

Report to: Scrutiny

Date: 11 July 2022

Title: Eastbourne Borough Council Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 - 2027

Report of: Tim Whelan, Director of Service Delivery

Cabinet member: Councillor Alan Shuttleworth, Cabinet member for direct assistance services

Ward(s): All

Purpose of report: To introduce a new homelessness & rough sleeping strategy and ask Cabinet for approval of the strategic goals, objectives, and associated action plan.

Decision type: Key

Officer recommendation(s) to the Cabinet: Cabinet is recommended to:

- (1) Consider the final draft of the Eastbourne Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 – 2027, set out in Appendix 1;
- (2) Subject to there being no requirement for significant amendments, to authorise the Director of Service Delivery to adopt the strategy for public release.

Reasons for recommendations: To secure Cabinet approval for a new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, which local authorities have a statutory obligation to review and publish every five years.

The new strategy provides a strategic overview of the current challenges and sets out a framework and action plan addressing these.

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1. Introduction & background.

1.1. Reducing the incidence of homelessness and ending rough sleeping is a priority for Eastbourne Borough Council. This strategy sets out the Council's approach to achieving this goal over the next five years, by setting out a new strategic

vision and an accompanying set of objectives, clearly focussed on reducing levels of homelessness.

1.2. The strategy has been developed in line with the requirements set out in the Homelessness Act 2002, which place a legal responsibility on local authorities to undertake a two stage process of reviewing homelessness in their district, and then using the findings of that review to develop and publish a revised homelessness strategy every five years.

1.3. The new strategy introduces a vision, based on three themes, that together shape an approach to managing homelessness across the Borough. These focus on:

- **Prevention** - to lower the incidence of homelessness;
- **Intervention** - to reduce the impact of existing homelessness, and;
- **Sustainable solutions** - to enhance re-housing options and help support households.

This vision is supported by a series of key objectives, to create a framework that, barring any significant change to the operating context, is intended to remain fixed for the five-year duration of the strategy.

1.4. An accompanying delivery plan sets out a series of clear actions and outcomes, designed to drive the implementation of the strategy. Once the strategy is approved these will be allocated to post holders, with completion times and performance measures added where appropriate. Unlike the framework, the action plan is designed to be updated across the duration of the strategy, to reflect progress, changes to operating context and new funding.

1.5. Further details of the strategy and delivery plan can be found in section 3 and Appendix 1.

2. Homelessness review.

2.1. The review stage of the process, undertaken in early 2022, provided an up to date picture of the:

- Current and likely future levels of homelessness across the Borough.
- Activities carried out and support available to prevent homelessness and those experiencing it.
- Level of resources made available locally to tackle homelessness.

The main sections of the review set out the current operating context, summarised progress made against the previous strategy, and looked at how the service is currently operating. The review of operations assessed the levels of demand for housing needs services, examined the responses made to prevent and relieve homelessness, and looked at how temporary accommodation was being used. How well local partnerships worked to address homelessness was also reviewed as part of the process.

2.2. A summary of the main outcomes of the review is set out in the strategy, and amongst these the headline findings were as follows:

- **Demand** - The level of demand remains high and is likely to remain so into the foreseeable future. In each of the past two years around 1,400 households raised enquiries with the housing needs team
- **Preventative action** - A range of activities undertaken by the team helped secure homes for over sixty-percent of the 111 households threatened with homelessness when they approached the Council (under the prevention duty¹).
- **Early action** - A range of activities undertaken within the team helped secure homes for well over a third (36%) of the 335 households already homeless when they approached the Council (under the relief duty²).
- **Main duties** - As a result of the advice, prevention and relief outcomes achieved by the team, only 42% of those already homeless when they approached the Council went on to be assessed under the main homelessness duty and required temporary accommodation. This reduced the social cost of homelessness on households and the financial costs borne by the Council.
- **Partnership working** - Shaping effective alliances with statutory and voluntary partners has been integral to the local response, helping prevent homelessness and providing support to vulnerable households across the Borough.
- **Rough sleeping** - The number of rough sleepers in the Borough continues to be relatively high when compared with areas of a similar size, though in absolute terms numbers remain fairly low. The annual rough sleeper count, which takes place in all local authorities each autumn, recorded 10 cases in 2021, a reduction from 14 in 2020, and 16 in 2019. The Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) continues to provide ongoing support, carrying out proactive outreach work that identifies those sleeping rough and connects them with local services. However, there remains a significant shortage of suitable move-on accommodation in the town. This has been exacerbated by the Government's 'Everyone In' & 'Protect & Vaccinate' Covid-19 plans, which provided much needed shelter for those at risk of rough sleeping, but have increased the number of single, vulnerable persons, staying in emergency accommodation.
- **Covid-19** - Analysis indicates that the pandemic had a local impact that reflected national trends, with the policies that sought to restrict evictions and increase the assistance given to the most vulnerable, raising the number of single households and reducing the number of family households, assisted by the housing needs team.

