

UPDATE ON THE HILLINGDON HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019 - 2024

Committee name	Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee
Officer reporting	Mark Billings, Residents Services Debby Weller, Residents Services
Papers with report	Homeless Strategy Action Plan January 2021
Ward	All

HEADLINES

This report provides an update on progress in implementing the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024 and an action plan for 2021.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee note the progress made in delivering the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- Hillingdon's Homelessness Prevention Review and Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 17th December 2019. The Strategy has six priorities:
 - Priority One: Ensure that residents are able to access good quality, clear housing advice regarding their housing options
 - Priority Two: Prevent earlier
 - Priority Three: Eliminate the need to sleep rough in Hillingdon
 - Priority Four: Increase the availability of affordable rented housing
 - Priority Five: Manage the quantity, quality and cost of temporary accommodation
 - Priority Six: Bring greater purpose and improved clarity and focus to local homelessness partnership arrangements
- The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory obligation on the Council to produce a strategy to address homelessness at least once every 5 years. Annual updating of the Action Plan is an MHCLG requirement. The previous 2017 to 2022 strategy had been reviewed early due to the significant changes brought about by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which was operational from April 2018.

Progress Update

Priority One: Ensure that residents are able to access good quality, clear housing advice regarding their housing options

3. Updates have been made to the Council website to ensure that clients and partners are aware of the services available and routes to access support. This has included the inclusion of separate information to assist rough sleepers and the organisations working with them. Updates in relation to housing services have been included in relation to changes resulting from Covid-19.
4. Contacts were made early in 2020 to key partner groups involved with vulnerable clients. These included hospitals, mental health and probation services. With the onset of Covid-19 there was an increase in the early release of prisoners, which meant that good contacts and processes working with probation were essential.
5. To improve the standard and consistency of homelessness advice, work was completed with the performance team to establish a quality assurance framework. A full training package has been created which has been rolled out to all homelessness prevention staff and the documentation and opportunity for discussion is made available to all new starters. This is aimed at ensuring good quality and consistent advice. All work processes and instructions have been reviewed to ensure that they are up to date.
6. Further improvements and revisions are being made to the quality assurance framework. A monitoring and review mechanism that includes reporting through to the homelessness prevention service management team will be incorporated.
7. Changes to Immigration Rules have been made as we prepare to leave the EU. Rough sleeping will be a ground for refusal or cancellation of permission to stay in the UK. Ensuring that partners and clients are aware of the new rules will be a priority for communication with partner agencies and homeless clients in 2021. Those affected will include EEA citizens who do not apply under the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) in time for the 30 June 2020 deadline.

Priority Two: Prevent earlier

8. The amount data collected increased alongside the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) at the individual client level. Analysis of this data is being used to help inform future service delivery.
9. The BID team has worked alongside the homeless prevention service to process map an end to end customer journey. This has assisted in identifying opportunities for prevention further upstream by identifying groups at risk of homelessness and where interventions have been successful. This process has helped in understanding where there is scope for improved service delivery by the council and where external partners can better assist in preventing homelessness amongst vulnerable groups.

10. Referral arrangements have been agreed with discharge teams at Hillingdon Hospital. It has been agreed that we will attend, when safe to do so for additional training to be provided. In the interim email and telephone support is being provided. A Point of Contact in the Homelessness Prevention Team has been agreed. This will provide a useful model to assist in reviewing our working arrangements with other partners such as probation and the RAF.
11. The strategy recognised the three most prevalent causes of homelessness are family and friend evictions, domestic abuse and private sector evictions. Family evictions have overtaken private sector evictions as the top cause of homelessness this year. Under normal circumstances face to face meetings would take place to discuss issues relating to family evictions and to negotiate to resolve issues where possible and appropriate. As a result of Covid-19 this is now dealt with over the phone and online.
12. There has been a decrease in private sector evictions as they were suspended as part of the response to Covid-19. There is however a significant number of cases that will work their way through the system over the next year or so and will add to homelessness approaches. We have proactively contacted landlords with households where the evictions process has been started. We have used the slowing down of the process as an opportunity to negotiate with landlords with a view to preventing their eviction proceeding any further and averting use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
13. Domestic abuse has continued to rise throughout the year. Lockdown due to Covid-19 has brought tensions to the fore and impacted negatively on domestic abuse. Domestic abuse advocates to assist with upskilling staff had been due to work with staff to raise awareness but unfortunately this has been held up due to Covid-19. The Council has agreed to work towards DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation and as a first step specialist homelessness prevention officers are being identified to lead on domestic abuse. Arrangements will be made for domestic abuse advocates to meet with staff.
14. Our young person housing advice service, currently run by P3, is to be significantly expanded in 2021 in order to meet the needs of young people facing homelessness.

