

TO: EXECUTIVE

DATE: 25 JANUARY 2022

**Development of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026
Director of People**

1. PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 The Council has a duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to conduct a review of the nature and extent of homelessness every 5 years and to develop a strategy setting out how services will be delivered in the future to tackle homelessness and the available resources to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- 1.2 The Council's previous Homelessness Strategy was published in 2015. In May 2021, work began on a comprehensive review of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough. This has informed the development of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2021-26. Following a period of external consultation on the draft strategy in November 2021, a final version of the strategy has been prepared for approval.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 Executive is asked to:

- (i) approve the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-26 which has been finalised following stakeholder consultation**
- (ii) delegate the development of a detailed action plan to the Assistant Director of Early Help and Communities, working with partners in the new Homelessness Forum**

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 Housing authorities are required to consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons they consider appropriate before adopting a new homelessness strategy. Stakeholder consultation has taken place on draft versions of the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Homelessness Review and Executive approval is now being sought to publish the final version of the new strategy.

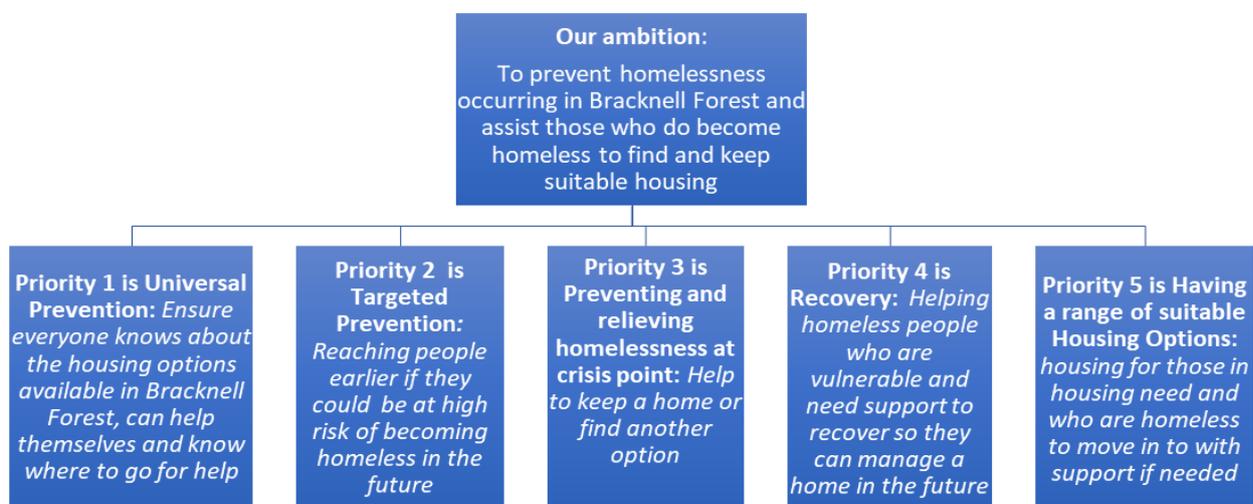
4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Should Executive propose any changes to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy or Homelessness Review, these can be accommodated prior to publication of the final version.

5. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 5.1 Since the last Homelessness Strategy was published in 2015 there have been significant changes nationally which have impacted on homelessness and the services to assist people at risk of homelessness in Bracknell Forest:
- The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 from April 2018 which meant a significant extension of local authority duties, offering more assistance to single people and placing homelessness prevention within a statutory framework (cited as the most significant change in homelessness law in 40 years);
 - The Government commitment to end rough sleeping by 2024 and a funding programme to support this aspiration, including more recently, the 'Everybody In' directive in response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
 - The Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on local communities, the economy and public services.
- 5.2 The Government's Homelessness Code of Guidance requires that the development of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is based on a detailed review of the local context, homelessness patterns, local service delivery (including partnership working) over the last 3 years, as well as an analysis of the impacts of significant changes that have taken place in recent years.
- 5.3 Work on the Homelessness Review began in May 2021, using homelessness statistics mainly from 2019/20 and 2020/21. The last year is recognised to have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The longer-term impact of Covid-19 on housing and homelessness is not yet known and the strategy and action plan take this uncertainty into account as far as possible.
- 5.4 The way the Homelessness Strategy has been structured broadly follows the Government's 2018 Rough Sleeping Strategy, which looks at actions in 3 domains: Prevention; Intervention; Recovery. The Strategy sets out a structured approach based on five priority areas.



