

CABINET

Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy

Report of Chief Officer Housing & Property

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
To request members approval of the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 2028.			
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Referral from Cabinet Member	<input type="checkbox"/>
Date of notice of forthcoming key decision	n/a		
This report is public			

RECOMMENDATIONS OF CLLR CAROLINE JACKSON

- (1) To approve and adopt the Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy and the three-year action plan (Appendix One).
- (2) That annual updates on progress be presented to Cabinet.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In July 2020 the Council adopted the Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy for 2020 – 2023 to prevent homelessness. The previous Strategy was approved at the start of the Covid pandemic, since then a number of priorities have been achieved (see below for more details), whilst others were no longer deemed relevant. Latterly housing market conditions and homelessness has inexplicably changed with inflationary increases, the cost of living crisis, increasing refugees / asylum seekers being accommodated, increased use of bed and breakfast / temporary accommodation and an increasing shortage of access to affordable accommodation contributing to a wider housing crisis, therefore it has been prudent to review the strategy early and replace with a new strategy and action plan.
- 1.2 A consultant was commissioned to undertake a review of the 2020 – 2023 strategy (Appendix Two) and to develop the new strategy. Information from the review, and meetings with partners and the voluntary sector, including those with lived experience, was used to inform the 2023 – 2028 strategy (Appendix One).

2.0 Homelessness Review

- 2.1 The review shows considerable progress made from 2020. Highlights include:

- 2.1.1 the successful capital funding bid to acquire and take forward the development of 12 self-contained move on flats for single homeless people (Jubilee Court), with revenue funding to provide visiting support enabling residents to receive floating support prior to moving to independent living.
- 2.1.2 Successful rough sleeper funding and next steps revenue funding bids have enabled the commissioning of the rough sleeper floating support contract with extended funding to continue this until 2025 provided by Calico. Calico also provides an accommodation finding service, with referrals received from the Housing Options Team. They have built positive relationships with private landlords and housed 120 households in settled accommodation, from 2020 to date.
- 2.1.3 A rough sleeper navigator is employed, by Calico and funded by rough sleeper initiative revenue funding bid via the Council which provides, outreach, support and liaison for rough sleepers and people in short stay accommodation. This service has helped to significantly reduce the numbers rough sleeping in the district.
- 2.1.4 In August 2022 a joint bid for funding with Preston City Council led by Lancaster was submitted following two pilots in Lancashire for the supported housing improvement programme to improve the quality and value for money within the unregulated supported housing sector. This bid was successful to employ a team of officers who will be in post by the end of 2023.
- 2.1.5 A new 5 bed supported housing project has opened to use for homeless temporary accommodation at Mary Street in Lancaster managed by Calico/Acorn and a redesigned 4 bed service is now available for single homeless female (only) temporary accommodation at Portland Street.
- 2.1.6 A new housing young people's LGBT homeless accommodation scheme has opened in Morecambe in partnership with Calico.
- 2.1.7 A new Women's refuge was opened in late 2021 to accommodate families fleeing domestic abuse with 6-units within the scheme to accommodate single females with more complex needs including mental health and substance misuse.
- 2.1.8 Extra funding from central government has enabled the city council to fund specialist housing options officers including: a specialist temporary accommodation support officer, landlord liaison officer to support the work with landlords and letting agencies in the private rented sector and a domestic abuse housing options officer.
- 2.1.9 Peer led befriending is provided by Let's Be Friends, by those with lived experience commissioned by the Council to match fund the service funded via the Rough sleeper initiative.

3.0 Local Context

- 3.1 The local and national picture shows there is still more to do, at the end of June 2023 there were over 3,000 people on the housing register wanting Council Housing and the number of people rough sleeping locally is increasing between July and September 2022 the Council recorded 8 people as rough sleeping during that period, for the same timeframe in 2023 this had risen to 19, whilst those statutorily recorded as homeless and requiring re-housing from the Council has risen from 19 at the end of September 2022 for that quarter to 40 at the same point this year.
- 3.2 Due to the lack of available housing, the numbers of residents living in hotel accommodation is also rising significantly, throughout July-September 2022 the Local Authority had accommodated 17 families, three of who had gone over the statutory maximum of 6 weeks, whilst for the same period in 2023, these figures had increased to 40 families having been accommodated and 31 going over the statutory maximum 6 week limit. Whilst this is not unique to Lancaster District it places significant pressure on the Council's limited finances, staffing resources in managing the increase in applications as well as the Council's housing stock.
- 3.3 The 5 most common assessed support needs for people who were accepted as homeless or threatened with homelessness in Quarter 4 2021/22 were mental health problems, physical ill health, and disability, offending, rough sleeping and repeat homelessness. In Quarter 4 2022/23 the 5 most common assessed support needs were mental health problems, physical ill health, and disability, rough sleeping and domestic abuse (physical and non-physical). This shows an increase in the numbers presenting with domestic abuse as the main support need, compared to the same period the previous year. Further detail can be found within the Homelessness Review.