Priority Three: Eliminate the need to sleep rough in Hillingdon

15. The strategy recognised Heathrow airport as being a hotspot for rough sleepers and to address this, funding has been secured under both the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) and the Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP) which have now been combined into the RSI funding stream. There has been some very significant progress in relation to addressing rough sleeping Hillingdon. The first three months of 2020 concluded action under the 2nd year of the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) and the Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP).
16. For 2020/21 the RSI and RRP funding streams were combined and Hillingdon's successful RSI3 bid was one of the largest at £2,186,646.66. The onset of Covid-19 saw some swift action around rough sleepers. In the interests of public health, the government's approach was to ensure that all rough sleepers were brought in off the streets and this prompted a large scale exercise at Heathrow at the beginning of April 2020. A total of 170 rough sleepers were housed including 142 into hotels across London arranged by the GLA/MHCLG.

17. The council quickly arranged to lease Olympic House, providing 33 units of accommodation for rough sleepers. A further 6 units at Micawber house were secured from December 2020. As of 10th March 2021, the council had 99 rough sleepers housed in temporary accommodation (this total does not include any rough sleepers housed by the GLA).
18. The changing situation in relation to Covid has resulted in some repurposing of the RSI3 grant agreed by MHCLG. This included funding for Olympic House rather than a proposed hub near the airport and additional HMO provision.
19. As part of the RSI3 commissioning an extra 40 HMO beds have been delivered through our commissioned partner, Trinity Homeless Projects. This has included 30 low support HMO spaces and 10 high support HMO spaces. All these bed spaces have now been delivered and are occupied.
20. Additional funding has been made available under the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP). This programme is aimed ensuring that rough sleepers brought in under the Covid-19 response, do not return to the streets. Funding has been secured to cover the cost of B&B / temporary accommodation for the rest of this financial year (Olympic House costs are already covered by RSI funding).
21. A successful bid has been submitted to Public Health England (PHE) for funding relating to rough sleepers with substance abuse issues and a separate successful joint funding bid has been made regarding health provision for rough sleepers to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions or delayed discharge. The latter is partnership bid by housing and health partners across North West London.
22. Additional funding has been made available via the Protect Programme (PP) and the Cold Weather Fund (CWF). The PP was announced in November to be provided to areas with high numbers of rough sleepers to support the ongoing efforts to provide accommodation for rough sleepers during the winter. This support is focused on those who are symptomatic or have tested positive for Covid-19, those sleeping rough who are clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable due to Covid-19 and those who are long term or repeat rough sleepers.
23. An approach to enforcement at Heathrow was pushed forward due to Covid-19 and the major decant of the airport took place in Spring 2020 in line with Government guidance. Since the decant there has been an increased presence of security (delivered by the Airport) and Thames Reach (who run our rough sleeper outreach service) conducting nightly patrols. There has been a proactive approach to help assess and reconnect individuals to their area of origin whilst liaising with support services. Fortnightly and sometimes weekly discussions take place between all partners to review the current process and determine whether changes need to be made. The number of rough sleepers at Heathrow has dramatically reduced although there are still
24. The annual rough sleeper snapshot across England, including the excellent news that rough sleeping reduced by a greater number in Hillingdon over the period Oct 2019 to Nov 2020 than in any other borough in England. The official annual count took place on 26 November 2020 and recorded just 11 rough sleepers, 4 at Heathrow Airport and 7 in the remainder of the borough. This is an excellent result compared to the count last year when there was a total of

106 rough sleepers including 95 at the airport. During the first quarter of 2021 this had increased to around 150. Activity under the 'Everyone in' initiative that the government undertook in response to Covid-19 dramatically reduced the numbers of rough sleepers and a determined multi-agency approach subsequently has ensured that numbers have remained low.

