

Lancaster City Council | Report Cover Sheet

Meeting	Cabinet			Date	14 July 2020
Title	Homeless & Rough Sleeper Strategy				
Report of	Director for Communities and the Environment				
Purpose of the Report					
To request members approve the revised Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-23.					
Key Decision (Y/N)	Y	Date of Notice	16 June 2020	Exempt (Y/N)	N

Report Summary

In March 2014 the Council adopted the Homelessness Strategy and action plan 2014-2019 to prevent Homelessness, this has now expired and needs replacing with a new Strategy document and action plan. The Council employed an independent Housing & Homeless Consultant to carry out a review of the Districts Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy which also included a “lived experience” report from local people who had experience of accessing homeless services locally and who had also experienced rough sleeping for themselves first hand to inform the strategy document. The new strategy highlights some of the achievements from the previous 5 years, and also reports on what we will do in the coming months and years, and how we can improve homelessness services across the Lancaster district to prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping.

Recommendations of Councillor Caroline Jackson

(1) To approve and adopt the revised Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy and action plan for the next 4 years.

Relationship to Policy Framework

Council Plan – the strategy directly contributes to the Council’s approved priorities which includes a sustainable District and Happy and Healthy Communities.
Local plan – will contribute to increasing the supply of housing in Lancaster district Will directly contribute to the Homes Strategy 2020-2025 (currently being drafted) – access to more accommodation options in the private sector and developing Housing First and a social lettings agency in partnership with housing providers.

Conclusion of Impact Assessment(s), where applicable

Climate

Wellbeing & Social Value

Digital	Health & Safety
Equality	Community Safety

Details of Consultation

A multi-agency consultation event with key stakeholders took place in May 2019 at the Storey Institute. At further 2 Homelessness Forum meetings took place in October 2019 and March 2020 to review the action plan document, make recommended changes and ensure all partners and key stakeholders which focused on a collective and agreed priorities within the action plan co-designed with our key partners. This provided the opportunity to discuss the key priorities taking into account the local housing market, existing provision, looking at gaps in provision at a local level to ensure we have support from all our key partners to work together to shape the local effort to reduce homelessness and end rough sleeping whilst at the same time considering the guidance, current legislation and good practice.

As highlighted above the work of the independent Housing and Homelessness Consultant also involved conversations with those with "lived experience" to ensure their voice was heard and included within the Strategy and Action Plan.

We have subsequently circulated draft copies of the draft Homeless and rough sleeper strategy via the Homelessness Forum in February 2020 and carried out a formal consultation period with our statutory, voluntary, faith and partner Private Registered Providers of Social Housing and local stakeholders.

Legal Implications

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 it is a legal requirement for the Council to have a Homelessness Strategy. The Council has a duty to review, consult on and update the strategy every five years. The Council must consider the strategy when exercising its housing functions.

Financial Implications

The approved general fund revenue budget includes the following amounts to assist towards our current objectives surrounding homelessness and rough sleeping.

Housing Advice	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	£	£	£	£
<u>Expenditure</u>				
Salaries	329,100	339,100	204,800	210,100
Transport Related	1,500	1,000	1,000	1,000
Supplies & Services	386,200	125,600	120,900	121,000
Total Expenditure	716,800	465,700	326,700	332,100
<u>Income</u>				
Government Grant	379,600	125,300	0	0
Housing Benefit Recovery	35,800	36,500	37,200	37,900
Total Income	415,400	161,800	37,200	37,900
Net Expenditure	301,400	303,900	289,500	294,200

It should also be recognised that included within the account is £826K of unspent government grant from previous years which is ringfenced to be spent on delivering homelessness and rough sleeping initiatives.

The strategy is inherent with actions/targets which require financial input. All these will be financially appraised prior to delivery but at this juncture it is expected that there are sufficient financial resources available to meet them.

