



STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM

Tuesday, 3 March 2020

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2020-2025

Councillor Stuart Whittingham, Cabinet Member - Housing and Planning said:

“Recent welfare changes and rising rents have put increasing pressure on the affordability of housing for residents. This, along with a shortage of affordable homes and a range of complex social and health factors, have led to an increase in homelessness and rough sleeping over the last five years – nationally, regionally and within Wirral.

“With our partners we have made good progress in preventing homelessness and reducing rough sleeping – but there is still more to do. An independent review of homeless services, alongside consultation with our partners and stakeholders, has informed our new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy.”

REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks Members’ approval and endorsement of Wirral’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025, which has been developed following a detailed homeless review, which incorporated public consultation with stakeholders and service users.

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to adopt a strategic approach to homeless issues by completing a comprehensive review of all forms of homelessness in their area and publishing a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years, ensuring this is taken into account when discharging its homeless function.

The strategy has been developed to fully take account of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) which placed additional duties on Local Authorities to prevent homelessness in their area. The HRA came into operation on 1st April 2018 with additional duties placed on other statutory agencies to refer those who are, or at risk of homelessness to the Council, called a ‘Duty to Refer’ from 1st October 2018.

This draft strategy has been developed to respond to this legislation and in accordance with Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) Code of Guidance and its Rough Sleepers Strategy, requiring Local Authorities to include a focus in their Strategies on rough sleeping. This new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will support the Wirral Plan 2020 – 2025 and its key priorities and actions going forward.

This is a key decision.

The adoption of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-2025 is relevant to all wards.

RECOMMENDATION/S

Cabinet are requested to: -

- a) approve the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 - 2025 as set out in Appendix One of this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To approve the proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 so that Wirral will meet the legal obligations set out in the Homelessness Act 2002 and ensure services and actions are delivered to prevent and respond to homelessness in the borough.
- 1.2 The strategy will drive proactive and responsive homeless services, ensuring effective resources are targeted and improve outcomes for local people to live in settled communities.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 None, publishing a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy at least every five years is a statutory requirement of the Homelessness Act 2002.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on all local housing authorities (LAs) to carry out a review of homelessness and homelessness service provision for their area and, in consultation with local partners and stakeholders, formulate and publish a five year homelessness strategy based on the results of that review. This process is expected to be undertaken every five years.
- 3.2 MHCLG also released their Rough Sleeper's Strategy, and in December 2018, a Delivery Plan which set out their proposals to reduce rough sleeping across the United Kingdom. This document updated a series of requirements to be met by all LA's, specifically that:
 - All LAs update their Strategies **and rebadge them as 'Homelessness and Rough Sleeping' strategies.**
 - Strategies are made available online and submitted to MHCLG.
 - LA report progress in delivering the strategies and publish annual action plans.
- 3.3 All councils were contacted by MHCLG to establish progress and timescales for meeting the anticipated deadline from Government for new strategies to be completed by 31st December 2019. Council Officers set out the timetable of actions and milestones for both the Review and Strategy to be completed within MHCLG timescales. MHCLG felt that Wirral's progress and plans for delivery were clearly in place and progressing to plan, however, to meet their timescales this involved the intention for final sign off the Strategy via Strong Leadership route. MHCLG advised their preference was for this to be approved by Cabinet and therefore based on Wirral's work and the fact that a draft strategy would be produced by 31st December they agreed a new date for final approval of the Strategy at March Cabinet.

4.0 WIRRAL HOMELESS REVIEW

4.1 Arc4 Consultants were appointed in August 2019 by Wirral Council to carry out an independent review of Homelessness. The review involved extensive engagement with service users and service providers, through customer and agency surveys, focus groups, one to one discussions and interviews. The review also included a detailed analysis of homelessness presentations and outcomes, alongside demographic information.