25. The winter night shelter contract was let and operated by Trinity in early 2021. There is no need for a shelter for 2022 as rough sleepers have all been and continue to be temporarily housed as part of the Covid-19 response.

26. Work is ongoing to assist rough or those at risk of sleeping rough to access the private rental market. The service has proactively looked to secure accommodation to assist this cohort and provide suitable housing options. During April to December 2020/21 we have successfully assisted 34 individuals into privately rented accommodation with added floating support to ensure it is sustained.

27. A draft delivery plan for continued action in relation to rough sleepers was completed and sent to MHCLG in December 2020. The plan outlines:

- Our overall plan for ending rough sleeping;
- Our shorter-term/Interim Accommodation & Immediate Support Plan
- Our longer-term Move-on Accommodation Plan

28. A key priority is an increase in medium/high support needs Accommodation. Floating support provision will also need to be maintained. It is also important that there is movement on from HMOs, particularly those with low level support where rough sleepers would be expected to be able to move on to the private rented sector. To track that this is happening effectively and to address any barriers a move-on panel has been established. In conjunction with our partner Trinity, options to provide additional longer-term move on accommodation are being explored. This includes a large building that has been identified suitable for providing studio flats with low level support. Options for shared accommodation that can be provided within Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates are also being explored. Repurposed RSI funding is contributing towards the conversion of Beechwood House, owned by the Council, into an HMO to be leased to Trinity Housing Projects.

29. A bid has been submitted for a fourth round of RSI funding for 2021/22. For the first three months of 2021/22 funding on the same basis as 2020/21 will be rolled forward. Hillingdon's MHCLG advisor has provided advice on proposals for funding for the following 9 months of 2021/22.

- This includes many of the existing interventions being rolled forward. Increased staff levels for London Borough of Hillingdon and Heathrow Travel Care are also included
- The HMO accommodation provided under RSI3, following set up, is now self-maintaining.
- Two further five bed HMOs providing a high level of support are proposed for 2021/22
- Further increases are proposed in relation to floating support, intervention at Heathrow Airport and costs concerned with accessing the private rented sector and personal budgets.

30. Proposed increases remain within the same overall cost envelope. The proposals are in line with Hillingdon's Rough Sleeper Delivery Plan for 2021/22. In particular they target accommodation for those with higher support needs; additional floating support to prevent tenancy breakdown and move on to settled housing.

Priority Four: Increase the availability of affordable rented housing

31. The following table shows private sector properties secured to house homeless households between April and January 2021. This includes lettings directly by private sector landlords and those that are leased to voluntary sector organisations working with homeless people.

2020/21	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
New private rented tenancies	6	37	32	29	27	32	27	15	17	12
New supported housing placements for single people	2	17	7	14	24	34	14	10	8	6
Total new tenancies	8	54	39	43	51	66	41	25	25	18

32. Following an increase in the number of asylum seeker placements in interim accommodation in Hillingdon, a closer relationship has been fostered with Clear Springs who hold the contract for asylum seeker placements. Data has been provided by Clear Springs on the number placed and future sourcing targets. The target for Hillingdon is now zero as they are no longer seeking additional interim accommodation in the borough. There have however been some hotels that have been used in Hillingdon as part of the emergency Covid-19 response. Officers are maintaining a close relationship with Clear Springs to monitor asylum seeker placements in the borough.

33. Between April 2020 and February 2021 there have been 291 lettings to homeless households owed a prevention, relief or main homelessness duty.