Other Resource or Risk Implications

Section 151 Officer's Comments

The Section 151 officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

Monitoring Officer's Comments

The Monitoring officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

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Links to Background Papers

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The report seeks approval of the Council's draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy¹ for the next 4 years which has been out to consultation for the past twelve weeks. The Strategy includes a review of levels of homelessness within the Lancaster and the District as well as key actions required over coming years to effectively meet future challenges. It builds on progress made and highlights some of the key actions that are proposed be taken by the Council and its partners to help prevent and address homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 1.2. The Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy aligns within the Council's over-arching Homes Strategy, following the stakeholder events and consultation process this strategy subject to member approval, will replace the existing one with an up-to-date, collaborative and sector-led approach to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping within our District.
- 1.3 This report is being presented to Cabinet because producing a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a statutory requirement for local authorities, reiterated in

¹ The Strategy was produced in consultation with independent consultant Imogen Blood.

guidance provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) following the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

- 1.4 The Council has chosen to integrate the Rough Sleeping Strategy with the Homelessness Strategy creating one document as the two areas are closely related. The strategy also includes input from people who have “lived experience” of homelessness and / or rough sleeping.
- 1.5 It should be noted that the course of the pandemic has significantly changed the rough sleeping landscape for Lancaster. Prior to March 2020, it is acknowledged that Lancaster, although not on the same scale as some other cities, did have a population of entrenched rough sleepers, that were difficult to engage with. However, by the end of March all rough sleepers had been accommodated and we are continuing to work with them and those accommodated due to rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping, to help keep them off the streets with our partners. This is an evolving area of government policy, therefore whilst some of the actions included within the new Strategy may now be less applicable, it is deemed important to present the Strategy in its current form with subsequent updates to follow when the national and local picture becomes clearer.

2.0 Proposal – Strategy Actions

- 2.1 The draft strategy includes a number of key priorities which are supported by a range of actions and recognises the importance of partnership working, including across council departments, statutory and voluntary agencies.
- 2.2 The strategy is underpinned by the following key priorities which have corresponding actions:
 - Priority 1: Preventing homelessness - since the causes of homelessness are varied, a multi-layered, whole system, strategic response is required to shift intervention ‘upstream’
 - Priority 2: Tackling rough sleeping and supporting people out of homelessness
 - Priority 3: Improving access to settled accommodation
- 2.3 These priorities were informed by a review of homelessness in the district that identified a number of key issues as summarised in the next section.

3.0 Local & National Context

- 3.1 The number of households in temporary accommodation has steadily increased since 2019/20 due to changes in the local housing market, universal credit and an increased lack of affordable accommodation at or below Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. This is despite the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 that strengthened prevention activities and the provision of comprehensive housing options services to local residents.
- 3.2 The most frequent reasons for homelessness are relationship breakdown, eviction by family and loss of private rented accommodation. The Council has invested in preventative services that seek to support people to remain in their existing home as well as expanding supported accommodation provision for those who do become homeless including:

