

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Environment and Community Panel		
DATE:	9 November 2021		
TITLE:	Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Review		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Post Implementation Review Update		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Cllr Sam Sandell		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Duncan Hall		
OPEN	Open	WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	No

REPORT SUMMARY/COVER PAGE

<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.</p> <p>The purpose of this report and presentation is to update members on progress made on the action plan, as well as how actions and approaches were adapted in the context of the pandemic. It will cover how the council responded rapidly to government initiatives, including new funding opportunities. Finally, it will look at 'where next' for the strategy and joint working priorities with partners; as well as what challenges remain, and what new challenges have emerged.</p>
<p>KEY ISSUES:</p> <p>The strategy set out a bold ambition to eliminate rough sleeping in the area; and a focus on new approaches to reduce homelessness. An ambitious action plan was proposed in the context of a worsening situation, particularly for those rough sleeping, and an understanding that solutions beyond accommodation provision were needed.</p>
<p>OPTIONS CONSIDERED:</p> <p>As outlined to the panel in 2019, a different approach was required in the context of rising numbers of rough sleepers and increasing numbers of homeless households approaching the council in crisis situations. Key objectives were devised, and alternative approaches considered through stakeholder engagement during 2019.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS:</p> <p>To continue to implement the strategy and action plan, as updated, because it has worked - and focus on solutions for those remaining and emerging challenges highlighted in the report. To continue the role of the Homelessness and Housing Supply Task Group to receive more detailed information and updates and monitor progress of the strategy.</p>
<p>REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:</p> <p>The Council has specific statutory duties in relation to reducing homelessness. It is required to produce and publish a strategy. The approach has been considered a success by colleagues at Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUCH) and local key delivery partners.</p>

REPORT DETAIL

1.Introduction

The original core ambition of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy: -

- 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

2. Post implementation progress / update

A table is attached in **appendix A** that provides an update to the original action plan on progress made to date and includes actions outstanding and actions added.

The pandemic response and 'Everyone in'

During the start of the pandemic 35 emergency beds were lost as they were based on dormitory/ shared space arrangements. In directly responding to the pandemic the council needed to meet the need for temporary and emergency accommodation that avoided congregate living situations, dealt with the loss of existing provision, and created opportunity to get every rough sleeper (or those likely to be at risk of rough sleeping) inside accommodation or shelter.

People were accommodated in different ways dependent upon their circumstances - In the early months of the pandemic the council adapted a community centre for living spaces, then subsequently utilised 40 bedspaces in the Travelodge. It engaged partner organisations to provide support and food. Welfare Cabins were deployed for people who would ordinarily avoid hostels to shelter in. These provided a lifeline in the colder months, as well as all the essentials' occupiers had support and security services on hand and food delivered. Colleagues worked with The Winter Night Shelter that initially had to close, and subsequently re-located and created hostel space that could be utilised in the colder months.

Everyone in initially 41, but in total between March 2020 and March 2021 a total of 118 people who had been either rough sleeping or in danger of rough sleeping were accommodated under 'Every-one in'- into emergency accommodation and then the majority re-settled.

Collaboration and a person-centred approach are the key

Recent feedback from partners suggests that having agreed a strategy in advance of the pandemic gave the collective effort a head -start. "It [the strategy] had focused people on the problem and some of the solutions". The collaborative way organisations worked together with a 'whatever it takes' approach led to some very positive outcomes. Firstly, the key goal of ending rough sleeping was achieved. Secondly, there were some very individual successes for some people who had previously been entrenched in sleeping rough or had no settled accommodation for long periods. Many had the opportunity to change behaviours - sometimes away from others, but with the certainty of accommodation or shelter. Levels of engagement with support providers was an unexpected surprise. A piece of work was commissioned (with funding secured from the LGA) with Nesta to capture through a series of case studies the lived experience and some lessons learned. This work will soon be available via the Norfolk Strategic Housing Partnership website

The strategy helped define problems and some responses – however information about individuals at a granular level was needed to inform a more person-centred approach. This meant focussed resources on a council led co-ordinating role amongst partners.

There were many organisations that supported the Councils efforts including Freebridge Community Housing, Broadland Housing Group, and The Purfleet Trust.

Success in using new funding rapidly for new accommodation and support services

During 2020 additional funding for 'move-on' accommodation support was made available. The government introduced faster and more certain ways of working with the council to deliver this which was welcome – for example 10 flats were acquired that had just been built on a leasehold basis, and 6 further units followed, following the 'Housing First' model; and re-modelling a vacant hostel (7 one bed self-contained flats) gave a total of 23 new units in the first wave of funding. Aligned with this a number of new contracts for support for the support services associated with new accommodation were put in place. Later a new outreach service to those rough sleeping or in danger of rough sleeping was established (including significantly a new in-reach / out-reach service (details in **appendix A**)).

Additional funding has helped deliver some key aspects of the strategy well in advance of original timescales. The key new funding pots were the 'Next Steps Accommodation programme' and the 'Rough Sleeper Initiative' programme year 1 to year 4– also refer to appendix A were achieved with through collaboration with MHCLG – proposals for funding were effectively co-produced and provided more certainty for the effort that was being made to devise and shape interventions.