¹The *prevention duty*, introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017, requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any eligible applicant likely to become homeless within 56 days of applying for help.

² The *relief duty*, introduced by the HRA 2017, requires local authorities to provide more support to those who are homeless when they applied to help, for a minimum of 56 days, including scope to provide emergency accommodation for a widely defined group of households.

- **Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017** - There is evidence that the shift towards assisting more single households was underway before the pandemic, as a result of the new prevention and relief duties introduced by the HRA. Invariably, this means that the service is managing higher numbers of single and vulnerable people with mental health issues and other complex disadvantages.
- 2.3. Taking account of the findings, the final section of the review set out a strategic outlook that shapes the prevention, intervention, and solution focused goals of the new strategy.
- 3. Strategy proposals.**
- 3.1. This section summarises the contents of the newly developed strategy, a full copy of which can be found in appendix 1. The opening and introductory sections of the document propose a vision for tackling homelessness across the Borough, outline the definition of homelessness underlying the proposals, and review the current national and local operating context.
- 3.2. At a national level the operating context focuses on the impact of Covid-19, recent legislation such as the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and Domestic Abuse Act 2021, as well as current policy frameworks such as the National Rough Sleeping Strategy. These have had an impact on levels of operational demand and shaped service delivery by forming the backdrop for joint working and helping to address issues such as domestic abuse and street homelessness, which remains a key challenge for the Borough.
- 3.3. Locally, the context focusses on the impact of high house prices and rents, increasing levels of deprivation which is currently being exacerbated by the cost of living crisis, and limited housing supply. The review recognised the continuing impact of high house prices, with median property prices in the town now averaging over ten times the local salary. High prices have a knock-on impact on rents, which have risen by 22 percent over the past five years, restricting the access that those on low (and increasingly those on moderate) incomes have to both home ownership and private rented markets. The restricted supply of both market and social housing compounds the issue, and together, these factors contribute to local households losing their homes and not being able to secure suitable housing in the Borough.
- 3.4. The key section of the strategy introduces nine objectives based around the three key themes set out in the vision, which focus on; **prevention** to lower the incidence of homelessness; effective **intervention** to reduce the impact of existing homelessness; and **sustainable solutions** to enhance re-housing options and help support households. Together the themes and objectives create a framework that, barring any significant change to the operating context, is intended to remain fixed for the five-year duration of the strategy. The nine objectives are set out below.

Prevention

- Quality housing needs services - dedicated to effective advice, holistic and informed assessment.
- Preventative casework – working, alongside partners, to stop those seeking help from becoming homeless.
- Targeted preventions for the most vulnerable groups – through the provision of agreed pathways into support.
- Strategic activities - that seek to identify the issues that drive homelessness across the Borough and apply remedies to reduce it.

Intervention

- Tackling rough sleeping - continue with our county-wide approach to reducing harm and addressing associated multiple, complex needs.
- Partnership working - maximise the effectiveness of joint working and pathways for at risk groups.
- Temporary housing – provide a good quality, safe, secure, value-for-money accommodation portfolio and reduce the use of emergency placements.

Sustainability

- Re-housing - establish a range of sustainable housing and move-on options for rough sleepers, vulnerable and homeless households.
- Support - deliver effective support services to help customers maintain accommodation once housed.

