

Report to Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report Title	Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Refresh
Date of Meeting	Thursday 20 March 2025
Report Author	Ryan Farmer
Corporate Director	Executive Director Place
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Cabinet member for Health and Well-being
Wards Affected	(All Wards);

Appendices (if any)	1. Place O&S Draft – Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 The current homelessness strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2020. All authorities are required to publish homelessness strategies at least once every five years. A new Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been developed which takes into account current homelessness in the borough, the impact of rising cost of living, and new opportunities for preventing homelessness.
- 1.4 The purpose of this paper is to present a working draft of the strategy to Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee for feedback before a final version is presented to Cabinet to seek approval and adoption.

2. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in this report, the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

2.1 Review and comment on the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 as attached at Appendix 1.

3. Commissioner's Comments

4. Proposals – the rationale and evidence for the recommendations

4.1 Background

4.1.1 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.

4.1.2 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.

4.1.3 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.

4.1.4 Thurrock Council last published a refresh to its Homelessness Strategy in September 2020. An appraisal of the successes and outcomes achieved against the aims and objectives of the 2020-2025 Strategy is included as Appendix 1 of the refreshed draft attached to this report.

4.1.5 Work to refresh Thurrock Council's Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy began in Spring 2024 and has encompassed a number of key stages, including evidence and data gathering, feeding in information from peer reviews from leading sector experts, and engagement with key partners and stakeholders.

4.1.6 The council's Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy represents an ambitious approach. Thurrock recognises that homelessness is the result of causality, as opposed to being an issue which can be resolved within itself. Until the specific factors currently affecting Thurrock are fully grasped, along with a practical approach to understand and meet the future needs of the borough, homelessness cannot and will not be holistically resolved.

4.1.7 Through taking a wider, collaborative approach to the barriers present within communities and embedding strong frameworks for future provision then meaningful steps can be taken to improve outcomes.

4.2 Drivers

- 4.2.1 There are two primary drivers for refreshing the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy at this point in time.
- 4.2.2 Firstly, as outlined previously, the council is required by statute approve and publish a refreshed strategy in the coming months as the existing strategy reaches the end of its lifespan.
- 4.2.3 Secondly, since the last strategy was published there has been a significant period of change, featuring elements such as:
- Increased number of presentations for households seeking homelessness advice and assistance
 - developments in law and legislation
 - COVID-19
 - The cost of living crisis
 - Government intervention of Thurrock Council
 - The emerging impact of devolution and local government reform in Thurrock
- 4.2.4 By refreshing the strategy now and establishing a direction of travel for the next five years which takes into account the above factors and other causes and drivers of homelessness in Thurrock, the council will be better able to target its resources to meet the demands and pressures facing the organisation relating to homelessness.

4.3 **Proposal**

- 4.3.1 A draft of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 is attached to this report in Appendix 1. The data included within this draft – in particular but not limited to the text highlighted in grey – will be updated and refreshed prior to the presentation of the final version to Cabinet.
- 4.3.2 The draft 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.
- 4.3.3 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.
- 4.3.4 The strategic themes which have been presented in the strategy are:
- Housing Supply and Affordability
 - Increase affordable housing by boosting supply (in particular within the council's own stock), collaborating with developers, utilising council properties, and engaging private landlords
 - Homelessness Prevention and Intervention

- Adopt a localised strategy to prevent and address homelessness, increase public awareness, expand tenancy sustainment programmes for vulnerable individuals, and improve access to housing services information
 - Partnership and Collaboration
 - Enhance coordination between housing, social services, health, and education, strengthen partnerships with non-profits and community organisations, establish clear communication protocols, collaborate with neighbouring boroughs, and engage with those affected by homelessness to improve our service offer
- 4.3.5 Within each theme section, a number of broad key actions have been presented, with more granular detailed actions and expected outcomes listed for each to be monitored to measure success. It has been a shared aspiration that the action plan will be a document which is jointly owned, by teams and services across the council, public sector and health partners, and community and voluntary sector groups and organisations.
- 4.3.6 A programme of partner engagement roadshows and presentations will follow the adoption of the strategy, discussing the actions, outcomes and measures of success to ensure that the best outcomes can be achieved by using the skills, knowledge and expertise which each stakeholder, team and organisation can bring.
- 4.3.7 To ensure that there is appropriate oversight of the delivery of the strategy, a biannual progress report will be provided to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with an annual report provided to Cabinet.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 The alternative option to refreshing the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping strategy would see the council retain its existing document. Whilst this is permitted until September 2025, if a refreshed strategy is not published by this point the council would breach its obligations under the Homelessness Act 2002. As such, this option is not recommended.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 Consultation and engagement activity which has taken includes extensive and wide-ranging face-to-face sessions with staff and partners from a range of services, especially those who support and work alongside individuals and households approaching the council for homelessness advice and assistance. This includes engagement with officers from across Adult Social Care and Children's Services.
- 6.2 These sessions were undertaken and concluded before the drafting of the refreshed strategy, ensuring that all views and feedback could feed into the document as it was produced. This gave assurances that the strategy would

be drafted to deliver on the priorities and areas of importance identified through consultation, rather than limiting the potential of the strategy by attempting to pre-empt these.

