



Mayor & Cabinet

Report title: Review of the councils Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Date: 19th July 2023

Key decision: Yes.

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Director of Housing Services

Outline and recommendations

This report details the councils proposed updated Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. Housing Select Committee considered this policy at its meeting held on 9th March 2023 and supported the approval of this policy by Mayor and Cabinet.

It is recommended that Mayor and Cabinet agrees that the strategy set out in this report is approved.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

11 November 2020	Housing Strategy and Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Approved by Mayor & Cabinet
10 March 2022	Update to Housing Select Committee on progress of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-22 action plan
6 July 2022	Mayor and Cabinet approval of new Location Priority Policy
17 November 2022	Accommodation Procurement Strategy presented to Housing Select Committee
7 December 2022	Mayor & Cabinet Approval of Accommodation Procurement Strategy
August 22 – January 2023	Homelessness & Rough Sleeping strategy stakeholder and service user consultation
9 March 2022	Housing Select Committee review of Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-26

1 Summary

- 1.1. The current Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy was agreed in 2020 and expired in 2022/23. This strategy was proposed as a two-year document so that a new version could be established after the longer term implications of COVID-19 were fully understood.
- 1.2. This paper sets out a summary of the engagement process and proposed updated priorities within the strategy. It is accompanied by a statistical review of trends in homelessness approaches and underlying causes, activity in preventing and relieving homelessness, cohorts that may be more likely to become homeless or be threatened with homelessness and the profile of households experiencing homelessness. The strategy also provides an action plan for meeting the goals set out in the updated version of the strategy.
- 1.3. The proposed Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy and its accompanying action plan is included as Appendix 1. The statistical review that informed the development of the strategy is included as Appendix 2. The Equalities Impact Assessment is included as Appendix 3.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that Mayor and Cabinet agrees that the strategy set out in this report is approved.

3. Background

- 3.1. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their district. Until 2020 we had incorporated our homelessness strategy within the wider housing strategy. Given the increase in homelessness and rough sleeping since the inception of the previous housing strategy, we moved forward with a dedicated homelessness and rough sleeping strategy in 2020.
- 3.2. The current Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy was agreed in 2020 and expired in 2022/23. This strategy was proposed as a two-year document so that a new version could be established after the longer term implications of COVID-19 were fully understood.
- 3.3. An update on the Council's progress of the Homelessness Strategy 2020-22 action plan

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was provided to Housing Select Committee on the 10th March 2022.

- 3.4. Since the last strategy was developed, there have been significant changes in the housing landscape, the cost of living and rising homelessness levels. Whilst many of the challenges the council currently faces are a continuation of existing issues, a review has been completed to determine whether the existing priorities are still fit for purpose or requires updating to reflect our latest needs.
- 3.5. Officers have worked with a wide range of stakeholders who are involved in or operate within the homelessness agenda in Lewisham, to seek their views on the priorities within the strategy. The intention was to work with existing services within the council and established forums of commissioned and community organisations addressing homelessness in the borough, as well as creating opportunities for service users to inform the development of the strategy.
- 3.6. On 9th March 2023 Housing Select Committee reviewed the updated Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. The committee noted the updated strategy and requested that information was circulated to the Committee on the targets being proposed for the strategy's Action Plan, before the strategy is presented to Mayor and Cabinet for approval.
- 3.7. This report outlines the outcome of the review/refresh of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-22 and the main themes emerging for the updated version.

4. Policy context

- 4.1. This report supports the aims and objectives the councils Corporate Strategy: Quality Housing - to provide as many people as possible with safe, comfortable accommodation that they can be proud of and happy living in, and holding landlords to account.
- 4.2. This report supports the achievement of the following Housing Strategy 2020-26 objectives: Preventing Homelessness and meeting housing need
- 4.3. This strategy sets the overall framework for the ambitions set out in Lewisham's Accommodation Procurement Strategy.
- 4.4. This strategy also complements the councils Location Priority Policy, which sets out how the council will prioritise the allocation of temporary and private rented sector accommodation that is available in different locations to our homeless households.
- 4.5. This strategy also complements the councils Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021–2026.

5. Previous strategy - Homelessness & RS Strategy 2020-2022

6. Lewisham's Homelessness Strategy 2020-22 set out the borough's strategic priorities in five key objectives as follows:
 - Prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity with the most appropriate level of support;
 - Support people to access a stable and secure home;
 - Support rough sleepers to enable access to services and sustainable accommodation;
 - Adapt and be agile in our service delivery to support residents impacted by COVID-19;
 - Strengthen partnership working.
- 6.1. An update on the councils progress of the Homelessness Strategy 2020-22 action plan, which has now lapsed, was provided to Housing Select Committee on the 10th March

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2022. The progress against this action plan had been heavily impacted by the covid-19 pandemic, meaning that work priorities were changed due to newly emerging priorities and capacity challenges.

- 6.2. There were a total of 48 specific actions. For the majority of actions, the status is 'ongoing' as many of these actions form 'business as usual' service and do not have milestones / end points. These activities will continue alongside the delivery of the new strategy.

