



## CABINET

**Subject Heading:**

***Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy***

To consider and approve the draft Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy in principle so that formal consultation with residents, members, internal and external stakeholders can commence

**Cabinet Member:**

Councillor Joshua Chapman

**SLT Lead:**

Patrick Odling-Smee, Director of Housing

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**Policy context:**

***Homelessness Reduction Act 2017***

**Financial summary:**

***The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy action plan does contain cost implications. This report identifies how these costs will be managed.***

**Is this a Key Decision?**

***Yes, significant effect on two or more Wards***

**When should this matter be reviewed?**

***March 2020***

**Reviewing OSC:**

***Towns and Communities***

**The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives**

Communities making Havering

[X]

Places making Havering

[X]

Opportunities making Havering

[]

Connections making Havering

[]

## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report sets out the Council's draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for the next 4 years, that will be consulted upon for the next twelve weeks. It builds on progress made and highlights some of the key actions that are proposed be taken by the Council and its partners to help prevent and address homelessness.
- 1.2. The Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a sub-strategy within the Council's over-arching Housing Strategy and, following the consultation, will replace the existing one with an up-to-date, collaborative and sector-led approach to homelessness within our borough.
- 1.3. This report is being presented to Cabinet because producing a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a statutory requirement for local authorities, reiterated in guidance provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) following the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- 1.4. The draft strategy includes a number of key priorities which are supported by a range of actions and recognises the importance of partnership working, including across council departments, statutory and voluntary agencies.
- 1.5. In their national Rough Sleeping Strategy, the Government are committed to ensuring that all local authorities have an up to date homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, submitted to MHCLG and available on line by winter 2019. MHCLG will consider our strategy to be submitted once it is available on-line.
- 1.6. The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is being presented to Cabinet to seek a steer on whether there are other issues that should be included before formal consultation is carried out. Following approval, the Council will carry out a formal consultation with key stakeholders, members of the public, and partners over a 12-week period from November 2019 – February 2020. Responses from the consultation will be used to inform and shape the final Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and its future priorities. Cabinet approval will be sought in March 2020 on the proposed final strategy before it is adopted.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is asked to:

- **Approve** the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and ask officers to commence the formal consultation process with members of the public, key stakeholders and partners.
- **Note** that the outcome of the consultation will inform and shape the final Strategy and its future priorities before final approval is sought from Cabinet.

### **3. REPORT DETAIL**

- 3.1.** This report presents Havering's draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy showing how the Council and its partners will continue to work to prevent homelessness for those at risk and provide support when homelessness occurs. The Council has chosen to integrate the Rough Sleeping Strategy with the homelessness strategy into one document as the two areas are closely related.
- 3.2.** The proposed strategy is aligned with the vision and objectives set out in Havering's Corporate Plan 2019/20 and Havering's draft Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2019/23. It relies on the Council using its collective resources and expertise to prevent and address homelessness in the borough.
- 3.3.** This vision is underpinned by the following four key priorities which have corresponding actions:
- Managing homelessness demand through effective pathways - we want to stop people from becoming homeless and reduce the use of temporary accommodation.
  - Supporting our vulnerable residents - we will support those experiencing the crisis of homelessness, helping them to recover and regain their independence
  - Ending rough sleeping by 2022 – we will halve rough sleeping by 2021 and eradicate it by 2022.
  - Increasing the supply of affordable housing and reducing the use and cost of temporary accommodation – we will continue to invest in developing genuinely affordable housing in the borough and work with private landlords to improve access to affordable and good quality accommodation
- 3.4.** These priorities were informed by a review of homelessness in the borough that identified a number of key issues as summarised in the paragraphs below.
- 3.5.** The number of households in temporary accommodation has steadily increased since 2013/14 due to changes in the local housing market and a lack of affordable accommodation at or below Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. There was a reduction in 2018/19 which was largely driven by changes since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 that strengthened prevention activities and the provision of comprehensive housing options services to local residents.
- 3.6.** The most frequent reasons for homelessness are eviction by family, loss of private rented accommodation, and domestic abuse. The Council has invested in preventative services that seek to support people to remain in their existing home including:
- 3.6.1. employing Community Outreach Housing Solutions Officers who offer mediation and conciliation for families in their home environment;
  - 3.6.2. services to support those who have experienced domestic violence like the Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs);
  - 3.6.3. Havering Women's Aid refuge provision to reduce the risk to victims; and
  - 3.6.4. the Council is also supporting households to access alternative private rented accommodation with financial assistance where required.
- 3.7.** Our early intervention model is increasingly geared to helping people help themselves by identifying and resolving the root causes of their problems before they

become critical. The Council is committed to continuing to prevent families from becoming homeless and, where this is not possible, support them to relieve their homelessness situation.

