

Housing, Health and Environment Policy Advisory Committee

12 March 2024

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Housing, Health and Environment Policy Advisory Committee	12 th March 2024
Cabinet	20 th March 2024

Will this be a Key Decision?	Yes
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Cabinet
Lead Head of Service	John Littlemore
Lead Officer and Report Author	Hannah Gaston
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

The Housing Act 1996 requires that each local housing authority carries out an assessment of homeless need in their locality and adopts a Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy setting out how they will meet those needs. The current Strategy is due to expire this year and the new Strategy explains the current environment and the priorities for the next 5 years.

Purpose of Report

To review the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 and make recommendation to the Cabinet for adoption.

This report asks the Committee to consider the following recommendation to the Cabinet;

1. That the new Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy attached to this report in Appendix B, be adopted.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve Homes and Communities.</p>	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected. <p>The report recommendation supports the achievement of the Health Inequalities is addressed and reduced, and Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved cross cutting objectives.</p>	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Risk Management	Covered in the risk section of the report	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Financial	Housing is one of the Council's core services and as such funding arrangements for housing form a key part of the annual budget process and the regular annual update of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services

Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the Homelessness Act 2022, local housing authorities have a duty to review homelessness in their area and formulate and publish a strategy based on the results of the review. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 requires that local housing authorities must take reasonable steps to either maintain or secure accommodation for eligible applicants threatened with homelessness. Local authorities are also bound to have regard to the Secretary of State’s Homelessness Code of Guidance. • Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council’s statutory duties under the above legislation. Failure to accept the recommendations without agreeing suitable alternatives may place the Council in breach of Homelessness Act 2022 and leave the Council open to legal challenge when carrying out its functions in relation to tackling homelessness 	Lawyer (Contentious)
Information Governance	The recommendations are likely to impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council processes. The Information Governance Team will review the processing of personal data affected and the associated documentation will be updated accordingly, including a data protection impact assessment.	Information Governance Team
Equalities	We recognise the recommendations may have varying impacts on different communities within Maidstone. Therefore we have completed a separate equalities impact assessment.	Equalities and Communities Officer.
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Crime and Disorder	There could be positive implications on reducing crime and disorder as street homelessness can provide the environment for anti-social behaviour to occur.	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services

Procurement	Not applicable	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Biodiversity and Climate Change	There are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Since the enactment of the Homelessness Act 2002, Local Housing Authorities have been required to carry out a strategic assessment of homelessness in their area and publish a homelessness strategy outlining their intentions and vision for preventing and supporting those who face homelessness. In 2018 the Government published their national rough sleeping strategy which obligated local authorities to include a special focus on Rough Sleeping and this is our second combined Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 2.2 The preceding years have presented many challenges for us as a local housing authority these include the pandemic which hugely altered the way services could be delivered, and how staff worked; world events such as the war in Ukraine and the turmoil of withdrawing from Afghanistan; and the current cost of living crisis and associated demand for housing has caused homelessness to surge. All of these have presenting extreme challenges to our housing and homeless teams but alongside these, we have had many opportunities to tailor the manner in which we work and provide services to our local community.
- 2.3 Maidstone Borough Council continues its commitment to providing a robust and effective housing and homelessness service to the local community. The provision of these services is a key borough priority and is reflected through our strategic plan under Homes and Communities banner, with the commitment to preventing homelessness and rough sleeping by 2045. This strategy sets out our aims for the coming five years (2024-2029) to support our priority of breaking the cycle of homelessness.
- 2.4 The strategic review of the outgoing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 was undertaken in the latter part of 2023, and included the achievements of the Council over the preceding five years, as well as the environmental changes faced when delivering services. A briefing and the full review can be found in Appendix A.
- 2.5 96% of respondents to the Consultation felt the previous priorities created in our 2019 Strategy were felt to still be relevant for the new strategy.

The four priorities are:

Homeless Prevention – supporting households to sustain and maintain their current accommodation, reducing the demand for temporary accommodation and the need for crisis interventions.

Accommodation – provision of good quality housing and housing options

Support vulnerable people and households – this includes domestic abuse survivors.

Target and alleviate rough sleeping within our borough.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Option 1 – adopt the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy 2024-2029 and the priorities as set out in the document attached as Appendix 2
- 3.2 Option 2 – to not do anything, however this is not recommended as the local housing authority's Homelessness Strategies are often cited during legal challenges to decisions made by officers and not having an up to date Strategy would increase the risk of legal challenge, as having a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a statutory requirement.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Option 1 is our preferred option. We would wish this strategy to be endorsed to cover off both the Council's statutory requirement and set the vision for the delivery of homelessness and rough sleeping services.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 There is a statutory requirement for a consultation and strategic review to take place when creating a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy.
- 6.2 Consultation took place with service users, stakeholders, Officers, and Members as well as review of the homelessness and rough sleeping services over the past five years. We engaged in number of mechanisms including:

- 1) Online consultation
- 2) Staff and stakeholder feedback sessions
- 3) Engagement with service users at Trinity
- 4) Meeting with Members and senior colleagues

This is an important process to ensure we are meeting the needs of our communities. During these sessions and events, 96% of individuals felt the above priorities were still relevant.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 Once the strategy has been agreed, the council will upload the strategy on to the website and complete relevant press release and communications to partners. We will then start to develop the action plan over the coming first few months.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Strategic review and briefing note
 - Appendix B: Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy
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