

Report title	Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy update
Report author	Iqvinder Sokhal (Head of Housing Solutions)
Department	Housing
Exempt?	No

Purpose of report:
For information

Synopsis of report:
Members approved a 5-year Homelessness Strategy in 2019 which is now in its final year. This report provides an update on the strategy and informs Members of the work being undertaken for the implementation of the Council’s new three year Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

1. Context and background of report

1.1 Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on every local authority to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy. Rough Sleeping was added to the original remit by government in light of the rise in homelessness. The current Runnymede Borough Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was approved by Members in 2019. This report provides an update on the strategy’s action plan for years 4-5 and informs members of the intention to commence work on a new strategy.

2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended

- 2.1 This will be the final year of the existing strategy and most of the items within the 5- year action plan were completed in earlier years. An update on the current activity is attached at Appendix A
- 2.2 The Council’s duties towards people who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness are complex. The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 extended these duties beyond those people who met the priority need threshold and the Council must provide advice and assistance to anyone who approaches us, irrespective of local connection or circumstances. The duties thereafter will depend on what form of assistance is provided and this will be tailored to the individual in line with legislation.
- 2.3 Over the last two years, the socio-economic landscape, cost of living crisis, post COVID-19 pandemic response and global humanitarian crises have led to an increase in the number of people approaching the Council’s homelessness service. In the past three years alone, the average number of homeless approaches has increased by 15%. Nevertheless, the team has continued in its efforts to take reasonable steps as required by legislation to prevent or end

homelessness where possible. This has been achieved by making the best use of our stock, liaising with Landlords and supported housing providers. Since the start of the Strategy, there has been a 22% increase in the number of households successfully prevented from becoming homeless and a 31% increase in the number of successful outcomes for those who are actually homeless. In line with the Localism Act 2011, the Council is able to make an offer of private rented sector accommodation to end a prevention or relief duty. Whilst the Council has continued with its efforts to be creative in developing links with Landlords, there are ongoing challenges with sourcing affordable, suitable accommodation for particularly single applicants who are under the age of 35.

- 2.4 The Council has both a Homelessness Adviser and a dedicated Rough Sleeping Adviser from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities who meet regularly with officers to review progress on the strategy action plan. Feedback has been that the Council has been successful in limiting the level of rough sleeping in the borough and the strategy has been effective. In a recent visit from DLUHC in 2024, the Council was praised for the plans it has in place to continue to support those facing homelessness. There was acknowledgment from the DLUHC representative that the overriding issue within the borough is the lack of affordable housing options for those seeking accommodation.
- 2.5 In March 2022 this committee approved a No Second Night Out Policy to support the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. When a person makes a homeless application to the Council, we are required by law to carry out an assessment of their needs (s.189A) and we will consider whether they are classed as a priority need (s.189). For individuals that are not classed as a priority, there is no duty on the Council to provide interim accommodation and if they have nowhere else to go, this can result in a person becoming a rough sleeper. Rough sleepers are people who sleep or bed down in the open air, such as on the street, in tents, doorways or bus shelters etc.
- 2.6 The Council takes part in an annual rough sleeper count, coordinated by HomelessLink for Central Government. This estimate/count is based on the number of rough sleepers identified on one night of the year in autumn. This is to give a snapshot figure only. The recent returns for Runnymede are:

Figure 1 Rough Sleeper Count

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
3	5	4	4	2	2	2	1	3

- 2.7 As a result of the No Second Night Out Policy there has been an increase in emergency bed and breakfast placements which have been funded by Central Government grants, which are ring fenced for the purpose of rough sleeping. This enables the Council to accommodate people whilst assessing their housing options and providing them with a Personal Housing Plan (PHP). The Council can then assess the provision of financial support for deposits and rent in advance for any move on properties identified. The lack of such properties within the Borough means that applicants need to be willing to consider a wider area if they are to find a tenancy. Most rough sleepers have limited accommodation offers within this borough and it is usually necessary to look wider for landlords willing to accept benefit dependent tenants without guarantors or references. People under 35 can only access shared accommodation options unless they have significant additional benefits. The No Second Night Policy is

applicable until the point an offer is made but if this is not accepted the emergency accommodation will be discontinued. In the last year alone, 80% of those identified as rough sleeping were successfully supported off the streets through our support pathways into medium and long term accommodation through either private rented sector accommodation, re-connection with their Borough of origin or through our Housing Led scheme (see paragraph 2.11 below).

