

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

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| REPORT TO: | <i>Environment & Community Panel</i> | | |
| DATE: | 9th April 2024 | | |
| TITLE: | Homelessness: A Review February 2024 | | |
| TYPE OF REPORT: | <i>Post Implementation A Review Update</i> | | |
| PORTFOLIO(S): | Cllr Rust | | |
| REPORT AUTHOR: | Nikki Patton Andy King author of Homelessness: A review February 2024 | | |
| OPEN/EXEMPT | Open | WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT: | No |

REPORT SUMMARY/COVER PAGE

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| <p>PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:</p> <p>In January 2020 a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-2024) and action plan was agreed and published by the Council. The strategy was considered in Autumn 2019 by the Environment and Community Panel. The Strategy was then subject to stakeholder engagement including a well-attended event in December 2019. The purpose of this report and presentation is to update members on the review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-2024). Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities are required by law to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy once every five years. Before publishing the strategy, housing authorities have the power to carry out a review of homelessness services in their district. The Council aims to publish its next strategy document by the autumn of 2024.</p> <p>The need for a refreshed strategy is timely, given the acute pressures currently faced, both by homeless households and the services supporting them. The Homelessness Review lays the foundation for developing an effective strategy: led by data and supported by professional and lived experience. The Review is a document prepared in advance of the Strategy. It looks at the current situation and provides analysis on the reasons, causes and wider factors affecting homelessness in this area.</p> <p>This report will highlight key findings. A copy of the full Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Review is attached.</p> |
| <p>KEY ISSUES:</p> <p>The review identifies that the Councils effectiveness in preventing homelessness since the publication of the last strategy has improved but this is being ebbed away due to new challenges in part coming from the cost of living pressures and an over heated private rented sector.</p> |
| <p>OPTIONS CONSIDERED:</p> <p>As outlined at the time of adopting the 2019-2024 strategy, a different approach was required in the context of rising numbers of rough sleepers and increasing numbers of</p> |

homeless households approaching the council in crisis situations. Key objectives were devised, and alternative approaches considered through stakeholder engagement during 2019.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To endorse the findings of the Homelessness Review to support and inform the work of the newly emerging Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 -2029.

To continue the role of the Homelessness and Housing Delivery Task Group to continue to receive detailed information and updates and monitoring progress of the strategy and agree the revised Terms of Reference for the Group.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Council has specific statutory duties in relation to reducing homelessness. It is required to produce and publish a strategy every 5 years. The approach has in the main been considered a success by colleagues at Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUCH) and local key delivery partners however as new challenges emerge it is important that we are sighted on the challenges and have robust response in place to respond and prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity whilst continuing to have adequate supply of accommodation and service to support those experiencing homelessness.

REPORT DETAIL

1. Introduction

The original core ambition of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-2024):

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- End rough sleeping and reduce homelessness
- Ensure people have access to appropriate temporary accommodation options, support services
- Improve access to settled housing options

The core key objectives:

- Develop a hierarchy of different types of temporary accommodation, including emergency provision
- Ensure access to housing related support, and provide new outreach services
- Provision of high-quality independent housing debt and advice service
- Devise new measures to reduce homelessness in all household categories
- To provide a new coordinating role to fix a 'shared problem' – bringing partners together in ways that find solutions to rough sleeping and reducing homelessness
- Ensure partners engage at a strategic level that recognises the urgency of tackling the issues
- Improve access to social housing, and the supply of additional private rented sector housing

The Homelessness Review provides an overview of homelessness experience and provision in King's Lynn and West Norfolk. It looks at:

- The current and future levels of homelessness in the borough,
- The available provision of services for people experiencing or facing homelessness,
- The ability of such services to meet current and future demand.

The review has been carried out in the autumn and winter of 2023/24, with extensive input from council officers, partner agencies and people with lived experience of homelessness. The council last produced a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in January 2020. By law, the council is required to produce a renewed strategy every five years. The need for a refreshed strategy is timely, given the acute pressures currently faced, both by homeless households and the services supporting them. The Homelessness Review lays the foundation for developing an effective strategy: led by data and supported by professional and lived experience.

2. Post Implementation Review

The council reports that homelessness presentations, per quarter, have doubled during the lifetime of the last strategy. Data shows no single cause for this increase, but shows an increase in

- The proportion of homelessness presentations arising from **Private Rented tenancies** ending.
- The proportion of homelessness presentations arising from **people fleeing domestic abuse**.
- The proportion of **households with children** making homeless presentations.

- The proportion of homelessness households where **at least one member is in employment**.

