



Report to: Communities Committee, 2nd November 2022

Report of: Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities

Subject: DRAFT HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY 2023-2025

1. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 1.1 Notes the contents of the report and in particular that the current Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 – 2022 comes to an end in December 2022;**
- 1.2 Approves a 6-week public consultation exercise to be undertaken on the Draft Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023-2025 (Appendix 1) and the Draft Worcester City Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Plan 2023 – 2025 (Appendix 2);**
- 1.3 Delegates to the Head of Homes and Communities, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Communities Committee to determine the submission of any proposed changes to the final strategy document and any changes to the action plan, deemed necessary following the review of consultation feedback; and**
- 1.4 Notes that any final amendments to the strategy and action plan determined in accordance with 1.2 and 1.3 above be recommended to Council for adoption.**

2. Background

- 2.1 Local Authorities have a duty to publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (Homelessness Act 2002 as amended by Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) every five years and must include the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for ensuring that sufficient accommodation and support are or will be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.
- 2.2 For new strategies, prior to the publication, local authorities must undertake a review of homelessness in their area. The review is a comprehensive assessment of the nature and extent of homelessness, developed by analysing homelessness data and the views of customers and partner organisations.
- 2.3 During the pandemic the usual homeless approaches altered as households were sheltered from eviction and a substantial number of rough sleepers (and those at risk of rough sleeping) were accommodated through government funded initiatives

“Everyone In” and “Protect and Vaccinate”. In more recent months the Council has seen a return to homelessness presentations more indicative of pre-pandemic levels both in terms of the cause of homelessness and volume of approaches

- 2.4 The supply of accommodation reduced and became more restricted during the successive lockdowns, with many Registered Providers and Private Landlords seeing a reduction in turnover and ceasing to let properties that became vacant due to a combination of covid restrictions and staff shortages. This has led to increased demand and lengthened the amount of time households have remained in temporary accommodation provided through the Local Authority. Demand for short term and permanent accommodation remains high.
- 2.5 The previous strategy was developed following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the primary focus was around increasing prevention services and the supply of accommodation. The pandemic significantly changed the nature of homelessness, reduced the opportunity for prevention and increased the presentation of people who were ‘roofless’ and in crisis. As a result, the delivery of some actions were prevented whilst focus turned to the response of homelessness in light of the environment during the pandemic.
- 2.6 Local Authorities have a duty to improve the health of the people in the local area (Health and Social Care Act 2012) and should therefore be mindful of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment of homeless people. In Worcestershire the Health and Wellbeing Strategy is being renewed and officers anticipate it being published at the end of 2022.
- 2.7 The Council is also working with other organisations across the county to bring forward a Worcestershire Housing Strategy which is anticipated to be published in early 2023. Both of these new strategies are relevant in relation to developing the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and must be taken into consideration.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (**Appendix 1**) focuses on prevention, intervention and recovery, following the national strategy and good practise. The effects of homelessness for families and individuals can be devastating and have significant negative impacts on health and wellbeing, on educational attainment and on employment opportunities. The prevention of homelessness is also more cost effective for councils and other public bodies but where it occurs the ambition should be that it is rare and short-term.
- 3.2 To accompany the strategy, an Action Plan has been developed to inform the priorities and focus of resources by the Local Authority over the course of the strategy. The action plan is spread over three years with greater weighting to actions in year one with it being reviewed annually to ensure it focusses on any emerging priorities at the time given the dynamic and changing nature of homelessness, ensuring that it remains relevant and deliverable.
- 3.3 Worcester faces significantly different pressures, nature and scale of homelessness and rough sleeping by comparison to the rest of the County impacted by its geographical makeup and the supply and availability of affordable housing. As such,

to ensure that the actions reflect these challenges, the Countywide action plan will not be adopted in Worcester but replaced with a Worcester City action plan (**Appendix 2**).

3.4 The Worcester City action plan extends its focus by addressing seven priority themes of:

- Reducing rough sleeping
- Increasing the supply of affordable and supported housing
- Increasing the supply and reducing the use of temporary accommodation
- Improving service delivery
- Improving prevention mechanisms and reducing homelessness approaches
- Support provision
- Partnership working

These themes address the wider focus on prevention, intervention, recovery.

3.5 The strategy has been developed by an operational group of officers from across the County, including all Local Housing Authorities, the County Council and a representative from the voluntary sector. This work was supported by a wider stakeholder day held in Wyre Forest in June, that had attendance from over 60 people from a number of statutory and voluntary organisations. The stakeholder day covered workshops around homeless families, young people, domestic violence, vulnerable households and the supply of accommodation and attendees were also given presentations on homeless policies at national and local level by Steve Barkess from Homelessness Link and council officers.

3.6 As each council needs to take the strategy through its own decision making process the strategy has gone out to consultation for the other five authorities in October for a six week period. Worcester City will go out to consultation on the Countywide strategy and own action plan following consideration at this committee. The consultation will be promoted through the Council's website and social media as well as through notification to Council partners and stakeholders including those with lived experience. Consultation responses can be given through the questionnaire (**Appendix 3**), through Survey Monkey and/or electronic forms.

3.7 The Covid pandemic has had a considerable impact on people's lives and an impact around homelessness and has led to the Council and partners changing models of service delivery. In addition, there will be a new Worcestershire Housing Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy due to be published shortly and it is therefore appropriate to take this opportunity to renew the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy.

3.8 The strategy will seek to reduce homeless presentations with a focus on prevention and ensuring those that do become homeless are assisted through intervention and recovery work quickly to minimise the harmful effects of long term homelessness.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

The costs of adopting and delivering the strategy will be met by a combination of existing financial resources and external grants.

4.2 Legal and Governance Implications

Local Housing Authorities have a legal duty to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and to publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy every five years.

4.3 Risk Implications

The Council is required to have a strategy in place every five years and the current strategy expires in December 2022.

The strategy will support working collectively with other councils and partners to reduce statutory homelessness across the county. By focusing on early intervention and prevention where possible the strategy should reduce the risk of homeless crisis situations which are costly to the Council and homeless applicant.

4.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

This report supports all the themes in the new City plan:

- Stronger and connected communities
- A prosperous city
- A healthy and active city
- A heritage city with a 21st Century culture
- Enhancing and sustaining our beautiful city for future generations.

4.5 Equality Implications

There are no adverse equality implications identified in this report. Consideration will be given to any adverse equality implications following public consultation and once the strategy is finalised.

4.6 Human Resources Implications

There are no Human Resources implications identified in this report.

4.7 Health and Safety Implications

There are no Health and Safety implications identified in this report.

Ward(s):

All

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Background Papers:

**Appendix 1- Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper
Strategy
Appendix 2- Draft Worcester City Action Plan
Appendix 3- Example questions for strategy consultation**