4.2 The review has considered the key factors that will impact on homelessness and rough sleeping in the future, as well as an analysis of the current approach Wirral is taking to respond to the requirements of the HRA. The full findings from the homeless review can be found in Wirral's Homeless Review report and in the Executive Summary document which are set out as appendices to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy, attached as Appendix 1. However, some of the principal findings of the review are listed below:

- **Current and Future Homelessness Levels**

Homelessness and the demands on Council services have increased. The Housing Options Team experienced a footfall increase of 17% in 2018/19 following the introduction of the HRA. The largest cohort of people accessing services is single households (64%), with the largest age profile being 24-44 at 50%. For people presenting to the Housing Options Team, the main reason for homelessness is the loss of private accommodation (31%) with the second leading cause was being asked to leave accommodation provided by family and friends (16%)

In 2018/19, the Council successfully prevented homelessness for 44% of those households owed a prevention duty and relieved homelessness for 57% of those that were owed a relief duty, compared with 43% nationally.

- **Temporary Accommodation**

The number of households placed in temporary accommodation at the end of each year has increased (47% increase since introduction of HRA) and, similarly, there has been an increase in the number of placements made into Bed & Breakfast accommodation. This is reflective of the regional and national picture.

- **Activities & Services**

The complexity of need amongst the single homeless population (unresolved mental health problems, substance misuse, offending behaviour etc) has increased, meaning that it is becoming more difficult to identify suitable housing options for this profile.

- **Rough Sleeping**

In Wirral, there was a significant increase in rough sleeping (100%) from 2014 to 2018 which reflects increases nationally. However, since then, the new Assertive Outreach Service (funded by a successful bid to MHCLG) has been successful in reducing numbers of people sleeping rough by 62.5% in 2019.

There is a need, however, to better understand the health needs of rough sleepers and to explore the feasibility of developing accommodation options for respite and end-of-life care.

Stakeholders raised the issue of a lack of both housing options and daytime activities for rough sleepers and so it is recognised that there is a need to explore other accommodation models available to Rough Sleepers; and to investigate the development of day service provision that offers a range of services and activities.

In Wirral, there are a range of organisations from the faith and voluntary sectors that provide services to vulnerable people, the review recommends that the goodwill of these agencies continues to be harnessed, and co-ordinated through the Homeless Forum.

- **Housing-Related Support Services**

Despite having homeless accommodation services in Wirral, demand for this accommodation outstrips supply, and the gap between supply and demand increases each year. In October 2019, the waiting lists for these services reached its highest point. This is linked to the lack of availability of appropriate move-on permanent accommodation for people living in homeless accommodation services.

The lack of a dedicated homeless accommodation service for vulnerable women and mediation services to help people remain in their own home, were raised as gaps in provision.

- **Settled Accommodation**

There are 23,234 affordable dwellings across the borough and households in Birkenhead are more likely to live in this type of accommodation, whereas rural areas and West Wirral have the lowest levels of affordable accommodation.

The number of households on the Housing Register has remained relatively steady since 2016/17 at approximately 9000, with 58% of these requiring one-bed homes.

In 2018/19, 649 properties were allocated to people via the Choice-Based Lettings System and/or council nomination of urgent cases. This represents a reduction of 49% since 2013/14.

- **Resources**

The Homelessness Budget has remained static despite the increased levels of homelessness and rough sleeping and the resultant demand on services. The Council has, however, been successful in securing grants to support wider homeless-related activity, in addition to the Council's dedicated resources.

The Council's expenditure on temporary accommodation has grown significantly and not all expenditure is able to be recouped from housing benefit claims. The future of financial support from the Government, such as New Burdens funding and flexible homeless grant, is uncertain and therefore has the potential to place further pressure on Council budgets.

5.0 WIRRAL HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2020-2025

- 5.1 The findings and recommendations of the homelessness review have provided the basis for Wirral's 2020-2025 strategy which sets out the future direction for actions to prevent and address homelessness and rough sleeping in Wirral.
- 5.2 The overarching vision for Wirral's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is that:

"We will work in partnership to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping across the Borough; ensuring that those who require help are assisted to access appropriate, affordable accommodation and support services are tailored to improve an individual's health and well-being"

- 5.3 The Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a high-level strategic document that sets out 5 key priorities, which will be underpinned by a robust delivery plan that outlines key tasks and milestones to be undertaken. These priorities, and their principal associated actions, are set out below:

Theme 1 - Providing a joined-up approach to early intervention and homeless prevention across the Wirral.

