

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 Nikki.patton@west-norfolk.gov.uk Andy King E-mail: Andy.King@west-norfolk.gov.uk Direct Dial: 01553616422			Other Officers consulted: Duncan Hall Assistant Director, Regeneration, Housing & Place		
Financial Implications Yes	Policy/ Personnel Implications No	Statutory Implications YES	Equal Impact Assessment YES If YES: Full EIA	Risk Management Implications Yes	Environmental Considerations No

Date of meeting: 17th September 2024

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY UPDATE

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 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 was carried out in the autumn/winter of 23/24, was published in April this year, and laid the foundation for developing an effective strategy: led by data and supported by professional and lived experience. The Homelessness Review considers the current situation and analyses 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.

1. Background

- 1.1 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. Since 2019 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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

- 1.4 In summary, the Review identified that the Council’s effectiveness in preventing homelessness since the publication of the last strategy (2029-2024) has improved, but is ebbing away due to new challenges, such as cost of living pressures and an overheated private rented sector.
- 1.5 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.

- 1.6 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

- 1.7 Following the review, and between April and June 2024 council officers conducted work to develop the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy. 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 several departments; Councillors; local partners including charities, statutory agencies and housing providers. A public survey was promoted on the Council's website and other social media channels and received 28 responses.
- 1.8 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.
- 1.9 As a framework, the strategy is designed to respond flexibly to unexpected challenges beyond the partnership's control. The strategy was developed during a pre-election period, which culminated 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.
- 1.10 Regardless of the 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.
- 1.11 The Strategy consists of five key themes which are consistent with the 'whole system' approach of the national rough sleeping strategy (Ending Rough Sleeping for Good, DLUHC, September 2022). They are as follows:
- **Prevention** – to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place.
 - **Intervention** – to ensure that people who are homeless are identified quickly and placed into suitable cost-effective accommodation as where necessary

- **Accommodation** – to provide good quality accommodation as a central tool 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 ensure that our good work and innovative services are underpinned by comprehensive, positive and effective structures and partnerships.

1.12 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

1.13 We will record and monitor our progress against a set of data indicators. 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 heard:

- 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.

1.14 Progress against the actions in the Strategy will be reviewed at least once every three months at the Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group meeting (partnership 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.

Housing and Homelessness Delivery Task Group

1.15 Senior officers presented the strategy in a briefing to members of the Homelessness and Housing Delivery Task Group on Tuesday 9 July.

Environment and Communities Panel

1.16 Subsequently, senior officers presented the strategy to the Environment and Communities Panel on Tuesday 16th July. The outcome was as follows:

*“**RESOLVED:** 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 was endorsed.”*

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 a co-production approach, engaging with people with lived experience of homelessness. This represents a new way of working in preparing the Strategy.

3. Policy Implications

- 3.1 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 relates to the review/redesign of the homelessness prevention grant scheme for individuals. Further details on these areas of work will be brought back to future Cabinet meetings to agree.
- 3.2 As laid out in more detail in the Equalities Impact Assessment, the strategy links clearly with the council's own Corporate Strategy, particularly in terms of:
 - **Supporting our communities** – preventing homelessness and encouraging people to thrive in the borough.
 - **Promoting growth and prosperity** – creating new, good quality housing and nurturing job opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness.
 - **Effective and efficient delivery of services** – reducing spend on emergency accommodation and managing externally delivered contracts more effectively.
- 3.3 The strategy has been developed alongside the council's emerging Local Plan and Economic Plan.

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.
- 4.2 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. Whilst an annual budget is set, it is important to state that strategy, policy and decision-making processes are made within the context of the statutory responsibility and accountability the council has in relation to homelessness prevention. The budget for this work is therefore subject to review and is influenced by the award of ring-fenced government funding, and primarily demand for the services including costs associated with emergency accommodation.

- 4.3 It is 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 The Strategy includes a detailed action plan, outlining how we intend to deliver the strategy's aims. Any new activities or roles may be absorbed within existing roles or funded through the ring-fenced Homelessness Prevention Grant.

6. Environmental Considerations

- 6.1 None

7. Community Considerations

- 7.1 The strategy has been developed at a time when the council and partners have begun work towards establishing West Norfolk as a Marmot Place – as a partnership, improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of all residents.

- 7.2 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 forthcoming work on becoming a Marmot Place and will reflect its principles, particularly (with reference to the Action Plan on pages 31-41 of the Strategy):

- **Enabling all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives** – the “recovery” strand aims to enable formerly homeless people to thrive in the borough
- **Creating fair employment and good work for all** – strands 4.4 and 4.5 encourage employment and meaningful activity for formerly homeless people
- **Ensuring a healthy standard of living for all** – strands 4.1 to 4.3 tackle health exclusion for people experiencing homelessness
- **Creating and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities** – strands 1.9 to 1.11 encourage the development of homelessness prevention services in accessible community locations
- **Tackling racism, discrimination and their outcomes** – the whole strategy focuses on improving the pathway for vulnerable households facing or experiencing homelessness.

- 7.3 The Equalities Impact Assessment sets out the positive implications of the strategy for people with protected characteristics who are experiencing homelessness or at risk.
- 7.4 The Strategy has been developed in partnership with local services who support people who are homeless or at risk. While the Council retains responsibility as lead partner, all local services play a part in the effective delivery of the strategy. Some local partners have already begun to shape their own strategies to fall in line with the key themes outlined in the document.

8. Statutory Considerations

- 8.1 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 Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, as well as in part 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002.
- 8.2 The Strategy also considers the implications of the 1999 Local Government Act, in terms of delivering Best Value for the services it procures and delivers. This includes a focus on reducing emergency accommodation costs, as well as ensuring that externally delivered contracts are procured and managed efficiently.

9. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 9.1 Pre-Screening and full EIA attached.

10. Risk Management Implications

- 10.1 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 alongside 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.
- 10.2 Following the 2024 General Election, any changes that would impact on the Strategy from a national policy perspective will be monitored and potentially amendments made.

11. Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

None

12. Background Papers

- Homelessness: a Review. February 2024 (BCKLWN)
- Homelessness and Rough Strategy 2019-2024 (BCKLWN)
- Ending Homelessness Person by Person: The King's Lynn and West Norfolk Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (Draft) 2024-2029 (BCKLWN)

**Appendix 1 - Pre-Screening Equality
Impact Assessment**

Borough Council of
**King's Lynn &
West Norfolk**



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 MHCLG 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> <hr/> <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>	