

REPORT TO CABINET

Open		Would any decisions proposed :			
Any especially affected Wards	Discretionary	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide	Yes		
		Need to be recommendations to Council	Yes		
		Is it a Key Decision			
Lead Member: Cllr Rust E-mail: cllr.rust@west-norfolk.gov.uk			Other Cabinet Members consulted: None		
			Other Members consulted:		
Lead Officer: Nikki Patton E-mail: Nikki.patton@west-norfolk.gov.uk Direct Dial: 01553616726 Andy King Andy.King@west-norfolk.gov.uk			Other Officers consulted: Duncan Hall Assistant Director of Regeneration, Housing & Place		
Financial Implications Yes	Policy/ Personnel Implications No	Statutory Implications YES	Equal Impact Assessment YES If YES: Pre- screening/	Risk Management Implications Yes	Environmental Considerations No
If not for publication, the paragraph(s) of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Local Government Act considered to justify that is (are) paragraph(s)					

Date of meeting: 17th September 2024

Summary

All housing authorities are required by law to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy once every five years. This report sets out the process by which a new Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy has been developed and how progress will be monitored and evaluated. Before publishing the strategy, housing authorities have the power to carry out a review of homelessness services in their district.

A Homelessness Review has been completed this year and laid the foundation for developing an effective strategy: led by data and supported by professional and lived experience. The Homelessness Review looks at the current situation and provides analysis on the reasons, causes and wider factors affecting homelessness in this area. The Homelessness Review and its findings were endorsed by the Environment and Community Panel on 9th April 2024.

The new Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 responds to the issues identified in the review and provides a framework for responding to homelessness in Borough. It replaces the 2019- 2024 strategy.

Recommendation

That the 2024-2029 Strategy is adopted and that the role of the Environment and Community Panel group - Homelessness and Housing Delivery Task

Group in overseeing the delivery of the Action Plan within the strategy is endorsed.

Reason for Decision

The Council has a statutory duty to produce a homelessness strategy (Homelessness Act 2002) setting out the issues it faces locally and what it is doing to prevent homelessness. The Council's commitments to preventing homelessness are set out in the Corporate Plan.

Background

When the 2019 to 2024 strategy was written, West Norfolk was responding to an all-time peak in rough sleeping, the most visible form of homelessness.

In 2024 we face a different set of circumstances and challenges. There has been a sustained and successful partnership effort to reduce instances of rough sleeping locally. Looking forward, though, we have a different, less visible set of challenges.

Homelessness in the borough is largely hidden, but the volume of households approaching the council as homeless has doubled since the COVID pandemic. Levels of rough sleeping in the borough are comparatively low, but there are people in the borough who are neither street homeless nor adequately housed. Services exist to help prevent homelessness, but we don't always get to people early enough.

The review of the 2019-2024 strategy was 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 findings were presented to the Environment and Community Panel on 9th April 2024 and endorsed by the panel. The findings of the Review laid the foundations for the new Strategy 2024-2029.

The Review

In summary the Review identified that the Council's effectiveness in preventing homelessness since the publication of the last strategy (2019-2024) 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.

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 highlighted that the number of households approaching the council as homeless (or at risk) doubled in a two-year period, driven by:

- An increasingly inaccessible private rental market,
- An increase in reports of domestic abuse,
- An increase in families seeking help, and
- An increase in homeless presentations for people in some form of employment.

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029

Following the review further strategy development work, was conducted between April and June 2024.

Overall, 118 people contributed towards the development of the strategy, including at least 27 people with lived experience of homelessness. Others included, Council staff across a number of departments, Councillors, local partners from Charity organisations, to other statutory agencies and housing providers and a public survey that was promoted on the Councils website and other social media channels.

The strategy provides **a framework for responding to homelessness in the borough**. As such, the actions laid out in the strategy are not exhaustive. There is much good work being carried out within the partnership that already fits within the framework (as laid out in part four of the Homelessness Review) and that we expect to continue in line with the partnership's vision, values and key strategy aims.

As a framework, it is designed to respond flexibly to unexpected challenges beyond the partnership's control. The strategy was developed during a pre-election period, which may culminate in a change in national government. This in turn may result in a shift on national government policy, a change in funding structures, and a set of national priorities.

Regardless of the outcome and impact of the July 2024 General Election, the action plan will be updated regularly by the Strategy Implementation Partnership in response to emerging priorities and available resources.

The Strategy consists of five key themes which are consistent with the whole system approach of the national strategy- Ending Rough Sleeping for Good September 2022. They are as follows;

Prevention- To end homelessness we need to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Intervention- Ensure that people who are homeless are identified quickly and placed into suitable cost-effective accommodation as where necessary.

Accommodation- Good quality accommodation is central to ending homelessness.

Recovery- to help people avoid a return to homelessness and to address the underlying issues that led to them losing their home.

Systems and Service Culture- To end homelessness, our good work and innovative services need to be underpinned by comprehensive, positive and effective structures and partnerships.

The Strategy 2024 to 2029 was presented to the Homelessness & Housing Delivery Task Group on 9th July 2024 and to the Environment and Community Panel on 16th July 2024.

