

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 3 June 2019

Reporting officer: Assistant Director (Housing)

Subject: Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy

Purpose and summary of report:

To present the council's draft homelessness and rough sleeping prevention strategy, which has been circulated widely for consultation with stakeholders. The aim of this strategy is to set out the Council's approach for tackling homelessness in the district and how, over the lifetime of this strategy, the council will achieve this working with key partners.

The council's current homelessness strategy has expired and the production of a new strategy was delayed to allow for the Homeless Reduction Act to receive Royal Assent during 2017 and for subsequent guidance to be issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government in the form of a revised Code of Guidance, which contains key information around Government expectations for Homelessness Strategies and their production. The revised code of Guidance was issued in November 2017 and the Government consulted on this early in 2018.

This Strategy is the first one developed under the framework of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and is important as homelessness and poor housing conditions continue to blight lives, damage health, reduce opportunities and negatively impact on communities in profound ways. Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping is therefore a priority for the Council and the Council remains committed to preventing homelessness, helping people find housing that meets their needs and providing the support needed to prevent them from going back into homelessness.

This draft Strategy reinforces the council's commitment to preventing homelessness rather than dealing with households at the point of crisis. This is particularly important during a time where resources available to the Council are more limited and yet we are seeing an increase in numbers requiring support to sustain their existing home, or secure new accommodation.

Recommendations:

- Adoption of the strategy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The council's last homelessness strategy focused on preventing homelessness. This approach has delivered excellent results, especially in preventing family homelessness. Between 2015 and 2017, 523 households were provided with support to help them maintain their current home or find alternative accommodation and prevent their homelessness.
- 1.2 The review of homelessness was commenced in April 2018 and it is a detailed robust analysis of the challenges, trends, existing services and opportunities facing Gravesham. Consultation was pivotal in the development of the review and feedback received has been factored into the document.
- 1.3 The draft strategy was approved for wider consultation by the Housing Committee on 13 February 2019 and the consultation period closed on 17 May 2019. The consultation was undertaken via direct mailing to all agencies involved with tackling homelessness in the borough, publication on the Council's website, publication on the Kent Housing Group website, all district councils in the county and all elected Members were also notified by email of the process.
- 1.4 Two comments were received in response to the consultation exercise, one of the comments was from the YMCA and suggested increasing the supply of one bed and shared accommodation for young people (18 to 35 year-olds) in housing need. This suggestion will be included in the action plan, which is a live and evolving document.
- 1.5 The other comment was from a Kent-based Housing Association, highlighting a point of clarification in one of the assumptions made in the draft and which has been corrected. The point of clarification is in bullet point 5 on page 11 of the strategy, which is about the benefit restriction to the room rate only for those who are under 35, only applying to the private rented sector and not social housing as suggested in the draft consulted on.
- 1.6 The strategy, if adopted will continue the focus on homeless prevention and seek to improve homeless prevention for singles and couples. This is aligned with the Homelessness Reduction Act which aims to ensure a greater focus on the prevention of homelessness and offers some increased protection for single homeless people and couples without dependent children. It also sets out how, over the lifetime of the Strategy, services will need to shift from being advisory in nature to being more individualised and supportive to those who are presenting as homeless, and sets out key actions as to how this will be achieved.
- 1.7 The Council has a statutory duty to have this strategy in place, and the adoption of this strategy will therefore ensure that this statutory requirement is met.

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 2.1 There are no background papers pertaining to this report.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
Legal	<p>There is requirement on the council to produce a homelessness strategy. The 2002 Homelessness Act amended the 1996 Housing Act and outlines the legal requirement placed on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area, and develop and publish a strategy which sets out how the authority will prevent homelessness, based on the findings of the review. This requirement was not amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act and the new Code of Guidance strengthens requirements for Local Authorities to work with partners in the development of their strategy.</p> <p>These Strategies should be published periodically but at no longer intervals than 5 years.</p>
Finance and Value for Money	<p>The proposals are intended to set out the council's approach to tackling homelessness. Budgeting for the service is undertaken as part of the council's budget preparation, approval and monitoring processes with appropriate allocation to enable the council meet its statutory requirements.</p>
Risk Assessment	<p>The strategy will be consulted upon publicly with comments received considered prior to finalising the policy. The action plan which supports the policy will also be kept under review during the lifetime of the strategy to ensure that it remains relevant. A full risk assessment, including an equality impact assessment of the draft policy will also be carried out.</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	Screening for Equality Impacts
	Question
	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>Yes. It ensures that the needs of homeless people in the borough are met..</p>
<p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>	
Corporate Plan	Area of focus 2 – A stronger Gravesham
Crime and Disorder	Ability to meet the needs of people who are either threatened with homelessness or already homeless helps avoid them being victims of crime or becoming involved in disorderly acts themselves.
Digital and website	None

implications	
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	A more people oriented strategy will assist in ensuring that the needs of vulnerable residents are better identified and addressed.