- 3.2.1 services to support those who have experienced domestic violence through pan-Lancashire funding bids to MHCLG for extra support services like children support workers Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) and dispersed family units;
- 3.2.2 Safenet refuge provision to reduce the risk to victims with extra bed spaces currently in development locally due to open in August 2020; and
- 3.2.3 The Council and County Council commissioning new supported accommodation services for single homeless and rough sleepers since the last Strategy including the development of the 23-bed hostel at Oak Tree House. The Council is also supporting households to access alternative private rented accommodation with financial assistance where required.
- 3.3 Our early intervention model is increasingly geared to helping people help themselves by identifying and resolving the root causes of their problems before they become homeless. The Council is committed to continuing to prevent households from becoming homeless and, where this is not possible, support them to relieve their homelessness situation.
- 3.4 There is a very high demand for social housing across the whole district. The Council has approximately 2000 households waiting for Council homes with approximately 450 homes let each year. The demand is highest in absolute terms for one bed flats, two and three bedroom houses. Housing market pressures and the continuing unaffordability of housing in the district will continue the ongoing increase in demand for support services to prevent homelessness.
- 3.5 We continue to use the levers at the Council's disposal, we are seeking to address the issues surrounding the supply of both affordable housing and available properties within the private rented sector. The Council's ambitious Housing Company and regeneration programmes will provide a number of new, much needed homes across the district, over the next 5 years. However, in the short term, the transitioning housing market due to the pandemic may create some supply challenges but also opportunities for homeless households to be housed using central government funding for those rough sleepers recently housed as part of the governments "everyone in" campaign".
- 3.6 It is recognised that the private rented sector has a key role to play in addressing the supply and demand imbalance. The key priorities are to reduce anti-social behaviour from rental properties which is caused by poor management, and improve housing standards. The Council acknowledges that the majority of landlords operate their businesses professionally and that the private rented sector can provide high quality housing options for local people.
- 3.7 The Council and Cabinet have looked at the possibilities of the introduction of selective licensing over 18 months ago in particular in the West End of Morecambe, the additional licensing scheme and this has been picked up in the review of the homelessness strategy to relook at in particular parts of the District.
- 3.8 The current national picture around rough sleeping is currently evolving. At the time of drafting the Homelessness Strategy we had clear and genuine aspirations to halve rough sleeping numbers in the district by 2020 and eliminate rough sleeping in the borough by 2022, ahead of national targets. This work has subsequently been expedited by the 'Everyone In' campaign spearheaded by Dame Louise Casey and

the Rough Sleeping COVID-19 Taskforce². The COVID-19 pandemic has of course presented many challenges however through the action of the Council and it's partners, we ensured 22 rough sleepers many of who were entrenched were brought in off the streets by the end of March, using a variety of options including bed and breakfast, council properties and supported housing projects. During the pandemic a further 37 residents who were found to be rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping have been provided with accommodation (as at 16th June 2020). It now remains a top priority to continue to keep those accommodated from returning to the streets as well as providing a more proactive response to tackling this issue, especially within Lancaster City Centre and as new rough sleepers continue to present.

- 3.12. Housing and homelessness are recognised as determinants of public health and critical to increasing the life expectancy of people living in the district. The homelessness review highlights the additional support needs from a number of vulnerable groups and the draft strategy links with the Health and Wellbeing Board local Integrated Care Community's objectives to improve health and social care outcomes through integrated services, especially for those suffering from mental health and substance misuse.
- 3.13 We recognise that dealing with homelessness is complex and numbers can be unpredictable, so we are not complacent. We need to keep our plans under review to respond to variations in demand or increases in the level of rough sleeping in future. The Council therefore will view this strategy as a "live" document, which will be subject to regular review with members of the Homeless Forum and Homeless advisory group to make sure we effectively respond to and address issues of homelessness. Further updates will be provided to Cabinet at appropriate intervals.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

Option 1:
Do not approve the revised Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy
Advantages: No notable advantages
Disadvantages: Not able to carry out our statutory duties to prevent homelessness. Increased statutory homeless applications, increase in rough sleeping, increased health inequalities and increase in use of temporary accommodation costs.
Risks: Legal Challenge – the Council would be in breach of its legal requirements and could face censure (and the loss of funding support) from Government. Increased costs to the Council through increasing levels of homelessness and rough sleeping as well as worsened outcomes for local residents.
Option 2:

² On 24th June the government announced an additional £105m to help local authorities implement a range of support interventions for people placed into emergency accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic, this is in addition to the funding announcement on 24th May to provide 3,300 long-term, safe homes for vulnerable rough sleepers this year.

Approve the revised Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy

Advantages:

The Strategy Policy has been independently reviewed and is compliant with current legislation and good practice. Reduce homelessness, prevents homelessness and rough sleeping and ends the use of Bed and Breakfast for all.

Disadvantages:

No notable disadvantages

Risks:

Targets set within the strategy are not met – mitigation of this will be through regular monitoring by multi-agency Homelessness Forum as well as Homelessness Advisory Group.

4. Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

4.1 The Officer preferred option is Option 2. If the Strategy is approved and adopted this will give officers and partners a clear framework and action plan to work together in collaboration to reduce homelessness and end rough sleeping.