

Appendix A

Homelessness Strategy 2019-24 ongoing review

Introduction

The Homelessness Strategy was approved by Housing Committee in March 2019 and came into effect on 01 April 2019. The strategy set out four main objectives, with multiple sub-objectives the Council aspire to achieve over the five year life of the document.

The Council are committed to reviewing the progress the authority has made towards the ambitious targets set in 2019 and adapting to any challenges that may impact on our ability to meet our goals.

Year One: 2019/20

The first year of the Homelessness Strategy has seen the Council continue to embed and embrace the significant changes the Homelessness Reduction Act introduced. In order to improve the service the Council provide to our customers, with member approval, the Housing Team have undergone a restructure to ensure that customer service and preventing homelessness are at the forefront of our approach.

Successes

During the first year there have been a number of objectives set out in the action plan that have successfully been implemented, such as:

- 1.3: Partners notifying RBC of potential housing issues so that proactive work can be undertaken to prevent homelessness
- 1.5: Focus on Sustaining homes and keeping people in their existing homes as appropriate
- 2.1: Set up a shared house for single people
- 2.4: Review nomination agreements
- 2.5 Focus on reducing tenancy and social housing fraud
- 2.11: Develop support for rough sleepers
- 3.1 Enhance Personalised Housing Plans (PHP)
- 3.2: Develop the FUSE group to give meaningful assistance to vulnerable groups
- 3.5: Continue and improve strong partnership relationships
- 4.1 Ensure B&B use is minimal

1.3: Partners notifying RBC of potential housing issues so that proactive work can be undertaken to prevent homelessness

Whilst there is a statutory duty for particular public bodies to refer customers to the Council if they are at risk of homelessness, there is no statutory duty on all agencies. The Council have therefore encouraged partners to follow in the spirit of the statutory duty to refer so that customers are provided with housing advice at an earlier stage.

As part of the Council's Homeless Task group and FUSE group, all partners have been briefed on the legislation and the support available to households at risk of homelessness. This has led to referrals and households have been able to remain in their existing homes.

Whilst the Council are under no illusion that this referral mechanism needs to continue and improve if more households are to be able to retain their homes, it is a promising start.

Action: A further step the Council will take during 2020/21 is to improve the website. This will include introducing a 'report of a rough sleeper' link so that anyone sleeping rough in the area is reported to the Council quicker.

1.5: Focus on Sustaining homes and keeping people in their existing homes as appropriate

As part of the Housing Team's restructure the Sustainment Officers handed over the management of temporary accommodation in order to develop a detailed, tailored sustainment package to those at threat of homeless and to give greater support to those in temporary housing needing to move on.

The new Sustainment role has been in operation since January 2020 with access to reporting through the Council's data system. The service are taking new referrals and proactively working in partnership with partners, both internal and external to target households that may require assistance. For example, Sustainment have linked into the benefit department so that anyone subjected to a welfare capping are offered advice to ensure they can maintain their home. The benefit department are also drafting a new Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) response that advises DHP applicants of the sustainment function regardless of if they are successful for a DHP or not.

Whilst this service is relatively new and is still currently in a transition stage, there have already been some positive outcomes for customers. For example, a customer moved into a new home but didn't have the financial means to connect the cooker. Sustainment were able to locate a grant to pay for the connection of the cooker to enable the family to eat.

2.1: Set up a shared house for single people

The first of two shared houses went live during May 2019 and the second in December 2019. The introduction of these shared houses, 8 bed spaces over the two properties, has undoubtedly contributed to a number of the objectives within the Homelessness Strategy. The scheme has reduced B&B placements, developed options for single people and has contributed to reducing rough sleeping.

The scheme has provided a safe space for single people that the Council may not have ordinarily owe an accommodation duty to but the short term placement gives them some respite and an opportunity to engage with the Council to secure alternate suitable longer term housing.

The share house has already had successful move on with customers housed into supported housing through transform following their stay in the shared house and others into the private rented sector.