- 2.8 The homelessness service has experienced significant staffing changes over the past year with none of last year's establishment still in place and three officers joining in the last 6 months. The service has a new Head of Service who joined in the last 4 months. The Housing Navigator role is currently vacant. This is a post to work with rough sleepers, and those whose are in insecure accommodation (such as sofa surfing), to identify pathways into housing and establish channels with the agencies that need to support individuals with complex needs and histories. This has meant that existing staff are having to absorb the role's functions in their current work. The staff ensure that any reports of rough sleeping through StreetLink are responded to for verification and work with the identified rough sleeper to support them off the streets.
- 2.9 There has therefore been a period of recruitment, consolidation and training. Work to ensure that the Personal Housing Plans, which are issued to all applicants, are a working document, tailored to individual circumstances and needs and not just an automated stage in the process has been successful. The current focus is also on reviewing all our internal processes and procedures to ensure we respond effectively to those facing homelessness as well as developing a more robust way of giving homeless decisions that are legally compliant. Ongoing work will continue to develop our move on pathways by strengthening links with partner agencies as well as developing our customer-focused approach.
- 2.10 Although there are very low levels of rough sleeping in the borough there is an increasing cohort of single adults with complex needs that do not meet the priority need threshold under which the Council would be responsible for accommodating them but need multi-agency support to relieve or prevent homelessness. We are increasingly seeing single applicants with complex substance misuse and entrenched historic issues of non-engagement with support services. Many of these people have a history of trauma from childhood, potentially engagement with the care and justice systems and an inability to sustain familial relationships. The incidence of presentations with a diagnosis of anti-social personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, Autism spectrum disorders, ADHD and ODD is reflective of the fact that increasing numbers of people are struggling to cope with the basics of life.
- 2.11 A successful bid resulted in capital funding to purchase 3 properties for complex needs cases to be accommodated in a "Housing Led" scheme with support from Transform Housing & Support. The Housing Led model identifies that there are individuals that are unable to access housing for themselves. In the outer London Boroughs, there are companies refurbishing and letting bedsit accommodation to benefit dependent people over 35 as a business model but for any rough sleeper or person in this borough with no employment or renting history there are very limited opportunities due to a significant shortfall in rent and the Local Housing Allowance.