34. Tenants registered to downsize are offered support to facilitate their move into more suitable accommodation. Between April and November 2020, 18 under-occupiers have been supported with incentives to downsize.

35. There has been considerable delay in the provision of new build housing by both the council and housing associations due to the impact of Covid. The expectation is that in most instances, schemes will still deliver, albeit over a longer period of time.

36. There were substantial works carried out at YMCA accommodation which resulted in 5 units being converted from one bed to two bed and a further 4 units being converted to 4 bedrooms each. In total 13 additional bedrooms were created.

Priority Five: Manage the quantity, quality and cost of temporary accommodation

37. Trinity Homeless Projects continue to secure HMOs for use as shared housing. They now have a total of 270 units, of which 88 have been secured since between April and December 2020.

38. The Private Sector Housing Team prioritise work in relation to HMOs, which are often used as temporary accommodation, for inspection and where necessary enforcement work. During 2020 there has been disruption to inspections, with most of the work of the team taking place remotely.
39. A pan London initiative, Setting the Standard, inspects and shares information on standards in temporary accommodation. Hillingdon takes part in this initiative which has been completely revised and updated to assist in ensuring good standards in temporary accommodation.

Priority Six: Bring greater purpose and improved clarity and focus to local homelessness partnership arrangements

40. Regular strategy implementation meetings had been disrupted to some extent by Covid-19 however ad hoc practical meetings to deal with specific issues continued. Strategy implementation meetings recommenced and have subsequently been reorganised so that they occur quarterly with separate meetings for rough sleeping/single homelessness and family homelessness. Membership and agendas are to be focused on prioritisation and delivery.
41. Partnership for a with a wider group of participants i.e. homelessness forum and landlord forum have been on hold as a result of Covid-19. These are also now being restarted online with the initial meetings being scheduled for the new financial year.
42. Although the structure of partnership working arrangements have evolved over the last year, the overall level and constructiveness of partnership working has increased enormously during 2020. Work with partners concerned with rough sleeping in particular has developed well and the MHCLG rough sleeping advisor and the Homelessness Prevention Team have worked closely with voluntary sector partners, health and social care colleagues, the police and Heathrow airport to sustain the success in reducing rough sleeping. For much of 2020, meetings were held on a weekly basis, ensuring a hands-on, practical and rapid response to issues as they arose. These meetings continue to be held frequently. In addition, meetings between the council and MHCLG have focussed on planning future provision and associated funding applications.
43. Public Health England made available funding for ARCH to purchase a Fibroscan machine and refurbishment and upgrade a welfare room. This project is now complete.
44. Based on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Public Health Outcome Framework data and the priorities set by Hillingdon's Health and Wellbeing board, through the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, areas identified for priority attentions during 2020/21 include: 'Reducing homelessness in the borough, assisting families to find permanent accommodation and addressing the challenge of rough sleeping'. Other priority areas also have links with homelessness i.e. 'Reducing alcohol and substance misuse, including smoking'; 'Improve mental health and wellbeing amongst vulnerable groups'.
45. Local authority public health profiles include a variety of indicators including, within the wider determinants of health, an indicator for the number of statutory homeless people not in priority

need. The majority of people under this cohort are single people who as a group have a high prevalence of mental and physical health needs.

46. A Homelessness Services Digest to bring together existing information regarding services into one document will be completed during 2021 and will be regularly reviewed to keep it up to date.

Action Plan

47. The draft Action Plan for the Homelessness Strategy for 2021 has been focussed on key actions to be achieved in 2021 and is attached at Appendix A.

Implications on related Council policies

The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a statutory requirement under the Homelessness Act 2002.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Homelessness is a significant issue in Hillingdon as it is elsewhere, The Council will complete approximately 2,300 full homelessness assessments during 2020/21 and at the end of February there were 430 homeless households in temporary accommodation in addition to the 99 rough sleepers housed. The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy and associated action plan maintains a focus on delivering priority actions to prevent and alleviate homelessness.

Financial Implications

None at this stage.

Legal Implications

None at this stage.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Hillingdon Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy 2019 to 2024