- 3.8.** There is a very high demand for social housing in Havering. The Council has approximately 2,000 households waiting for Council homes with approximately 400 homes to let each year. The demand is highest in absolute terms for 1, 2 and 3 bedroom homes. Housing market pressures and the continuing unaffordability of housing in the borough will result in an ongoing increase in demand for support services to prevent homelessness.
- 3.9.** Using the levers at the Council's disposal, we are seeking to address the issues surrounding the supply of both affordable housing and available properties within the private rented sector. The Council's ambitious regeneration programme will provide a significant number of new, much needed homes across the borough, over the next 10 years. However, in the short term, the transitioning of existing tenants from properties earmarked for regeneration will create some permanent supply challenges but also opportunities for homeless households to be housed, albeit temporarily, in the resulting empty properties.
- 3.10.** At the same time, it is recognised that the private rented sector has a role to play in addressing the supply and demand imbalance. However, regulating the sector ensures that private rented properties offer residents a choice of safe, quality and well-managed accommodation. The key priorities are to reduce anti-social behaviour from rental properties which is caused by poor management, and improve housing standards. The Council acknowledges that the majority of landlords operate their businesses professionally and that the private rented sector can provide high quality housing options for local people.
- 3.11.** The introduction of selective licensing in Romford Town and Brooklands wards and the extension of the additional licensing scheme by including the remaining six wards currently not covered; Cranham, Upminster, St Andrews, Emerson Park, Hacton and Hylands, will allow the Council to focus action against landlords who ignore their responsibilities whilst providing a light-touch approach for compliant landlords.
- 3.12.** The action the Council and its partners have taken to date has delivered significant reductions in the numbers of rough sleepers in the borough. We recognise that, despite having low rough sleeping numbers in comparison to most London boroughs, the Council still needs to develop a more proactive response to tackling this issue, especially within Romford Town Centre. The agencies already work closely together to support vulnerable people however we need to improve this because new rough sleepers continue to present, as do others arriving in Havering from neighbouring boroughs. There are also a number of entrenched rough sleepers who are hard to reach due to the complexity of their issues, in particular drug and alcohol abuse and mental health problems. We have clear and genuine aspirations to halve rough sleeping numbers in Havering by 2021 and eliminate rough sleeping in the borough by 2022, ahead of national targets.
- 3.13.** Housing and homelessness are recognised as determinants of public health and critical to increasing the life expectancy of people living in Havering. The homelessness review highlights the additional support needs from a number of vulnerable groups and the draft strategy links with the Health and Wellbeing Board's

objectives to improve health and social care outcomes through integrated services, especially for those suffering from mental health and substance misuse.

**3.14.** Building on the successful joint working between housing, mental health support agencies and substance misuse agencies, the draft Strategy proposes to develop activities already underway, led by the Council's various partners who support homeless households, while also seeking to be more ambitious in key areas to improve further outcomes over the coming years.

**3.15.** We recognise that dealing with homelessness is complex and numbers can be unpredictable, so we are not complacent. We need to keep our plans under review to respond to variations in demand or increases in the level of rough sleeping in future. The Council therefore will view this strategy as a "live" document, which will be subject to regular review to make sure Havering effectively responds to and addresses issues of homelessness.

#### **4. Proposed timetable for adoption of the Strategy**

The proposed strategy, if approved, is planned to be ready for implementation from March 2020. The approach and timeline is set out below:

<b>Action</b>	<b>Date</b>
Cabinet decision to consult on the draft Strategy	13 <sup>th</sup> November 2019
Consultation period (12 weeks)	November 2019 – February (5 <sup>th</sup> ) 2020
Consultation analysis/updated strategy	February 2020
Cabinet decision to adopt the Strategy	11 <sup>th</sup> March 2020

#### **5. Consultation**

**5.1.** The consultation process will run for 12 weeks. This is in line with the Council's Consultation Policy on the basis that this is a major strategy and has significant impact.

**5.2.** The Council will engage with:

- Residents including rough sleepers, those living in temporary accommodation and those on the Council's housing register
- Members of Havering Council, MP's, Senior Managers of the Council
- Statutory partners
- Members of the Homelessness Forum
- Third sector and voluntary sector partners
- Private landlords
- Other council departments
- Housing providers
- Metropolitan Police
- Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge Clinical commissioning group
- Members of the Tenant Participation Panel
- Other relevant forums and interested parties

**5.3.** The methods of engagement that will be used will include:

- An online survey available on the Council's website for all using a summarised version of the strategy with a notification in 'At the Heart' and 'Living' magazines

for all residents. Summarised versions of the strategy will be produced in accessible formats for hard to reach groups.