Monitoring & Evaluation

We will record and monitor a number of data indicators to track progress of the actions in the strategy. Full details of the indicators are set out on page 42 of the Strategy. Additionally, the following new measures will be introduced to ensure that homeless applicants' voices are listened to:

- A customer feedback button ("how did we do?") at the foot of standard emails from the Housing Needs Service, linking to a brief survey about their experience
- A quarterly review of any complaints received to the Housing Needs Service, with a record kept of lessons learnt and remedial action taken
- A clear interface between the work of the council and the work of the newly formed coproduction group

Progress against the actions in the Strategy will be reviewed at least once every three months at the Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group meeting (partners meeting), with key successes and challenges reported to the Homelessness and Housing Delivery Task Group on a quarterly basis. An annual report to the council's Environment and Communities Panel, outlining progress and updating the plan to reflect any changes in circumstance.

2. Options Considered

- 2.1 There is no option to consider as under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities are required by law to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy once every five years.
- 2.2 The approach taken builds on the latest best practice including co-production and engaging with people with lived experience of homelessness. This represents a new way for the preparation of the Strategy.

3. Policy Implications

There are actions identified in the Strategy that will have policy implications for the Council. Of particular importance will be any policy change proposals following a review of the Social Housing Allocations policy. A further policy implication related to the review/redesign of the homelessness prevention grant scheme for individuals. Further details on these areas of work will be brought back to a future Cabinet meeting to agree.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Council utilises some of the funding it receives from Central Government ringfenced for Housing Services to support actions in the strategy. The Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) that Council receives annually from Central Government specifies that it is to be used 'in maximising wider prevention of homelessness activities and reducing reliance upon temporary accommodation'. The Strategy sets out how we will do this. This funding alone will not be enough to support all actions and activities within the strategy. We will continue to maximise funding opportunities presented by Central Government. Its important to note that the Strategy has been prepared a time where there is no certainty relating to future central government funding for homelessness services. Therefore, it has been costed on a likely 'worst case scenario' basis as set out at section A1.5 of the Strategy. An implication of not having funding to support all activities in the strategy is that we could see a rise in B&B, temporary accommodation costs. Whilst the strategy seeks to address this, it relies upon central government funding.

5. Personnel Implications

5.1 Any new activities or roles that are proposed to be explored as part of the action plan contained within the strategy to respond to a particular action/area of work may be absorbed within existing roles. Where a new role is created this could be funded through the ring fenced Homelessness Prevention Grant.

6. Environmental Considerations

6.1 None

6.2 Community Considerations

6.3 The delivery of the strategy and further decision making and development of some of the proposals set out in the Strategy will be made in the context of the forth coming work on becoming a Marmot Place and reflect its principles.

7. Statutory Considerations

7.1 Homelessness Prevention activities and the publication of a Homelessness Strategy are a statutory requirement. The scope and content of the Strategy is prescribed in the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.

8. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 Pre-screening report attached.

9. Risk Management Implications

9.1 As referred to above the strategy has been developed at a time where there is no certainty relating to future central government funding for homelessness services. The Housing team will maintain a risk register



along side the Strategy and action plan to monitor threats to delivery. Full details of the threats to delivery are set out in section A1.6 of the Strategy.

- 9.2 Given the 2024 General Election any changes that would impact on the Strategy from a national policy perspective will be monitored and potentially amendments made.

10. Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

None

11. Background Papers

Homelessness: A Review February 2024
Homelessness & Rough Strategy 2019-2024
Ending Homelessness Person by Person King's Lynn & West Norfolk
Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Draft 2024-2029

Name of policy/service/function	Housing Needs				
Is this a new or existing policy/service/function?	New Strategy – Actions identified that will have future policy implications				
Brief summary/description of the main aims of the policy/service/function being screened. Please state if this policy/service is rigidly constrained by statutory obligations	Homelessness Prevention activities and the publication of a Homelessness Strategy are a statutory requirement (Housing Act 2002). The scope and content of the Strategy is prescribed in the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.				
Question	Answer				
<p>1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups according to their different protected characteristic, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service?</p> <p>Please tick the relevant box for each group.</p> <p>NB. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group.</p>		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
	Age	x			
	Disability	x			
	Gender	x			
	Gender Re-assignment	x			
	Marriage/civil partnership			x	
	Pregnancy & maternity	x			
	Race	x			
	Religion or belief			x	
	Sexual orientation			x	
Other (eg low income)	x				

Question	Answer	Comments
<p>2. Is the proposed policy/service likely to affect relations between certain equality communities or to damage relations between the equality communities and the Council, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular community or denying opportunities to another?</p>	No	
<p>3. Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?</p>	Yes	
<p>4. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?</p>	Yes	To ensure that the Council fulfils its statutory duties in relation to homelessness
<p>5. Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions?</p> <p>If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section</p>	No	<p>Actions: N/A</p>
		<p>Actions agreed by EWG member:</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>If 'yes' to questions 2 - 4 a full impact assessment will be required unless comments are provided to explain why this is not felt necessary:</p> <p>A full impact assessment will be undertaken in advance of the Strategy being considered by Cabinet in September 2024.</p> <p>Decision agreed by EWG member:Claire Dorgan...(5/7/2024).....</p>		
<p>Assessment completed by:</p> <p>Name</p>	<p>Nikki Patton</p>	
<p>Job title</p>	<p>Housing Services Manager</p>	
<p>Date</p>	<p>4th July 2024</p>	