

<b>15 February 2024</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Kick-off</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> None	
<b>Report of:</b> Ryan Farmer – Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Ewelina Sorbjan – Assistant Director, Housing Management and Development		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Ian Wake – Executive Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
<b>This report is public</b>		
<b>Version:</b> Final		

## Executive Summary

There is a statutory duty on every local authority to have a homelessness strategy which sets out the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are, or will be, available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

The local authority must ensure that all organisations whose work can help to prevent homelessness and meet the needs of homeless people are involved in the development, implementation and delivery of the strategy.

The current homelessness strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2020.

A new homelessness prevention strategy is now required which takes into account current homelessness in the borough, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, and new opportunities for preventing homelessness.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1. **Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment on the contents of this report and the proposal to develop a new Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy.**
- 1.2. **Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on the engagement principles as set out in section 0.**

Version Control (delete as appropriate)

**Version 1** - First draft ready for DMT, SLT and Commissioner input; **Version 2** - Second Draft ready for Portfolio Holder, Leader and other Member Input; **Version 3** - Third draft for any further comments; **Version Committee** – Draft ready for submission to public committee; **Version Cabinet** – Final version ready for Cabinet/Executive decision

## 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Housing Solutions service continues to see a large increase in demand, with presentations year on year having increased, at the point of writing, by 22% from the same point last year. Given the current cost of living crisis, which shows no signs of easing off significantly, as well as previous changes in legislation, we have also seen a comparable year on year increase in temporary accommodation placements.
- 2.2 Following the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002, every local authority was required to carry out a homelessness review, then formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the findings of the review.
- 2.3 The 2002 Act also requires local authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the result of further homelessness analysis, within five years of the publication of their last homelessness strategy. Local authorities are able to undertake homelessness reviews and publish homelessness strategies more frequently if circumstances change.
- 2.4 The council last published its homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy in 2020, primarily responded to developments in case law and legislation, most notably the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and is now seeking to start work on the development of a refreshed document.
- 2.5 The primary function of the 2017 Act places greater emphasis on the prevention of homelessness and significantly adjusted the criteria of those who approaching the Council who are eligible for assistance.
- 2.6 Since April 2020, the council has received over 7,200 approaches from households seeking homelessness advice and assistance.

Year	Total Number of Approaches	% change	Approaches between April-October	% change
2020/21	1819	-	1003	-
2021/22	1825	+0.3%	1062	+5.6%
2022/23	2188	+16.6%	1216	+12.7%
2023/24*	-	-	1415	+14.1%

- 2.7 Approximately 30% of all households approaching the council for homelessness advice and assistance during this timeframe featured children as household members, and single person households accounted for around 65% of approaches.
- 2.8 The five most common recorded reasons for approaching the council for homelessness advice and assistance between April 2020 and October 2023 are recorded below.

Version Control (delete as appropriate)

**Version 1** - First draft ready for DMT, SLT and Commissioner input; **Version 2** - Second Draft ready for Portfolio Holder, Leader and other Member Input; **Version 3** - Third draft for any further comments; **Version Committee** – Draft ready for submission to public committee; **Version Cabinet** – Final version ready for Cabinet/Executive decision

Reason	Total Number of Approaches
Asked to leave by family	1803
Section 21 notice	678
Relationship breakdown	532
Fleeing domestic abuse	471
Friend no longer willing to accommodate	379

### 3. Homelessness Review and Evidence Base

3.1 A range of strategic reviews will take place considering the various factors affecting the provision of homelessness services across the borough. The analysis will primarily look at:

- national context, considering matters such as national trends, changing legislation/case law, cost of living, new government initiatives in end rough sleeping and regional factors affecting homelessness
- local strategic context, considering the wider corporate priorities, strategies from across the Council and other partner organisations, and the statistical background of the borough
- local housing context, considering reasons and trends in homelessness across the borough, household composition, the use and availability of temporary accommodation, and the supply of accommodation across tenure types in the borough

3.2 In addition, a review of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 will be undertaken to understand the progress which had been made, the key actions and objectives which need to be taken forwards into the new strategy, and any other learning which is central to the council's approach and response to homelessness in the borough.

### 4. Homelessness Prevention Strategy

4.1 It is anticipated that through the homelessness review and development of the evidence base, a range of key issues will be identified. The homelessness prevention strategy will include:

- an identification of the main causes of homelessness in Thurrock and exploration of challenges and barriers which residents and services face
- a number of key priorities to be adopted in order to prevent and relieve homelessness across the borough

Version Control (delete as appropriate)

**Version 1** - First draft ready for DMT, SLT and Commissioner input; **Version 2** - Second Draft ready for Portfolio Holder, Leader and other Member Input; **Version 3** - Third draft for any further comments; **Version Committee** – Draft ready for submission to public committee; **Version Cabinet** – Final version ready for Cabinet/Executive decision

- the development of a clear action plan with regular progress reviews to ensure that goals are met in partnership with other public bodies and organisations
- clear links which support the aims and objectives of Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Housing Strategy, and Better Care Together Thurrock: Case for Further Change
- continued adoption of Human Learning Systems (HLS) principles within the person-centred approach to working with households experiencing homelessness, with consideration to all elements and factors contributing to their circumstances

## **5. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 5.1 The general role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees as outlined within the constitution includes the consideration of any matter which affects the area of Thurrock or its inhabitants.
- 5.2 From a policy development perspective, Overview and Scrutiny Committees will conduct research, community and other consultation in the analysis of policy issues or proposed projects and possible options. They will also Review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas.
- 5.3 As outlined within the council's constitution, the specific functions of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee listed within its terms of reference include reviewing and scrutinising the formulation of policies and strategies to govern the Council's housing activities.
- 5.4 With this in mind, it is appropriate that members of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive adequate opportunity to be informed of the duties and responsibilities of the Housing service in response to the Act and have the chance to further develop their understanding through member-officer interaction and the provision of appropriate resources.