Data shows that the council's effectiveness in preventing homelessness has improved since the publication of the last strategy, but has ebbed away over the last two years, due (in part) to cost-of living pressures and the overheating of the private rented sector (PRS).

The council provided a substantial data set towards the review; partners were able to identify trends that corroborated this data. They also reported that homeless applicants displayed a greater level of support needs – particularly, mental health and substance misuse. Council officers reported difficulties accessing adequate levels of support for such applicants.

The council has gathered data over the last three years to track its progress towards ending rough sleeping. Council data shows that the level of people found sleeping rough in any given month, since Autumn 2020, has been steady, with some seasonal fluctuations. The number of people sleeping rough in the borough(per 100,000 population) is lower than most other local authorities in the region. Nevertheless, partners describe a cohort of people who are neither sleeping rough nor adequately housed, who need support to find and sustain accommodation.

3. Issues for the Panel to Consider

Challenges

The Council is one of many councils whose previous homelessness and rough sleeping strategy was devised prior to COVID-19. It is unlikely that anyone preparing a strategy in 2019 would have predicted a global pandemic and developed their strategy in response. The 2024-29 strategy must be sufficiently agile to respond to unanticipated challenges. Nevertheless, there are future threats and opportunities we can predict, as identified by the council and its partners.

The Review has identified that there are a number of key challenges (summary, full details contained within the Review); -

- Significant increase in demand for homelessness services (doubled between 2020-22) and sustaining levels.
- Homelessness Prevention does not always happen early enough
- Overuse of inappropriate and expensive bed and breakfast / nightly-paid accommodation
- Lack of accommodation, partly due to high levels of affordable housing void properties, low levels of new affordable housing supply and reduction in Private rented sector properties that are both available and affordable

Potential threats and further challenges (summary)

State Funding - many externally funded programmes are due to end in March 2025, leaving a potential cliff-edge. This affects wider services (e.g. social services) and is a key recurring theme.

Cost of living – the current economic crisis is a considerable threat to the viability of local services, in terms of higher costs, lower income and increased demand

Increasing proportions of adults with mental health needs – increasing demand on services.

Challenges of staff recruitment and retention – with a potential impact on quality of customer service.

Renters Reform Bill – whilst the Bill aims to “bring in a better deal for renters¹”, it may contribute towards PRS landlords exiting the market

4. Corporate Priorities

The Councils Corporate Strategy 2023-2027 identifies a key priority ‘To support the health and wellbeing of our communities, help prevent homelessness, assist people with access to benefits advice and ensure there is equal access to opportunities’.

5. Financial Implications

The overall costs of temporary accommodation including B&B spend has escalated significantly in the past two years. The Council receives a ring fenced grant from Central Government (Homelessness Prevention Grant) to fund homelessness prevention. The strategy will consider best use of these resources to reduce homelessness and reduce reliance on the expensive form of temporary accommodation ie B&B.

6. Any other Implications/Risks

Reference to those matters in ‘Newly emerging challenges’. Continued sustained high demand for homelessness services and demands on temporary accommodation continue to be area of concern that the strategy will seek to respond too.

7. Equal Opportunity Considerations

The impacts of rough sleeping and homelessness can have a disproportionate impact on those with protected characteristics. In preparing and delivering the new strategy 2024-2029 effectively a positive impact should be delivered for those groups. A full Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken.

8. Environmental Considerations

The sustainability and suitability of accommodation and support services including locations will be assessed in preparing the Strategy.

9. Consultation

The review has been carried out in the autumn and winter of 2023/24, with extensive input from council officers, partner agencies and people with lived experience of homelessness. The report has been shared with partner agencies and was presented to Members at the Homelessness & Housing Delivery Task Group on 29th February 2024.

The review marks the end of the first stage of the strategy process. The council will lead the process of developing the 2024-2029 strategy, but anyone in King’s Lynn and West Norfolk is welcome to contribute ideas and resources towards its success. There will be further engagement with partner organisations, people with lived experience of homelessness, Members and wider community throughout preparation of the emerging strategy. The council

aims to approve the new strategy in September 2024, with a launch event to be held shortly afterwards.

10. Conclusion

Key lesson learnt is the value of understanding and agreeing as a group of stakeholders a shared problem and a common goal. The Review shows that, through diligence, intelligence and determination, the partnership has made a sustained impact on the lives of homeless households in the borough. However, its job is not done yet.

11. Background Papers

Homelessness: A Review February 2024

Homelessness & Rough Strategy 2019-2024