- We will ensure that the Homeless Forum has multi-agency representation at the correct levels and establish task and finish groups comprising forum members, to deliver against identified actions.
- With partners, we will undertake an awareness-raising campaign to increase the profile of the issue of homelessness and the support available across the borough, resulting in increased prevention.
- We will establish a pre-eviction protocol with Registered Providers/ Social Landlords.

Theme 2 - Ensure that housing-related support services meet the diverse and complex needs of customers.

- We will undertake a review of housing-related support services to ensure that provision matches the findings of the review and demand on services.
- We will work with providers of homeless accommodation services to ensure that they are maximising the opportunities for homeless people to become involved in employment, training and education.

Theme 3 - Preventing and ending rough sleeping.

- We will work to reduce rough sleeping, with a wider commitment to end rough sleeping by 2027 in line with Governments targets.
- We will identify the key triggers that lead to rough sleeping, and work with partner agencies to ensure that these key triggers and risk factors are identified, and referrals to appropriate services.

Theme 4 - Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available;

- We will ensure an adequate supply of temporary accommodation is in place to meet the needs of customers while reducing the use of Bed & Breakfast by undertaking a review of our approach to temporary accommodation

Theme 5 - Improving access to and developing more settled accommodation solutions

- We will work with local private and social landlords to provide different accommodation options and models.
- The Council is committed to increasing housing supply. Homes England's current Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Programme identified that in Wirral by 2021 at least 283 new affordable homes will be delivered in partnership with Registered Providers.

- 5.4 Clearly, homelessness is not just a housing issue, but one that requires input from a range of statutory, community and charitable organisations. In recognition of this, oversight of the strategy and delivery plan will be provided and driven forward by the multi-agency Homelessness Forum, with the establishment of specific task and finish groups for key work areas where required. It is also proposed that Council Members receive an annual detailed report describing the progress made against the key themes of the delivery plan.

6.0 REVIEW AND STRATEGY CONSULTATION

- 6.1 As detailed in Section 3.2 of this report, Arc4, an independent consultancy, conducted a comprehensive review of homelessness in Wirral, which included an extensive engagement process with partner agencies and stakeholders. This included workshops with individuals who were currently accessing homeless services or who had previously accessed services.
- 6.2 The draft findings and recommendations identified through the review process were discussed and agreed with wider partners who form part of Wirral's Homeless Forum. This was done to ensure partner involvement and commitment to addressing and preventing homelessness in the future.
- 6.3 Further engagement has taken place with members of the Homeless Forum, internal Council teams and external stakeholders, to identify the key priorities and recommendations which should be focused upon in the draft Strategy and Delivery Plan.
- 6.4 An initial draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was made available online between 10th January and 29th January 2020 to enable further consultation with key stakeholders and reality check the evidence and input obtained as part of the review process. A questionnaire was posted on the Council's website and was publicised directly to all stakeholders via targeted email to ensure as wide an audience as possible could contribute to this final stage of the engagement process.

- 6.5 The questionnaire consisted of four key questions relating to the draft vision and the strategic themes developed however it offered the opportunity for any additional information to be given to the Council on the intended strategy. In total 66 respondents took part in the consultation although not all responded to every question. Of those respondents, 15% were organisations, 41% were individuals, 8% were private landlords, 36% did not specify.
- 6.6 The majority of responses (87.9%) agreed or strongly agreed with the vision set out in the strategy. There was an overall majority of support for all the priorities identified within the strategy. Providing a joined-up approach to intervention and prevention received the highest support (84.6% scored a 4 or 5 for relevance with 5 being the most). Preventing and ending rough sleeping had the lowest support response (75.4% scored 4 or 5). Whilst this priority theme scored the lowest of all priorities, there is still an overwhelming majority in support of this being set out and recognised in the Strategy.