4.0 Homelessness Strategy

- 4.1 The draft strategy includes several key priorities to address homelessness and rough sleeping within the District which are supported by a range of actions and recognises the importance of partnership working, including across council departments, statutory and voluntary agencies.
- 4.2 The strategy is underpinned by the following key priorities which have corresponding actions:
- Priority 1: Prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping.
 - Priority 2: Intervention to relieve homelessness and rough sleeping.
 - Priority 3: Recovery from homelessness and rough sleeping.
 - Priority 4: Underlying improvements to reducing homelessness in Lancaster and improving our services locally.
- 4.3 These priorities were informed by a review of the 2020 – 2023 homelessness and rough sleeping strategy and the priorities align with those detailed in DLUHC's Ending Rough Sleeping Strategy, which was published in September 2022.

4.4 The action plan reflects the four priorities and will be a living document, which is monitored, reviewed and reported on at the Lancaster Advisory Group and the Homelessness Forum. It is recognised that changes may need to be made to this so local need and circumstances are responded to.

5.0 Details of Consultation

5.1 Consultation was undertaken at the Housing Advisory Group, Homelessness Forum, on the Council’s website and by directly emailing city councillors, parish councillors, health professionals, voluntary sector, registered social landlords council colleagues, and other statutory and public services such as Social Care. In addition to discussions at forums, people were encouraged to complete the online questionnaire or directly email with comments.

5.2 The feedback asked respondents what they think the biggest challenges are around preventing homelessness and rough sleeping in the Lancaster District and to comment on the four priorities which are included in the draft strategy.

5.3 The biggest challenges cited were lack of affordable accommodation, meeting the needs of people with complex needs and a lack of funding for adequate staffing levels and a wider range of supported housing.

5.4 There is overall agreement with the four priorities, our online consultation shows 85% agreeing with priority one, 80% with priority 2, 91% with priority 3, and 89% with priority 4. These will guide the action plan and the key performance indicators (KPIs) for monitoring progress on our actions.

5.5 The independent consultant also met with the Housing Options Team, providers of services and those with lived experience, to ensure a wide range of voices were heard and able to influence the strategy and action plan, whilst also taking into account the resources available both to the City Council and other contributory services who will be responsible for supporting with the action plan.

6.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

	Option 1: Do not approve the revised Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy.	Option 2: Approve the revised Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy.
Advantages	No notable advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independently reviewed strategy which is compliant with current legislation and good practice. • Reduction in homelessness. • Reduction in use of bed and breakfast, for families and single people. • Provides a clear framework and action plan for the council and partners to reduce homelessness. • Improved community cohesion.

Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to carry out statutory duties to prevent homelessness. • Increased statutory homeless applications. • Increased health inequalities. • Increase in temporary accommodation costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No notable disadvantages
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal challenge – the council would be in breach of its legal requirements and face censure, and the loss of funding support, from the Government. • Increased costs to the council through increasing levels of homelessness and rough sleeping. • Reduced community cohesion and increase in ASB. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets are not achieved.

7.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

7.1 The officer preferred option is 2.

8.0 Conclusion

The report provides information on progress made with the 2020 – 2023 strategy and sets out priorities in the draft 2023 – 2028 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which we are seeking approval for. Whilst the national and local housing context is undeniably challenging setting out a clear plan for action and working in partnership with others provides the best opportunity to support some of the District's most vulnerable residents.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

Corporate Priorities: The priorities directly contribute to the Council's approved priorities, which includes focussing on early intervention approaches and involving our communities.

Homes Strategy: contributes to supporting independent living, creating sustainable communities, and improving health through housing.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, HR, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and concludes no adverse impact.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Section 1 Homelessness Act 2002 provides that the Council as a housing authority must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in in their district. The Strategy must be renewed at least every 5 years.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The process of adopting and implementing the strategy can be resourced from within existing budgets.

However, it should be noted that the council is currently under significant financial pressure due to the costs associated with relatively high numbers of eligible families currently being housed within temporary accommodation under our statutory duty. In the short term, this may require drawdown of the unspent government grant from previous years which is ringfenced to be spent on reducing homelessness (£455K as of 1 April 2023). This strategy will be instrumental in reducing these costs in future years, and preparing to make the provision more sustainable, where required.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources:

Where the need for additional resources is identified applications will be made for funding through Government funding relating to their Ending Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Information Services:

None

Property:

None

Open Spaces:

None

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, the increase in homelessness and the use of Bed & Breakfast, or other temporary accommodation is a significant budgetary pressure for all Councils. As we work towards the 2024/25 Budget it is likely that the costs of meeting our statutory obligations will outstrip available grants.

This strategy will be instrument in not only looking at means of prevention and early intervention but also presenting a range of options which may require significant investment by the Council in future years.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1: Draft Lancaster City Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan 2023 – 2028 (for approval)

Appendix 2: Lancaster City Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review.

Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment

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