- 3.5. A series of cross-cutting themes support the delivery of the framework through:
- Promoting collaborations with statutory, agency and voluntary partners.
 - Investing to train staff and upskill teams.
 - Delivering high quality, value for money services that make the most of available funding.
- 3.6. This framework forms the basis for a delivery plan, the first iteration of which is incorporated into the strategy set out in appendix 1. The plan contains a series of actions and outcomes targeted at delivering the listed objectives, which will be allocated to post holders once the strategy is approved. Unlike the framework, the action plan is designed to be updated across the duration of the strategy, to reflect progress, changes to operating context and new funding opportunities.
- 3.7. The majority of the actions and outcomes presented in the delivery plan are set to complete within two years of the strategy being deployed. Highlights include:
- Supporting education initiatives for young people & care leavers.
 - Creating a dedicated 'prevention hub' to co-ordinate the work of Council teams, local voluntary and agency partners.
 - Using data modelling to identify households at a high risk of homelessness and engaging them to target support, wellbeing, and employment initiatives.

- Delivering updated processes, IT case management systems, and enhanced reporting to deliver key service improvements.
- Working with neighbouring authorities and key delivery partners to best utilise the 3-year RSI funding commitment from DLUHC.
- Aligning multi-agency relationships to agree housing solutions in the most complex of individual cases.
- Reviewing the allocations policy to ensure that it balances the needs of homeless and housing register applicants.
- Reviewing temporary accommodation provision to enhance the supply of a good quality, value for money, portfolio.
- Exploring the development of a county-wide approach to partnership working with private rented sector landlords.

4. Outcome expected and performance management.

- 4.1. The structure of the strategy is designed to remain relevant, adaptable, and responsive. It comprises of a framework setting out the vision and key objectives, which is designed to guide the implementation of a regularly updated delivery plan across the life of the strategy. The first iteration of the delivery plan is summarised above and set out in full, in appendix 1.
- 4.2. Regular monitoring and reviews will be led by the Senior Leadership Team in Homes First and an annual review of progress will engage key stakeholders. The Head of Homes First will provide a report on progress against this strategy to the Cabinet's Lead Member for Direct Assistance Services each year.

5. Consultation.

- 5.1. In line with the provisions set out in the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Government's published *Homelessness Code of Guidance*³, housing authorities must consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations, or other persons they consider appropriate, before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy. They must also ensure that their feedback is taken into account.'
- 5.2. As part of the preparation of the draft strategy there have been two periods of consultation, the first in respect of the preceding homelessness review (autumn / winter 2021/22) and more recently in respect of the draft strategy, a six week consultation which closed in early June. Both members of the public and agency partners were invited to comment on the proposals.
- 5.3. Responses received were broadly supportive of the strategy themes and delivery plans, in particular recognising the importance of addressing high levels of housing need, the value of strong partnerships, and the benefit of preventative measures. The strategy has been updated to reflect the responses, for example by, clarifying areas where the Council will actively seek to work with partners;

³ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities – 22/02/2018 (updated 12/10/2021).

emphasising the importance of good quality temporary accommodation, and clarifying the steps that will be taken to help increase the supply of supported accommodation and accompanying tenancy sustainment services.

- 5.4. Beyond the specific remit of the consultation, the leads responsible for delivering housing policy routinely co-ordinate activities with housing authorities across the County, as part of the East Sussex Housing Strategy Group.

6. Corporate Plan & Council Policies.

- 6.1. This strategy contributes directly to the housing ambitions set out in Eastbourne Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2020-2024, which sets out five key priorities targeted at:

- Delivering good access to housing that meets modern standards.
- Providing safe, well managed and decent homes.
- Regenerating locations and delivering more housing.
- Promoting housing that sustains health & wellbeing.
- Addressing the causes of homelessness.

- 6.2 In addressing homelessness, the plan sets out goals to; focus on prevention; support households at risk of homelessness; and work in partnership to address the number of rough sleepers in the town.

7. Business case.

- 7.1. The high-level business case associated with the strategy is set out in the delivery plan. Specific business cases will be developed to support items the plan contains, such as those relating to the delivery of new IT case management systems, the multi-disciplinary preventative hub, and specific support services.