- 5.5 Priorities 1 and 2 focus on prevention by encouraging people to seek early housing advice in order to resolve any problems through a range of universal and targeted services. Priority areas 3 and 5 relate to people who are homeless but do not have any specific support needs, and focus on providing housing options and other

assistance. Priority 4 covers people who need support to recover from the issues which have led to their homelessness, or the trauma of being homeless.

- 5.6 The success of the structured approach set out in the strategy depends on the level and quality of partnership working, with the Council taking a lead, but other key stakeholders working with the Council to prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping. The consultation process and the development of a detailed action plan are important means of building this partnership approach.

Homelessness Review findings

- 5.7 The review found that homelessness applications are increasing and that young people (both singles and families) are significantly over-represented. The causes of this are complex but include rising housing costs and a relatively small private rented sector, low incomes and the impact of benefit caps for some households, and a shortage of affordable housing relative to levels of demand. Key findings are:
- Homeless applications have increased since the Homelessness Reduction Act (from 573 in 2019/20 to 735 in 2020/21), in line with national trends.
 - 80% of people contacted the Council for assistance before becoming homeless, which is positive.
 - The two most common causes of homelessness are family or friends no longer able to accommodate and loss of accommodation in the private rented sector.
 - Domestic abuse is the third highest cause of homelessness and has increased significantly from 38 cases in 2019/20 to 83 cases in 2020/21.
 - Young people, black people and lone parents are over-represented among homeless people.

Positive outcomes

- 5.8 The Council, working closely with other agencies, has been successful in preventing and resolving homelessness and concerted action to provide accommodation and support has significantly reduced the number of people sleeping rough.
- In 2020/21, the housing options service successfully resolved the threat of homelessness for 55% of households seeking assistance.
 - In 2019/20, of the people who were actually homeless, 38% of cases were successfully resolved, which is above the South East regional average of 31%.
 - 42% of applicants at risk of homelessness were helped to stay in their home in 2019/20, higher than both the national and South East rates.
 - In 2019/20, 51 households were accepted under the 'main' homelessness duty compared to 111 in 2018/19. This reduction is due to the success of earlier prevention or relief work undertaken by the housing service.
 - The number of people rough sleeping fell from 22 in November 2019 to 4 in 2020 following the Government's 'Everyone in' programme; it fell further to 2 in 2021.

Challenges

- 5.9 There are particular challenges providing suitable housing for larger families and for single people with support needs, such as those recovering from rough sleeping, people with mental health issues and victims of domestic abuse.

- The number of households in Temporary Accommodation has increased since the Covid-19 pandemic from 136 in March 2020 to 174 in March 2021.
- Much of this increase relates to single people, including rough sleepers.
- Access to long-term accommodation is hampered by a relatively small private rented sector (12.5% of local housing stock, compared to 16.8% nationally) and a shortfall in social housing, especially for larger families, with the average wait for a three bedroom property over 4 years.
- There are challenges accessing local mental health and substance misuse services for homeless people, including rough sleepers and those with a dual diagnosis.

Identified needs and gaps

5.10 The homelessness review identified the following gaps in provision:

- No suitable short stay supported housing offer for single people aged over 25 who are homeless, including those recovering from rough sleeping.
- Limited safe accommodation options for victims of domestic abuse, with many staying in temporary accommodation without dedicated support (although some DA support provision is available, funded by the council).
- A need for resettlement and floating support services to help people in the first few months of a new tenancy or in the longer term.

Homelessness Strategy priorities

5.11 Proposed actions have been set out in the draft strategy grouped under the 5 priority areas. The key points are summarised below.