## **6. Engagement (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 6.1 As set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance published by DLUHC, the Council must consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations and other people considered appropriate before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy.
- 6.2 Consultation will also take place with those who access the council's services, as well as with specialist agencies which provide support to individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness across the borough.
- 6.3 Examples of previous engagement activity which will be considered for use again includes face-to-face sessions with Council staff and partner agencies, online surveys, statistical analysis, and presentations to other key Council services, committees and boards.
- 6.4 Close work will take place with a range of partners and service providers, including NELFT, EPUT, Open Door, SERICC, Mind, and Changing Pathways.
- 6.5 Discussions and engagement will also take place with services across the Council, including Adult Social Care, Public Health, and Children's Services, as well as with bodies such as the Youth Cabinet.

Version Control (delete as appropriate)

**Version 1** - First draft ready for DMT, SLT and Commissioner input; **Version 2** - Second Draft ready for Portfolio Holder, Leader and other Member Input; **Version 3** - Third draft for any further comments; **Version Committee** – Draft ready for submission to public committee; **Version Cabinet** – Final version ready for Cabinet/Executive decision

6.6 It is intended that specific activity with members of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee will take place to ensure that all appropriate stakeholders and issues as identified by members can be included throughout any period of consultation.

6.7 The homelessness review and compilation of the evidence base is expected to take place between February 2024 and April 2024. It is anticipated that the engagement activity for a new homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy will commence in May 2024 and run until August 2024.

## **7. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

7.1 The work to establish a new homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy will set the direction for supporting vulnerable cohorts of residents, alongside measures already outlined other key strategic documents such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Housing Strategy, and the Better Care Together Thurrock: The Case for Further Change.

## **8. Implications**

### **8.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Andy Michaelides**  
**Service Accountant, Corporate Finance**

The increase in the number of approaches from residents in relation to homelessness represents a significant financial risk to the Council. After careful assessment, growth has been identified within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, and draft budget proposals for the following financial year.

The acquisition of open market properties in order to find permanent accommodation solutions and increase the level of Council owned housing is not currently available to the Council in following financial years due to legislative and financial constraints, although a further business case is being considered should financial restrictions be eased to some extent. Expenditure on temporary housing solutions will continue to be closely monitored, and any realisation of increased expenditure risks reported accordingly.

### **8.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Jayne Middleton-Albooye**  
**Assistant Director – Legal, Legal Services**

Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002, requires a Local Authority to review homelessness in its area and to produce a strategy under s1(3). Section 1(4) requires that the strategy is reviewed and updated every 5 years, although Local Authorities may do this earlier/more frequently than that. Thurrock Council must comply with the legal requirement of having an updated strategy within five years of publication of its last strategy

Version Control (delete as appropriate)

**Version 1** - First draft ready for DMT, SLT and Commissioner input; **Version 2** - Second Draft ready for Portfolio Holder, Leader and other Member Input; **Version 3** - Third draft for any further comments; **Version Committee** – Draft ready for submission to public committee; **Version Cabinet** – Final version ready for Cabinet/Executive decision

This strategy must include consideration of statutorily defined vulnerable groups such as those fleeing domestic abuse, as well as locally defined priorities, such as rough sleepers and people with complex needs.

### 8.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Team Manager, Corporate Diversity and Equality**

As outlined within this report and set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance, consultation activity must take place with other public bodies, voluntary organisations, service users and other identified stakeholders before a new strategy can be implemented. By undertaking a homelessness review, a broad range of stakeholders throughout the community can be identified and involved in the activity to develop a holistic strategy. The consultation results will help to inform a Community Equality Impact Assessment prior to implementation of the strategy.

### 8.4 Risks

Cost of living pressures, a reduction in available stock in the private rental sector, challenges in increasing affordable rental stock in the borough and the impact of temporary accommodation placements being made in Thurrock from other local authorities are all factors in increasing homelessness approaches made to the council.

A refreshed homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy will support the council in understanding the nature of these risks and designing appropriate mitigations to manage their impacts, both for the organisation and for affected households.

### 8.5 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder and Looked After Children

Not applicable

## 9. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Thurrock Council – Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025: <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/homelessness-prevention-2020-v02.pdf>

Version Control (delete as appropriate)

**Version 1** - First draft ready for DMT, SLT and Commissioner input; **Version 2** - Second Draft ready for Portfolio Holder, Leader and other Member Input; **Version 3** - Third draft for any further comments; **Version Committee** – Draft ready for submission to public committee; **Version Cabinet** – Final version ready for Cabinet/Executive decision

## 10. Appendices to the report

- None

### Report Author:

Ryan Farmer

Housing Strategy Manager

Adults, Housing and Health

Christopher Wade

Head of Housing Solutions

Adults, Housing and Health

Version Control (delete as appropriate)

**Version 1** - First draft ready for DMT, SLT and Commissioner input; **Version 2** - Second Draft ready for Portfolio Holder, Leader and other Member Input; **Version 3** - Third draft for any further comments; **Version Committee** – Draft ready for submission to public committee; **Version Cabinet** – Final version ready for Cabinet/Executive decision