8. Financial appraisal.

- 8.1. It is anticipated that the cost of deploying initiatives contained within the action plan can be met from existing budgets, DLUHC confirmed *Homelessness Prevention Grants* for 2022/23, and the recently confirmed three year settlement to fund the Rough Sleeper Initiative. The Council will work with other Districts and Boroughs to secure additional funding opportunities made available by Central Government, such as the *Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme*, and work locally to utilise NHS / Public Health funding to secure positive outcomes for local households. Action plans may have to be updated to reflect any changes to this funding, or changes to future levels of grant received across the duration of the strategy.

- 8.2. Successful implementation of the strategy is designed to reduce the cost of addressing homelessness by; focussing on preventative measures to reduce demand; putting in place lower cost solutions to meet temporary housing needs;

and shaping a more integrated approach to housing, health, and wellbeing to reduce the call on wider public services.

8.3. *Deputy Chief Finance Officer consulted on 13/06/2022.*

9. Legal implications.

9.1. This strategy has been prepared in line with the statutory requirements set out in the Homelessness Act 2002, Section 1(4) of which requires housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a homelessness review, within a period of five years.

9.2. The housing authority shall take their homelessness strategy into account in the exercise of their functions in accordance with Section 1(5) of the Act.

9.3. In formulating or modifying this strategy the housing authority shall have regard to its current allocation scheme under Section 166A of the Housing Act 1996 and its current tenancy strategy under Section 150 of the Localism Act 2011.

9.4. In line with the Act and the Government's published *Homelessness Code of Guidance*⁴ the

- Preceding review included an assessment of the:
 - current levels and likely future levels of homelessness;
 - activities carried out to prevent households from becoming homeless;
 - accommodation available to those who are homeless or who may become homeless;
 - support available to those who are or who may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent homelessness again;
 - level of resources available locally to tackle homelessness.
- Proposed strategy incorporates plans for addressing homelessness and rough sleeping into a single document.
- Statutory and voluntary partners, along with members of the public have been provided with an opportunity to comment and provide feedback on the proposals at both the review and draft proposal stage.
- Strategy and action plan align with county wide approaches wherever applicable and sets out actions and outcomes that will build on the key relationships already formed with local partners.
- Strategy contains an action plan setting out to secure effective outcomes in pursuit of the proposed strategic themes and objectives.
- The proposals commit to regular reviews of the action plan.

9.5. *Legal Services considered this report on 15/06/2022. (Legal ref: IKEN 011178-EBC-CH)*

⁴ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities – published 22/02/2018 (last updated 01/06/2022).

10. Risk management implications.

- 10.1. Having in place a robust strategy and up to date action plan improves the ability to co-ordinate and deliver the range of services that set out to address homelessness. Through doing so it reduces the incidence of homelessness and deals with it more effectively where it occurs. This:
- Lowers the impact on local individual and family households and the associated risk to their wellbeing.
 - Reduces the risk of the Council spending more than budgeted on homelessness services.
- 10.2. Having in place an up to date strategy that complies with statutory responsibilities, reduces the risk of strategic shortfalls being cited in any legal proceedings seeking review of homelessness decisions, which is commonplace in legal challenges.

11. Equality analysis.

- 11.1. An equality analysis has been completed, to assess the impact of the proposals on groups of residents with protected characteristics, and those facing financial hardship.
- 11.2. The assessment identified no negative impacts on protected groups and neutral or positive impacts for others. The positive impacts of the proposals can be delivered through the successful implementation of enhanced preventative activities, support actions, and case management, particularly those measures setting out to address the issues experienced by groups at higher risk of homelessness. These include women at risk of domestic abuse; those living with physical disabilities, mental health conditions and experiencing multiple complex needs; and those on lower incomes struggling to afford housing. A copy of the analysis is available from the report author.

12. Environmental impact analysis.

- 12.1. There are no direct environmental impact implications for the Council arising from the recommendations set out in this report.

13. Appendices.

- 13.1.
- Appendix 1 – Draft Eastbourne Borough Council Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027.

14. Background papers.

- 14.1. The following background papers are associated with this report, copies of which are available from the author:

- Eastbourne Borough Council Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-27 – Equality & Fairness Analysis.
- Eastbourne Borough Council Homelessness Review 2021/22.