2.4: Review nomination agreements

In order to ensure officers have housing solutions available to prevent homelessness, the Council have met with our partners whom we have nomination agreements with; Life Housing, Riverside Housing and Transform to ensure that we are receiving the correct number of vacancies.

In order to ensure the team utilise these options, these partners have attended team meetings to explain the service and role each partner has in reducing homelessness and this in turn has increased the volume of successful referrals and outcomes.

Case Study:

Ms X had been living in a Council owed property but terminated the tenancy due to being detained in prison whilst serving a custodial sentence. On Ms X release from prison she had no where to live and ended up staying wherever she could but this increased her risk of relapse into drink and drugs.

The Council were able to nominate Ms X to Riverside housing who offered her a space in one of their shared houses. Since Ms X has been in the property she has actively engaged with her support network, avoided the group of people she had previously associated and has maintained her tenancy there.

2.5 Focus on reducing tenancy and social housing fraud

The joint partnership with Reigate and Banstead has been established to give the team access to fraud advice and detection for all customers applying for the housing register and as homeless. This service has enabled staff to make quicker enquiries into applications and informed decision making to ensure that only those that qualify for assistance access it.

The service has detected suspected fraudulent cases and held interviews under caution. This has led to a couple of applicants withdrawing their applications and a few applications declined on the basis of false information declared. This helps to reduce the risk that limited social homes are offered to those without a housing need.

2.11: Develop support for rough sleepers 3.2: Develop the FUSE group to give meaningful assistance to vulnerable groups 3.5: Continue and improve strong partnership relationships

The activities of the FUSE group play a large role in the support for rough sleepers in Runnymede. For example, justahelping hand provide rucksacks with supplies, two local shower facilities have opened to enable rough sleepers a place to shower and dress.

The sustainment service have proactively began to work with the foodbanks and East Well Spend Less to educate people how to cook on a budget will benefit those in need. The sustainment team will continue to target those who may need

assistance and will start to support people to become independent of foodbanks when appropriate.

3.1 Enhance Personalised Housing Plans (PHP)

The PHPs have been expanded to include general signposting advice to a holistic range of services including how to register for a GP or Dentist, how to manage money and health support links. Officers are asking trigger questions to ensure that customers in need are given a full service with signposting support to relevant services, rather than just focussing on housing issues.

4.1 Ensure B&B use is minimal

The team have worked hard to ensure that B&B use has been kept to a minimum. For a number of weeks throughout the year there have been zero customers in B&B accommodation, which is a fantastic achievement.

For the year 2019/20 to date, the team have made on 11 B&B placements. Against the backdrop of national B&B numbers increasing, this is a major success of the first year of the Homelessness Strategy.

One of the contributing factors of this has been where possible the team have referred the customer to the shared house rather than place a person in B&B, which is often outside of the borough. This has multiple benefits for the organisation and for the customer.

Next Steps

Now that the first year of the homelessness strategy is drawing to a close, the Council have taken time to reflect and review any changes in Government direction and policy to ensure that our objectives are aligned to that of central government. The Government, as set out in the Rough Sleeping Strategy, are committed to reducing rough sleeping. The ambition is to half the number of rough sleepers by 2022 and to end it all together by 2027.

This is an ambition that is shared with Runnymede Council and is a target that we will strive to achieve within this strategy timeframe. During 2018 we reported an estimate of 4 rough sleepers on a particular night in November. During the same reporting period of 2019 we reported 2. This reflects a reduction of half from the year before but we will do more to end it.

As outlined above, the development of the Council website will include more information for Rough Sleepers and a reporting mechanism for customers to notify the Council of anyone bedding down outside. We will continue to develop the shared house and the support available to rough sleepers through FUSE.

Action: It is therefore important that as part of the review of this strategy that this key objective is reflected within the document and we propose to rebrand it the 'Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy'.

The Council will continue to work towards the remaining objectives within the Homelessness Strategy.