, and has a budgeted gross cost of £5,289k in 2019/20. In recognition of the demand-led nature of this service, the ongoing legislative changes and that numbers of households accommodated in temporary accommodation remain above levels assumed in the base budget, the Council's Medium Term Financial Forecast (MTFF) also includes a contingency provision of £1,072k. In addition, there is a specific earmarked reserve for housing incentives that supports the procurement of private sector accommodation.

The contingency provision is subject to review as part of the MTFF development work for 2020/21, and is currently assumed to be required over the period of the current MTFF.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities?

The Homelessnesss Prevention and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy has a direct bearing on the Council's vision of 'Putting Our Residents First'. It sets out plans for the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping, and securing accommodation and support for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Council needs to ensure that any policies or decisions in relation to homelessness take account of requirements under equalities and human rights legislation, including ensuring that policies and decisions do not discriminate against those with protected characteristics, and complying with the public sector equality duty. The Hillingdon Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy collated available information to understand the demographics of those who are homeless, including age, ethnicity, disability, mental illness, family size and composition and nature of vulnerabilities. Equality impact assessments will be carried out where relevant and appropriate to do so in the delivery of the strategy.

Consultation carried out or required

The strategy has been subject to a wide ranging consultation process which is the subject of the report.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and associated financial implications, noting that there are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations that Cabinet approves the revised Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Review and Strategy as appended to the report. As a potentially volatile demand-led area of activity, budgets for Homelessness Prevention and Lettings continue to be closely monitored with outputs feeding into both the monthly budget monitoring reports to Cabinet and regular updates on the Medium Term Financial Forecast.

Legal

The Borough Solicitor confirms that there are no legal impediments to the Council approving the revised Homelessness Prevention Strategy which has been subject to statutory consultation under Section 3 of the Homelessness Act 2002.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Minutes of the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee - 23 October 2019](#)