

## Appendix B

### Homelessness & Rough Sleeping 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 Two: 2020/21

The Homelessness Strategy was rebranded Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy in early 2020 to reflect the Government's commitment to ending rough sleeping.

The progress in the second year of the Strategy has been complicated by the global pandemic, Coronavirus, however despite the impact and challenges this brought, good progress has been made. Covid-19 had a huge impact on service delivery we were required to quickly adapt to home working. Despite the speed of the change to service delivery, the Housing Solutions team have continued to provide a frontline and back office service throughout this year.

There were multiple staffing changes which also impacted on the team with some new members of staff having never worked in housing, having to pick up and learn the role quickly. Despite the challenges, during this year the team have continued to work towards the goals in the Strategy:

- 1.1 Improve awareness and public knowledge
- 1.3 Early referrals for homeless cases
- 1.9 Redesign the website
- 2.3 Review the Allocations Scheme
- 2.8 MCL funding
- 2.11 Develop support for rough sleepers
- 2.12 Apply for relevant funding
- 4.1 Ensure low B&B use

#### 1.1 Improve awareness and public knowledge

The team actively engaged with Communications to ensure regular social media campaigns were ran to inform the public of the sustainment services and support we could give to those at risk of homelessness as a result of the pandemic. We continued to deliver private rented sector and social housing lets as well as sign up to temporary accommodation.

The team also continued to build relationships with partners, such as The Salvation Army and Citizens Advice through meetings, joint training and regular communication.

### 1.3 Early referrals for homeless cases & 1.9 Redesign the website

We redesigned the housing pages on the website to ensure that we were legally compliant i.e. explaining how to make a homeless application. We reviewed all content to make sure it was relevant and useful as well as moving this to the corporate website and away from the out of date Living&Homes site.

This included updating the pages for rough sleeping and Duty to Refer as well as simplifying the form and making it easier to use for partners to ensure referrers are not deterred from completing.

### 2.3 Review the Allocation Scheme

A thorough review of the current Allocation Scheme and the last few years data has been carried out. This involved reviewing (but not limited to) number of lets, number of refusals, number of people not bidding, number of reviews, types of people on the list i.e. by bedroom size, band, age, ethnicity.

All housing solutions staff were invited to give comments on what they wanted to see in the new scheme, what works, what doesn't, what is too ambiguous. A set of proposed changes were presented to Housing Committee on 06 January 2021 who approved these for consultation. Formal consultation commenced on 21 January 2021, including a questionnaire for the public which was sent to all members of the housing register. A further meeting with Members was held on 11 February 2021 to discuss these proposals further.

Once the consultation period ends, the data will be analysed and used to form the new scheme which will then be drafted and shared with RPs and legal services. The final scheme will be presented to Housing Committee in June 2021, with a view to commencing 01 July 2021.

### 2.11 Develop support for rough sleepers & 2.12 Apply for relevant funding

We have been successful for four Government funding bids which provided funding towards PRS access and initiatives for rough sleepers and single no PN customers. We were able to purchase and implement two emergency sleep pods in partnership with The Salvation Army which gives us another interim housing option as part of our rough sleeping delivery plan and winter provision.

We were successful for a grant for The Salvation Army and justahelpinghand and for a part time Sustainment Officer post.

**Action:** There are additional funding rounds available due to the pandemic and supporting those that are vulnerable. The Council will bid for additional funds as appropriate to support our rough sleeper delivery plan.

### 4.1 Ensure low B&B use

We have continued to keep B&B numbers low by utilising our own stock as TA, using a proactive preventative approach to support customers to stay in their existing homes or into alternative accommodation.

Despite the Government announcing an “Everyone In” scheme which required local authorities to provide accommodation to all those sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough, we were able to support the majority of people into our own stock as TA. We took a homeless application for all and engaged in a relief duty to give them the support needed to move onto suitable, settled housing.

In the first Lockdown there was just one single male that occupied B&B for an extended period, however this was due to lack of suitability for other housing tenures. This applicant was successfully supported into a PRS property by the team.

## Next Steps

The pandemic is far from over despite the progress made with the vaccination rollout programme and this will continue to impact on the housing service i.e. delivering services remotely until safe to do otherwise.

There has been some excellent progress over the last year despite these challenges and options such as the Emergency Sleep Pods provide us with an additional resource to keep people off of the streets.

Whilst we have met some of the objectives, such as maintaining low B&B numbers, this remains an objective for the remaining years of the strategy and there is a lot of work still needs to be done to ensure that we create opportunities for move on, that our new Allocation Scheme lets social homes to the right people at the right time and that our services are joined up with relevant partners such as heath.