- 2.12 To be eligible for the Housing Led scheme the client does not need to meet the qualification criteria for the Housing Register where often a history of bad debt, criminality, anti-social behaviour, or a broken local connection restricts their access to social housing and with no means or credibility to access the private rented sector their housing options are nonexistent.
- 2.13 The Council has recently reviewed the relationship with Transform Housing & Support to identify further opportunities for supported housing in the borough and to ensure that the referral processes are effective in identifying the right client for each vacancy, limiting void periods, and ensuring the level of support in the unit is appropriate to the needs of the individual. There is also close partnership work through regular meetings and a referral mechanism so that any potential move on opportunities or evictions are identified at the earliest opportunity, so that such voids are considered for new referrals.
- 2.14 The Council operates an inhouse agency to work with private sector landlords and estate agencies to secure tenancies within the private sector through a package of financial incentives and management offers, known as Magna Carta Lettings. This has been an integral part of our response to homelessness in the borough. At the current time rents have increased so very few landlords will consider a tenant who is benefit dependent and landlords are selling due to changes in legislation and the cost of living resulting in mortgage increases. We have seen a slight slowing down of Landlords wishing to seek their property back and we will monitor the impact the upcoming increase of the Local Housing Allowance will have on the market.
- 2.15 Domestic Abuse is a significant cause of homelessness, and the Council is working to increase the availability of refuge accommodation and suitable rehousing pathways. People fleeing domestic abuse and approaching as homeless from social housing anywhere in the country are entitled under legislation to an offer of social housing. No local connection is required for an approach due to DA and it can be complex to make enquiries to confirm the passport to priority need eligibility due to DA without appearing to make invasive enquiries of a victim.
- 2.16 In recognition that homelessness services need to be agile and responsive, that current economic and specifically housing conditions are making it increasingly difficult to find affordable housing options in the borough it is believed that a future Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy should be for 3 years, keeping the focus on responding to current conditions, government programs and seeking innovative solutions.
- 2.17 Work has commenced on the next strategy with a significant focus on supporting people who do not fall into the priority need groups but present the most challenges in finding accommodation. This will be through enhanced partnership working to focus on intervention at the earliest opportunity as well as strengthening the Council's response to domestic abuse in line with recent legislation. There will be a period of data capture and analysis to enable us to set our priorities and formulate an action plan. Officers will work with DLUHC advisers and ensure that all opportunities for additional funding or support are maximised.
- 2.18 Over the course of the current Strategy we have noted that there is an increase in approaches to the authority for assistance and a reduction in the options available to people. Whilst there have been positive moves such as the imminent increase in the Local Housing Allowance and reduction in the level of inflation, the extent of any positive impact this may result is yet to be

determined. We therefore envisage that the current challenges in securing affordable accommodation are set to continue for the foreseeable future. This is likely to result in an increase in households in priority need for whom we cannot prevent their homelessness and therefore need to provide interim accommodation whilst we work with them. The Council has a portfolio of temporary accommodation properties but this is provided at a high cost to the Council and a temporary move is disruptive to households. Therefore, the immediate aim will always be to maximise the opportunity to prevent any loss of accommodation and where this is not possible, then to identify and support the client into a private sector tenancy in an area where they have connections if possible.

2.19 An update on the Action Plan is attached at Appendix A

3. Policy framework implications

3.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 sets out the requirement for local authorities to develop and publish a Homeless Strategy at least every 5 years and for this to be kept under regular review.

4 Resource implications/Value for Money

4.1 All activities within the Strategy are covered by existing budgets.

5. Legal implications

5.1 Under the Homelessness Act 2002, sections 1-4, a local housing authority must regularly undertake a review of homelessness in the Borough and in consultation with service users, social services and other relevant organisations, formulate and publish a local homelessness strategy. The authority has a duty to publish a new strategy every 5 years.

6. Equality implications

6.1 Under the Equality Act 2010 (as amended), the Council is required to have due regard to its Public Sector Equality Duty before adopting the Strategy.

6.2 This is to:

- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, or victimisation
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a Protected Characteristic and those who do not share it;
- c) Foster good relations between those who share a relevant characteristic and those who do not.

6.3 The 9 Protected Characteristics are age, disability, race/ethnicity, pregnancy and maternity, religion, sexual orientation, sex, gender reassignment and marriage/civil partnership.

6.4 An Equality Impact Screening was carried out when the Strategy was compiled, and it was decided that a full EIA was not required. There was no evidence to suggest that the Strategy would have a negative impact on any of the protected groups. Rather the Strategy has the potential to have a positive impact on all members of the Runnymede community who will need support under the Strategy, a significant number of which will be people with protected characteristics. The review of the Strategy will include analysis of the outcomes for people with different protected characteristics and where the next strategy might address any inequalities and shall be accompanied by an updated or new Equalities Impact Assessment.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

None

8. Other implications (where applicable)

None

9. Timetable for Implementation

Not applicable.

10. Conclusions

Members are asked to note the progress on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and that work will commence on a new 3 year strategy to be brought to this committee in March 2024.

11. Background papers

[New Homelessness Strategy 2019 – 2024 Housing Committee 14 March 2019](#)

[Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Update Housing Committee 9 March 2022](#)

12. Appendices

- Appendix Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan Update