What challenges remain

What has not progressed has been some of those matters either difficult to take forward or not a priority in the context of the pandemic needs - for example on taking forward a private sector leasing scheme (although the supply of PRS stock delivered directly by the Council was accelerated last November). Changes to national planning approaches meant that some housing supply policies did not emerge. Questions around longer term funding and sustainability of some of the interventions in the pandemic remain.

Reducing homelessness measures and targets

The strategy document detailed a new set of measures and a new IT platform to capture and present information going forward. The **presentation** will cover some key measures, however, the patterns of homelessness for 2020/21 was quite different from any other year and therefore making comparisons has limited value. The volume of evictions for example (amongst some sub-categories) was low because of the national moratorium. There have

been more domestic abuse cases in line with national trends. Renewed efforts will focus on ensuring measures are captured for the reasons outlined in the strategy document - the need to understand the impact of interventions through data collection and information production and management.

3. Issues for the Panel to Consider

Working with others across Norfolk – ‘No Homelessness in Norfolk’ strategy

A new very close relationship with MHCLG colleagues saw contact on at least a weekly basis through the 2020/2021. In the autumn of 2020, the council (along with other councils in Norfolk) commissioned a strategy identifying some key interventions for the area ‘No Homelessness in Norfolk’ which was endorsed by MHCLG. The strategy seeks to build on the success of the pandemic and acknowledges that there are benefits to doing this jointly. A multi-agency partnership was set up to oversee the delivery – Norfolk Strategic Housing Partnership. Amongst other things the partnership has created a new system to collate data and evidence (including work on lived experience from rough sleepers) that will support funding applications; it has through an event and lobbying created a louder collective voice to be heard by other public funding bodies including Health and Ministry of Justice.

Additional funding opportunities and the case for change

The funding that was received to support the development/ acquisition of additional accommodation and support services has been welcome, but particularly in respect of revenue funding it has only been committed for very short time periods. There is a case for change in respect of more permanent or longer-term funding to enable support providers to plan properly and make investments commitments regarding property/ equipment or staff. The case has been made to local MP James Wild who has engaged departmental representatives - Some of the Rough Sleeper Initiative funding has been extended from 12 months to 3 years.

Newly emerging challenges

There are a number of key emerging challenges; -

- For those with very high support needs, who are deemed by the Care Authority to require residential placement, there is a trend of situations of no placement (in or outside the area) being available leaving individuals homeless or in wholly inappropriate settings. The structural problems affecting the care sector means that some very vulnerable people (including those with dual diagnosis) cannot be placed – particularly if there has been a record of challenging behaviour.
- Concerns over levels of staffing in hostels where providers have contracts with the Care Authority (Social Services housing related support contracts). In these situations, contractual arrangements mean that pay is effectively capped, and skilled staff are being lost to more lucrative supermarket or driving jobs.
- There are a cohort of rough sleepers who are non UK nationals with complex needs and limited eligibility to public funds. This means that the normal routes off the streets to temporary accommodation cannot be funded through normal subsidy mechanisms.

4. Corporate Priorities

The emerging Corporate Business Plan identifies a key ambition of improving social mobility and inclusion, with a commitment to supporting residents to access support and services they need and ‘Reviewing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy’.

5. Financial Implications

The immediate pandemic response meant that significant additional resources (not within existing budgets) were committed during 2020/2021. Some of this funding has been recovered. The additional resources were used where costs associated with 'everyone in' could not be met through the Housing Benefit system.

Efforts were made to ensure that this central housing subsidy was used as effectively as possible. Costs were incurred in the provision of support, re-settlement activity, food, and security. Security costs associated with the Welfare Cabins have been significant. Effective support was provided by council owned West Norfolk Housing Company (acting as a landlord for some emergency accommodation), and Alive West Norfolk whose staff supported some of the early emergency accommodation responses.

It is anticipated that there will be no financial resources over and above existing budgets required in 2021/2022.

6. Any other Implications/Risks

Reference to those matters in 'Newly emerging challenges' - Staffing capacity within the organisation, and staffing resources and recruitment challenges particularly amongst housing support providers pose a risk to delivery and threaten the existence of some key services.

7. Equal Opportunity Considerations

The impacts of rough sleeping and homelessness can have a disproportionate impact on those with protected characteristics. In delivering this strategy effectively a positive impact should be delivered for those groups – refer to the original EIA screening report.

8. Environmental Considerations

The deployment of Welfare Cabins was made in the context of emergency powers granted in the pandemic. The relative suitability of the locations of these was considered at the time; however, the locations of the remaining cabins are not sustainable and were never planned as anything more than temporary positions. The use of the cabins is not form part of the long-term strategy of eradicating rough sleeping and reducing homelessness.

9. Consultation

A variety of stakeholder engagement is undertaken as part of the review of the Action Plan, and include:

- Ongoing Discussion with our partners / strategic housing partnership meeting every 4 weeks
- DLUHC engaged and support on-going approach.
- Nesta work undertaken as part of the No Homelessness in Norfolk strategy looking at lived experiences of those in Welfare Cabins in King's Lynn

10. Conclusion

Key lesson learnt is the value of understanding and agreeing as a group of stakeholders a shared problem and a common goal. This was successfully achieved prior to the pandemic. The success of 'Everyone in' and the subsequent sustainment of having no rough sleeping has been achieved by those involved adopting a 'Do what it takes' approach.

11. Background Papers

- Appendix A – action plan update
- No Homelessness in Norfolk – <https://www.hopestead.org/norfolk-strategic-housing-partnership/>
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