- Round table discussions with organisations/forum members
- Team and one to one discussions
- Email briefings to staff, members and other stakeholders
- Rough sleeper engagement at the drop-in service at Salvation Army and Hope4Havering Night Shelter.
- Social media

**5.4.** The outcome of the consultation will shape the final strategy and inform the Equality and Health Impact Assessment that will accompany the final version of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

## **6. Governance and delivery of the Strategy**

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a critical strategy for the Council as it affects the delivery of a range of statutory services to Havering residents. This means that the oversight and responsibility for the delivery of the strategy will sit with a recognised body that spans housing, care services and health. It is proposed that the Health and Wellbeing Board and Havering Council's Housing Services department are currently best placed to fulfil this role.

However, in the longer term, this may need to be reviewed as MHCLG are currently (as at July 2019) consulting on proposals that could result in the establishment of Homelessness Reduction Boards. Depending on the outcome of the consultation, it is possible that the governance arrangements for the strategy will need to change to align with new requirements.

## **7. REASONS AND OPTIONS**

### **Reasons for the decision:**

#### **7.1. Reasons for the decision:**

Once the proposed draft strategy is approved, then officers can commence the formal consultation process. This will enable the Council to comply with its statutory duty to consult with residents and stakeholders in the development of a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, as well as make positive progress towards developing a fit for purpose strategy for adoption.

#### **7.2. Other options considered:**

“Do nothing” would put the Council at risk of legal challenge and breach statutory requirements for not developing and adopting a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This is because without a strategy in place, decisions taken relying on the strategy could be open to challenge.

## **8. IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

### **8.1. Financial implications and risks:**

The action plan, which is in Section 9 of The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, does contain cost implications, but the majority of these can be managed within existing Housing Demand budgets or by making use of existing grants. The Regeneration and Supported Housing Programme actions are being led by other services within the Council and the associated costs will be addressed by them. The exception to this is the re-modelling of the hostels which will be subject to a separate Executive Decision once the new model has been agreed and the costs and the funding sources have been identified.

### **8.2. Legal implications and risks:**

- (i) Section 2 of the Homelessness Act 2002 (“HA 2002) requires local housing authorities to review homelessness in their district and to formulate and publish a strategy based on the results of the review. It is accordingly a statutory requirement for the Council to have a published homelessness strategy and a failure to do so would present a risk of legal challenge to the Council.
- (ii) Section 1(4) HA 2002 requires a new strategy every 4 years. The proposed strategy is for 4 years, and subject to annual review, so is compliant with this requirement.
- (iii) Chapter 7 Housing Act 1996 (“HA 1996”) contains a local authority’s statutory homelessness obligations. Sections 1(5) and 1(6) of HA 2002 require housing and social services authorities to take the homelessness strategy into account when exercising their functions.
- (iv) Section 214A Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) (“HA 1996”) provides that the Secretary of State may from time to time issue codes of practice relating to homelessness or the prevention of homelessness. In accordance with section 182(1) of the HA 1996 Act, local housing authorities and social services authority are obligated to have regard for the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s Homelessness Code of Guidance in exercising their functions relating to homelessness and the prevention of homelessness. Failure to have regard to the Code would again potentially give rise to legal challenge to the Strategy.
- (v) The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into effect from 3 April 2018 and requires that local housing authorities must take reasonable steps to either maintain or secure accommodation for eligible applicants threatened with homelessness.
- (vi) Following the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, a new Code of Guidance was issued by the Secretary of State to include the prevention duties as required by the HRA 2017.
- (vii) Chapter 2 of the Code of Guidance relates to homelessness strategies and reviews.
- (viii) Clause 2.4 of the Guidance states that the homelessness strategy should take account of the additional duties introduced through HRA 2017. The proposed strategy does so by including prevention as Priority 1 of the action plan.

- (ix) The Code references Health and Social Care Act 2012 that requires a local authority to take such steps as it considers appropriate for improving the health of people in the area, including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Code focuses on having a multifaceted approach to homelessness and threatened homelessness with involvement of relevant departments and partner agencies.
- (x) Paragraph 2.10 of the Code states that housing authorities “must” consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy. Paragraph 5.2 of this report sets out those people, departments and organisations who will be consulted and encompasses a wide range of consultees in compliance with the requirement under the Code.

**8.3. Human Resources implications and risks:**

There are no Human Resource implications arising from the decision to consult with residents and all affected stakeholders on the draft strategy as these will be delivered through existing resources.

**8.4. Equalities and Health implications and risks:**

The outcome of the consultation will inform the Equality and Health Impact Assessment which will accompany the final version of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. Where necessary, the Service will set out an action plan to mitigate any adverse impacts identified.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None