- 6.3 Statistical analysis has also been carried out, and presentations to other key Council services and management teams have been made to share findings and gather feedback.
- 6.4 Consultation and engagement with the Cabinet member for Health and Well-being has taken place at every stage of the development of the proposed draft strategy.
- 6.5 This report and the draft of the strategy is being presented to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, providing the opportunity to give feedback on the strategy document itself on prior to its presentation as a final version to Cabinet.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the approval of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030. The adoption of the strategy in itself would not commit to any additional or alternative expenditure, or to any alterations in the approach to establishing budgets for service delivery.
- 7.2 It is anticipated that in the longer term, through the measures set out in the strategy, that the delivery of homelessness services would see a shift from reactive to preventative, presenting opportunities for financial savings through reduced demand, such as less reliance on costly nightly let temporary accommodation.

Implications verified by: **S.Siva Ananthan**
Head of Financial Management, Housing Finance

8. Risk Implications

- 8.1 The following section sets out the main risks, which should be taken into account when considering the recommendations in this report.
- 8.2 There are a number of risks held on the corporate risk register relating to homelessness, including:

Risk Description and Consequence	Mitigations	Residual Risk Status (after mitigations)
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<p>Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation</p> <p>Risk relates to failure to manage demand for temporary accommodation and homelessness, escalated costs, failure to manage demand, failure to manage demand-led services, and external influences</p>	<p>Treatments and mitigations presented within the draft strategy to be delivered within its five-year lifespan include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing affordable housing supply through modular homes, developer incentives, and council property use • engaging landlords with incentives like rent guarantees and support • establishing local multi-agency teams for tailored support and early interventions • expanding tenancy sustainment programs to prevent tenancy breakdowns • improving cross-department coordination to streamline service access 	<p>High</p>
<p>Housing Supply</p> <p>Risk relates to failure to effectively discharge statutory duties to homeless households, increased out-of-borough discharge and temporary housing, longer stays in temporary accommodation, and higher costs</p>	<p>Treatments and mitigations presented within the draft strategy to be delivered within its five-year lifespan include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boosting affordable housing by partnering with housing associations and private developers. • incentivising development of underutilised land and prioritising modular construction • using data systems to inform planning and allocate resources and placements effectively • collaborating regionally to share resources and best practices 	<p>High</p>
<p>Legislative Changes to the Private Rental Market</p> <p>Risk relates to landlord flight due to any new regulatory regime and changes to eviction periods/notices, reduced supply, higher costs, and higher demand in the interim period between</p>	<p>Treatments and mitigations presented within the draft strategy to be delivered within its five-year lifespan include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting landlords through engagement forums, incentives, and education on regulatory changes • raising tenant and landlord awareness via campaigns and community outreach. 	<p>High</p>

royal assent and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enhancing tenancy sustainability with wraparound support services 	
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Implications verified by: **Kelly McMillan –
Business Development Project Manager &
Chief Risk Adviser, Finance**

9. Legal and Governance Implications

- 9.1 Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires a local authority to review homelessness in its area and to produce a strategy under section 1(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.
- 9.2 The following legislation set out the statutory responsibilities of the Council to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and are eligible for assistance:
- Housing Act 1996.
 - Homelessness Act 2002.
 - Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- 9.3 In addition, the Council must take into account the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and not act in a way which is incompatible with a Convention right. Under Article 8, any interference with the right to respect for a person's private and family life and home must be proportionate and Article 14 requires that there must be no unjustified discrimination within the scope of human rights on any grounds, such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, or other status.
- 9.4 In carrying out a homelessness review, and in developing the revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, under Section 182(1) of the Housing Act 1996 the authority must have regard to guidance from time to time given by the Secretary of State. Chapter 2 of the Code of Guidance relates to homelessness strategies and reviews.
- 9.5 All actions delivered under the strategy and associated action plans should be implemented having regard to these duties. It is further a requirement of section 1 Homelessness Act 2002 that the local housing authority and social services will have regard to the Strategy in the exercise of their functions.
- 9.6 The Strategy does not form part of the policy framework which would be required to be approved by Council under paragraph 5 of Chapter 2 of the Constitution. As such, as a key decision Cabinet has the power to take the decision to approve.

Implications verified by **Helen Nicol
Assistant Director Legal and Governance**

10. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 10.1 The new Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy aims to address homelessness through a comprehensive approach, positively impacting various communities. By implementing targeted interventions based on an understanding of homelessness causes, the strategy ensures that the needs of impacted community groups are effectively met. The success of the strategy relies on full endorsement and collaboration across the council and key partners in the public, private, and third sectors.
- 10.2 Specific actions in the strategy aim to improve housing awareness for children and young people, enhancing the likelihood of future tenancy sustainment. The strategy also highlights the need to boost supported accommodation and expand tenancy sustainment programmes for individuals with disabilities or learning difficulties, ensuring that vulnerable residents receive the support they need.
- 10.3 No specific impacts are identified for individuals with protected characteristics such as gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation, indicating an equitable strategy. General improvements in homelessness prevention and intervention are expected to benefit all individuals, in particular the support offered to those who may be at risk of domestic abuse or experiencing hate crime
- 10.4 The strategy proposes expanding locality-based work to address specific needs in different areas. This approach aims to prevent and relieve homelessness more effectively across the borough. Housing and homelessness are key determinants of health and wellbeing, and the strategy's proactive approach is expected to reduce the impact of homelessness on physical and mental health.
- 10.5 The strategy supports economically inactive individuals, those on low incomes, and those in poverty, who are at the greatest risk of homelessness. New initiatives will be established to support these cohorts, preventing and relieving homelessness.
- 10.6 Overall, the strategy aims to create a more effective and inclusive approach to addressing homelessness, focusing on collaboration, targeted interventions, and comprehensive support for vulnerable populations.

Implications verified by **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager, Community Development

11. Other Relevant Implications

- Not applicable

12. Background Documents

- Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 – Thurrock Council