



CABINET

Subject Heading:

Prevention of Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 - 2025

Cabinet Member:

Joshua Chapman, Lead Member for Housing

SLT Lead:

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Policy context:

(a) With the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017, the Council is required to have a separate, stand-alone strategy dedicated to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.

(b) Impact of COVID 19 on households and staff.

Financial summary:

There are minimal financial implications arising from publishing a statutory proposal. However, the implementation of this proposal will have significant financial implications.

Is this a Key Decision?

Yes

When should this matter be reviewed?

16 September 2020

Reviewing OSC:

15 September 2020

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

Communities making Havering
Places making Havering
Opportunities making Havering
Connections making Havering

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SUMMARY

The Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 sets out the London Borough of Havering's commitment to tackling all forms of homelessness in the borough.

We will seek to further help those who do become homeless into stable, long-term homes, whilst intervening early to prevent residents becoming homeless.

We have a clear and genuine aspiration to end long-term rough sleeping by 2022, whilst meeting the Government's objective to eliminate it altogether by 2024.

The strategy sets out a number of measurable priorities, through a dedicated action plan, to support some of the most vulnerable people in our borough who are at risk of homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To agree the Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025.

REPORT DETAIL

The Council recognises the importance of working with partners and industry experts to tackle homelessness and develop a truly bespoke pathway for each person that needs support, advice or housing. The Strategy has four over-arching objectives:

- Objective 1 – End long-term rough sleeping
- Objective 2 – Reducing the number of people in temporary accommodation
- Objective 3 – Supporting people who become homeless
- Objective 4 – Provide good value, integrated services that deliver excellent customer care

The draft strategy went out to consultation in December 2019 with the voluntary sector, housing associations, other public sector agencies, internal and external partners as well as Havering residents.

The resulting Action Plan reflects our response, highlighting how Havering and its partners will tackle homelessness in future years and deliver its strategic objectives. The delivery of the Action Plan will be monitored by the Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleeping Steering Group made up of Council, statutory and voluntary sector partners.

Following the Covid-19 outbreak, the Government has taken unprecedented steps to limit the impact of the virus by announcing a number of measures to prevent and reduce the risk of homelessness.

Guidance was issued to local authorities on social distancing, self-isolation, necessary travel and the closure of all but essential retailers. Housing authorities were asked to close night-shelters and further guidance was issued on managing people in supported housing. Additionally, the Government implemented a blanket ban on private sector evictions.

People experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 and the risks of those sleeping on the streets are even greater. We anticipate the pandemic to cause a rise in reports of domestic abuse and relationship breakdowns, as well as an increase in parental, family and friend evictions; we will actively monitor these scenarios to provide early intervention from the moment of contact.

We expect to see an increase in the demand for homelessness services and a reduction in the supply of affordable housing in the private sector. This strategy will therefore be monitored and reviewed in 12 months to ensure we respond to the changing circumstances of homelessness in the borough.

The development of new, affordable, social housing is critical to the success of the Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The Council's ambition to double the number of social homes in the borough through our Regeneration Programme demonstrates our commitment to reducing the levels of homelessness and supporting those most in need of housing.

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Reasons for the decision:

As a local housing authority, Havering Council has a statutory duty to publish a Homelessness strategy.

With the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017, the Council is now required to have a separate, stand-alone strategy dedicated to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. The HRA 2017 presents the biggest change to homelessness legislation in 40 years including new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Havering Council's Prevention of Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 aims to ensure the provision of support to people who were previously not entitled to help. It also seeks to help prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place by intervening earlier and encouraging other public sector bodies to actively assist in identifying and referring those who are at risk of becoming homeless.

Other options considered:

To not develop a standalone Prevention of Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

This was not a feasible option. We have a statutory duty to deliver a standalone Homelessness strategy.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Part B - Assessment of implications and risks

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

- 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.
- Local housing authorities have discretion to carry out a homelessness review and republish a homelessness strategy as often as they wish to, providing they do so at least every five years. The proposed Strategy is clearly compliant with this, being the Strategy effective from 2020 – 2025.
- The Homelessness Strategy and results of the Homelessness Review are to be made available to the public. It is recommended that these are published on the council’s website.
- Housing and social services authorities must take the homelessness strategy into account when exercising their functions.
- Local housing and social services authorities are obligated to have regard for the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s Homelessness Code of Guidance (“the Code”) in exercising their functions relating to homelessness and the prevention of homelessness.
- A chapter of the code sets out provisions for homelessness strategies and reviews. This includes that the homelessness strategy should take account of the additional duties introduced through Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The proposed Strategy does this.
- 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. This paper sets out that a wide range of organisations have been consulted with regard to the Strategy.
- Local authorities are under a statutory obligation 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. The Strategy proposes a multi-agency approach and references new protocols to be set up with NHS partners amongst other things.
- The challenges for homelessness as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic are set out in both this report and the Strategy. It is noted that as part of the Government’s ‘Everyone In’ policy, that the Council may be accommodating individuals who usually would not be entitled to assistance under Part 6 or 7 Housing Act 1996 (for example those with no recourse to public funds). This is currently acceptable as it is in line with

government policy in response to the pandemic. The Council would need to keep the situation under review as government guidance evolves.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

There are minimal financial implication arising from publishing a statutory proposal. However, the implementation of this proposal will have significant financial implications. Grant funding of £3.4m exists within Housing Demand. The grant funding which is administered by the MHCLG is made up of the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, Rough Sleeping Strategy (Pathways & Initiative) Prevention Fund, New Burdens and the Private Rented Sector Access Fund. £1.1m of this funding was brought forward from 2019/20 and £2.3m awarded for the year 2020/21. There has been no grant funding agreed to date for 2021/22. There is a risk that if unable to secure future grant aid for the years 2021/22-2024/25, the Authority will have to meet this funding deficit from its own budget.

The Government has committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminating it altogether by 2027. This will only be possible for Havering to achieve 5 years ahead of the target deadline, if sufficient funding and resources are allocated by the Government.

The change to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate to the lowest 30th percentile due to COVID-19 will enable more homeless individuals to afford private sector accommodation, however, the details of the duration of this change is still not known, which puts at risk their ability to sustain this type of accommodation as it may only be affordable in the short term.

Havering Council's regeneration scheme, which includes the redevelopment of 12 Estates across the borough has created the availability of short term temporary accommodation that are vacant, subject to delays in each phase of the redevelopment. It also creates a short-term rise in demand on housing stock as a result of the need to house existing tenants that are temporarily displaced by the programme.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The recommendations made in this report do not give rise to any identifiable HR risks or implications that would affect either the Council or its workforce.

EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to:

- (i) the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are: age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.

A full EIA has been completed as part of the Prevention of Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 – 2025 and is available as Appendix 2.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The strategy captures the profound impacts of homelessness in all its forms on physical and mental health.

The implementation of this strategy will generate significant benefits to the health and wellbeing of vulnerable residents. Significant decisions entailed in implementing aspects of the strategy will be informed by EqHIAs which will serve to identify opportunities to maximise health benefits and mitigate potential harms arising from the specific actions proposed.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 – 2025

Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 – 2025 - Equality and Health Impact Assessment