7.0 CHANGES TO THE STRATEGY AS A RESULT OF CONSULTATION AND REPRESENTATIONS MADE

- 7.1 The public consultation exercise produced some valuable feedback which further informed the strategy. A summary of responses that shaped the final strategy include the following:
- There was general agreement with the vision however there was a recognition that it needed to include a focus on the individual's health and wellbeing in addition to their accommodation needs.
 - Some respondents raised the difficulty of engaging with entrenched rough sleepers, and the need to explore other models of support.
 - The importance of an awareness-raising campaign was mentioned.
 - There was general agreement with the themes set out in the strategy, with a recognition that there should also be a focus on identifying permanent housing solutions, rather than temporary ones; the need to prevent evictions and improve working relationships with private landlords; and the importance of co-ordinating the range of responses across providers and community groups.
 - It was reassuring to note that respondents were keen to ensure that their organisations played a role in responding to homelessness and rough sleeping.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications at this stage in respect of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 – 2025. Any future requirements and actions that identify any financial implications, would be considered by officers and reported to members accordingly.
- 8.2 Members should note however several services and activities are supported by Government grants (including current annual grants and specific funding programmes) If these grant levels change or are reduced this would impact on current and planned service delivery. This would be reported to members for consideration.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy supports the Council to meet its statutory responsibilities, as set out in the Homelessness Act 2002.

10.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

10.1 The Council commissions several homeless accommodation services that are provided by the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector. Any changes to the commissioning of these services arising from the priorities identified in this strategy will be the subject of a separate consultation process as part of any contractual arrangements which may be in place.

11.0 RELEVANT RISKS

11.1 Failure to have a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy would mean that there is a risk of:

- a) Wirral being in breach of its statutory duties under the Homelessness Act 2002 and new additional requirements set out by Government to local authorities as part of its Rough Sleepers policy approach.
- b) Failure to meet the timetable which has been set out and agreed with MCHLG to produce Wirral's Strategy.
- c) Homeless and rough sleeping increasing significantly without any co-ordinated resources and targeted action being identified.
- d) The Council and its partners not taking full advantage of investment opportunities to respond to homelessness and rough sleeping in Wirral.
- e) Key partners and stakeholders not being clear on the strategic priorities and actions required to be delivered and that the Council is focusing on, leading to key opportunities for investment and joint working being missed.

12.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

12.1 The development of the draft homelessness and rough sleeping strategy involved a two-stage approach to consultation.

12.2 The initial phase involved a comprehensive, independent review of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough in accordance with our statutory requirements under the Homelessness Act 2002.

12.3 Consultation was carried out over a period of three months. This involved direct consultation with key stakeholders, service providers, partners and individuals who had experienced homelessness and all were advised of how their contribution would help to shape the Council's strategic approach to the delivery of homelessness and rough sleeping services during the next five years.

- 12.4 The outcome of the homeless and rough sleeping review was used to inform the initial draft strategy. Although there is no statutory requirement to consult on the draft strategy a three-week online consultation exercise took place, which included an online questionnaire to capture any comments or suggestions for change.
- 12.5 This final draft of the strategy has been changed to reflect the outcome of this additional consultation exercise.
- 12.6 The consultation process followed has therefore been carried out in accordance with the Councils corporate approach in addition to statutory requirements.

13.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 seeks to address homelessness and rough sleeping for those who are vulnerable and subject to social exclusion and equalities issues.

14.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The recommendations contained within this report are expected to reduce emissions of Greenhouse Gases and / or CO₂ in the following ways:
- 14.2 Better use of the private rented sector to move households out of temporary accommodation will ensure these properties meet the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards and have valid Energy Performance Certificates.
- 14.3 Maximising opportunities to develop more social and affordable housing will provide an increased supply of energy efficient properties.
- 14.4 Bringing empty homes back into use, particularly where Council empty property grants are utilised, improves their energy performance compared to when they were last in use.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

REFERENCE MATERIAL

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
<i>"Homelessness in Wirral"</i> Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee	2nd July 2019

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Housing Act 1997 Part VII

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/part/VII>

Homelessness Act 2002

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/contents>

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/13/contents/enacted>

Homelessness Code of Guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>