- Review and improve the information provided through the Council website and other media to promote available advice and support, including self-help.
- Work more closely with other organisations to establish referral protocols and pathways with a focus on identifying and acting on the warning signs of homelessness at an early stage.
- Ensure that the Housing Options Service maintains and increases its prevention success rate, focusing on those who are already homeless, in an emergency or crisis situation.
- Work more intensively with private and social housing landlords to increase move on from temporary accommodation.
- Set up a Homelessness Forum to ensure effective communication and joint working between all relevant housing and support providers
- Establish a forum to improve engagement with private landlords.
- Improve support for victims of domestic abuse by taking forward the recommendations in the new Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy.
- Review and develop support options to help people with their initial recovery from homelessness and to sustain accommodation in the longer term.

Delivering and monitoring the strategy

- 5.12 These actions will be taken forward through the development of a detailed action plan to be agreed with partners, which will include target dates, outcomes and milestones. Future reporting and governance arrangements will also be agreed as part of this process. The main vehicle for overseeing the strategy and action plan will be the new Homelessness Forum which will be launched in January 2022.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on English local housing authorities, to formulate a homelessness strategy at least every five years. A review of homelessness in a local housing authority area must take place prior to a homelessness strategy being formulated and published. The legislation requires local housing authorities to take strategic responsibility for tackling and preventing homelessness in their local authority area. The Bracknell Forest Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 has been produced in compliance with the legislation.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 Bracknell Forest Council has had an uplift in Government funding over recent years to support work on preventing and relieving homelessness, including targeted funding specifically aimed at people who are rough sleeping. In 2021/22 a number of separate funding pots for rough sleeping were amalgamated, resulting in a total funding allocation of £578,669 to the Council under the RSI4 programme. This is used to fund additional rough sleeping staff, emergency accommodation, rehabilitation work and incentive payments for private landlords. In addition, the Council received Homelessness Prevention Grant of £538,306 for 2021/22, to fund prevention work with single people and families. Finally, the Council has been allocated £135,991 for Discretionary Housing Payments to make up shortfalls in rent where this will prevent homelessness.
- 6.3 The main financial risk associated with homelessness demand relates to increased use of temporary accommodation and, in particular, the costs associated with the use of nightly-paid accommodation. This is addressed in the strategy through proposed actions to intensify prevention work, increase move-on options and procurement of accommodation in the private sector, and promote access to social housing.

Consultation

- 6.4 Housing authorities are required to consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations, and specialist agencies before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy. An initial round of stakeholder consultation was undertaken in November 2019 through focus groups with customers, stakeholders and housing and welfare staff to inform the review of homelessness.
- 6.5 In November 2021, a further round of stakeholder consultation was undertaken in order to present the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and to consult on the priorities and actions. Three consultation sessions were held:
- Group 1: Internal housing, welfare and rough sleeping teams
 - Group 2: Stakeholders working with single homeless people and rough sleepers
 - Group 3: Other stakeholders including housing associations, voluntary organisations, public health, community mental health service

- 6.6 Key issues raised in the consultation were:
- (i) tackling homelessness is not just a housing issue – for many it involves addressing mental health and well-being issues
 - (ii) local organisations must work together to make services more accessible for people and to develop local solutions to address issues that prevent people using services, and
 - (iii) there are many vulnerable people that need additional support to help them access, manage and sustain a tenancy.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.7 In developing the Homelessness Strategy, the council must have due regard for advancing equality. The Homelessness Review looked at groups included within the protected characteristics set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty and found evidence indicating a higher risk of homelessness for some groups based on age, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Health inequalities are also a feature, with higher levels of people who have physical and mental health issues and disabilities becoming homeless.
- 6.8 An Initial Equalities Screening Report Form has been completed. This has determined that the Strategy will have a positive impact on all of the above groups, through actions focusing on better data recording, improving information on and access to services, work with landlords to increase access to accommodation, briefings and training for local organisations and improved partnership working and information sharing. These will be elaborated in further detail in the action plan.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.9 Apart from the risk highlighted in 6.3 above, there are no other significant risks identified relating to the proposals contained in the report.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.10 The recommendations are expected to have no impact on emissions of CO₂ as they relate principally to advice, assistance and support services to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Background Papers

Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Review 2021-2026

Contact for further information

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