

## Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Update, (Maggie Ward, Head of Housing Services and Business Planning)

### 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 intention to commence work on a new 3-year strategy to be brought to this committee in March 2024

### Recommendation(s):

Members note the update on the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 and the commencement of the review of the current strategy and evidential data with a new draft 3-year strategy to be brought to this Committee in March 2024

## 1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 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 and 5 and informs members of the intention to commence work on a new strategy.

## 2. Report

- 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 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. The overriding issue within the borough is the lack of affordable housing options for those seeking accommodation.

2.4 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. There are many more people who are in insecure situations which make them vulnerable and unable to access services.

2.5 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
3	5	4	4	2	2	2	1

2.6 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 government grants. This enables the Council to accommodate people whilst assessing their housing options and providing them with a Personal Housing Plan (PHP). There is then financial support available for deposits and rent in advance if a property can be found that meet our required standard. 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.

2.7 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.

2.8 The homelessness service have experienced significant staffing changes over the past year with only 1.5 FTE of last year's establishment still in place and 6 officers relatively new in place including the Housing Solutions Manager and an Interim Head of Service. There has therefore been a period of recruitment, consolidation and training and focus is currently on improving our client contact, both increasing the level of in person conversations, reviewing our internal documentation and developing user friendly guides. Work is in progress 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.

- 2.9 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 high levels of support to relieve or prevent homelessness. We are currently recruiting for a Housing Navigator, 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.
- 2.10 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 the buoyant local housing market and high levels of employment.
- 2.11 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.
- 2.12 The Council is reviewing 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.
- 2.13 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 anecdotally we are hearing that in line with the national trend landlords are selling due to imminent changes in legislation and recent mortgage increases.
- 2.14 A review will be carried out of the operations of Magna Carta Lettings to establish which products deliver the best outcomes for the Council and tenants and where future funding and resources should be focused. A report on Magna Carta Lettings will be brought to this committee and will inform the emerging strategy.
- 2.15 Work will commence on the next strategy this year with a significant focus on supporting people who do not fall into the priority need groups but present the most challenges in finding accommodation. 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.

2.16 Whilst the levels of homeless people in Runnymede are still comparatively low compared to other areas there is an increase in approaches to the authority for assistance and a reduction in the options available to people. 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 identify and support the client into a private sector tenancy in an area where they have connections if possible.

2.17 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 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, the Council is required to have due regard to its Public Sector Equality Duty before adopting the Strategy.

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.

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

## **7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 7.1 None

## **8. Conclusions**

- 8.1 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.

**(To resolve)**

### **Background papers**

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

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