

14 January 2020		ITEM: 6
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Yes	
Report of: Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health/Interim Director Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

There is a statutory duty on every Local Authority to have a Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping 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/or meet the needs of homeless people are involved in the strategy.

The current homelessness strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2015.

A new Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been developed which takes into account current homelessness in the borough, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and new opportunities for preventing homelessness.

The purpose of this paper is to present the final draft of the strategy to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to seek feedback from the Committee on its contents before its presentation to Cabinet.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on the draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25 before its presentation to Cabinet.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1. The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness within their area. Following this review, local authorities were required to formulate and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on its findings.
- 2.2. Each Homelessness Strategy must set out plans for the prevention of homelessness, including securing that sufficient accommodation and support are, or will be, available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.
- 2.3. The 2002 Act also includes requirements for local authorities to publish refreshed Homelessness Strategies, based on the result of further analysis, within five years of the publication of their last document. Local authorities are able to undertake such reviews and publish refreshed strategies more frequently if circumstances change.
- 2.4. Thurrock Council last refreshed its Homelessness Strategy in November 2015. Since this time, there have been a number of developments in case law and legislation, most notably relating to the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation and was widely welcomed by homelessness charities and support organisations.
- 2.5. In August 2018 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published its Rough Sleeping Strategy where the government stated a commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. Within this document it was also outlined that local authorities would be required to update their existing homelessness strategies.
- 2.6. Work to refresh Thurrock Council's Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy began in Winter 2018 and has encompassed a number of key stages, including evidence and data gathering, peer reviews from leading sector experts, engagement with key partners and stakeholders.
- 2.7. An initial paper was presented at Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2019 which outlined the plans for the development of a refreshed document. A further update was provided to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2019 which shared the emerging key themes as well as the details of consultation activity which had been undertaken.
- 2.8. The Council's Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy represents an ambitious approach rooted by the fundamental principle that homelessness is not simply a housing issue, but is instead a complex social challenge requiring true collaboration to tackle effectively.

3. Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy

- 3.1. The strategy presents comprehensive details of the local and national issues which affect homelessness in Thurrock, as well as an overview of the legislation which outline the duties which the Council has to those in need of assistance.
- 3.2. The document also provides an overview of areas of significant action which has been undertaken by the Council since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, before detailing the main themes of the strategy which had been identified through stakeholder engagement.
- 3.3. The strategic themes which have been presented in the strategy are:
 - Partnership and Collaboration
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - Provision and Accessibility
 - Customer Excellence
- 3.4. Within each theme section, a number of broad key actions have been presented, including the establishment of a Homelessness Partnership Board for Thurrock. It has been a shared aspiration that the action plan will be a document which is jointly owned by partners, ensuring that the best outcomes can be achieved by using the skills, knowledge and expertise of each organisation.
- 3.5. The Homelessness Partnership Board will therefore be responsible for further development of the action plan for the strategy and for regularly monitoring and updating the document, so that progress is made and that key actions are delivered within defined timeframes.
- 3.6. To ensure that there is appropriate oversight of the action plan, an annual update will be provided to Housing Overview on Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.7. **Reasons for Recommendation**
- 3.8. As outlined, the Council has a statutory duty to ensure that it carries out regular analysis of homelessness in the borough and publishes a refreshed homelessness strategy at least every five years. The current strategy therefore requires a published refresh by November 2020.
- 3.9. Due to the significant changes since 2015 in welfare reform, homelessness legislation and housing provision in the borough, it is recommended that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee review this draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy and provide feedback so that the document can be presented to Cabinet and published ahead of the statutory deadline.
- 3.10. **Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 3.11. As set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance published by MHCLG, the Council must consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations and other people considered appropriate before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy.
- 3.12. Consultation activity that has taken place so far includes face-to-face sessions with Council staff, with individuals which have used the Council's homelessness services, and with partner agencies. Statistical analysis has also been carried out, and presentations to other key Council services, committees and boards have been made to share findings and gather feedback.
- 3.13. Close work has and will continue to take place with a range of partners and service providers, such as the membership of the Council's Homelessness and Mental Health Forum, including NELFT, St Mungo's, Open Door, SERRIC, Mind, and Changing Pathways, and newer organisations such as the Friends of Essex and London Homeless.
- 4. 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):

- Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, MHCLG

5. Implications

5.1. Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Strategic Lead, Corporate Finance

By analysing homelessness in the borough and developing a new strategy in line with the preventative aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, it is hoped that the costs associated with the provision of services can be contained within the budget allocation. Additional funding to meet the current budget pressures within Homelessness have been identified in the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy.

5.2. Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
**Assistant Director of Law & Governance,
Interim Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer**

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. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 changes should be reflected in such a strategy. Thurrock Council must comply with the legal requirement of having an updated strategy within five years of publication of its last strategy.

5.3. **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead, Community Development and Equalities

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 have been 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 to identify and address any issues affecting those within the protected characteristics.

5.4. **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable

6. **Appendices to the report**

- DRAFT - Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

Report Author:

Ryan Farmer

Housing Strategy & Quality Manager