7. Engagement and Consultation - Reviewing the priorities

- 7.1. Since 2020, there have been more challenges in the delivery of homelessness services as a result of the onset of the pandemic and changes to the housing market / cost of living. Whilst many of the challenges we face are a continuation of existing issues, we wanted to review whether the existing priorities are still relevant and reflect our needs or requires updating to reflect our latest needs.

- 7.2. Between August 2022 and January 2023 we engaged with service users, council services and external organisations to find out their views on our homelessness & rough sleeping strategy. The engagement events focussed on exploring the existing themes within the strategy, our progress against these and other priorities they would like to be considered.

- 7.3. A number of engagement activities took place including formal face-to-face engagement events, discussions with internal partners, workshops with commissioned and non-commissioned providers and community organisations in Lewisham, followed up by an online survey for service users. These include:

- Staff working in the housing needs service were invited to attend 4x workshops in August 2022 to contribute to the development of the homelessness strategy by discussing the current themes;
 - Wider council stakeholders were invited to attend a workshop in September 2022 to discuss the themes within the strategy and how these relate to other areas of work
 - Feedback from over 50 service users / people with lived experience of homelessness through surveys, client committee meetings, one-to-one conversations and group discussions.
 - The Lewisham Homelessness Forum including community homeless organisations, commissioned providers and third sector organisations were invited to take part in a focus group during a forum meeting;
 - External commissioned providers from the Rough Sleeping Pathway, Mental Health Pathway, Young Persons Pathway and Single Vulnerable Adults Pathway were invited to attend workshops to discuss the themes within the strategy and how these relate to other areas of work;
- St Mungos
 - Dinardos
 - Quo Vadis Trust
 - Thamesreach
 - Apax
 - Honour Lee
 - Bench
 - One Housing
 - Equinox
 - Change, Grow, Live
 - Ladywell Hospital
 - 999 Club

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8. Summary of findings

8.1. The feedback we received suggested that existing overarching priorities continue to reflect the current needs in Lewisham. In terms of issues raised, a number of recurring themes were identified:

- The outcomes of the engagement highlighted that three themes that were mentioned the most by participants were: 'communication and information sharing', 'support' and 'supply of accommodation'.
- Improving communication regarding the housing support pathways, and other forms of support available was supported as this would enable households to understand the reality of the housing shortage and to be better informed to make their own decisions.
- The need for a continued focus on prevention was clear, by working closely with landlords, partners and other stakeholders to ensure that opportunities to maintain tenancies are maximised. In particular, this included eviction from family and friends, and feedback made clear the need to develop our mediation offer and enhance opportunities to resolve relationship breakdown.
- Equally, there is need to secure more private rented properties both to enable discharge of the homelessness duty, and to prevent homelessness occurring without households having to enter temporary accommodation.
- The engagement found that responding to Covid-19 was no longer viewed as a main priority as our service response has largely become business as usual. However, it was noted that the ability of the council to be agile in response to live issues should continue to feature in the strategy.
- Feedback also highlighted that the current rough sleeping pathways are successfully helping to divert people away from the streets and this needs to be sustained. However there remain concerns about a number of rough sleepers who are experiencing repeat incidences of rough sleeping as well as cases for those whose immigration status means they have No Recourse of Public Funds, restricting the services that would have kept them off the streets.
- Welfare reform and changes to the cost of living are continuing to impact residents, in particular those out of work and single people under the age of 35. Managing the impact will be necessary to prevent homelessness occurring. This includes a focus on supporting households by, for example, assistance with benefits, getting into employment or with their financial management skills to ensure rent arrears do not arise and homelessness is prevented.
- Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) was a priority for many respondents. The rate of exit from TA is slowing as the number of available lets in the social housing and private rented sectors have diminished. The Council has recently agreed an Accommodation Procurement Strategy which sets out an action plan for ensuring a sufficient supply of accommodation for homeless households.
- Feedback also noted the need to ensure that the accommodation available supports a range of people including young people, those fleeing abuse and violence, vulnerable adults and people with accessibility needs.
- It was acknowledged that people facing homelessness require access to a range of support services, and developing the coordination of services, policies, and processes between partners would be beneficial.

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9. The Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-26

- 9.1. Lewisham’s strategic vision will guide all our work with partners to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. Over the next three years, the key priorities of the updated Homelessness and Rough Sleeping will seek to:
- Prevent homelessness by supporting more households to remain in their homes or helping them to find alternative accommodation;
 - Where homelessness does occur, ensure there is a supply of suitable accommodation for eligible households to move into;
 - Deliver an ongoing reduction in the number of people sleeping rough and ensure that where it does occur it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.
 - Improve pathways and partnerships internally and external with public authorities and other partner agencies to prevent and alleviate homelessness.
- 9.2. Under these four priorities, officers have developed a series of actions, initiatives and key performance indicators for each priority, setting out the activity that the council needs to undertake and how it will measure success against the goals set out in this strategy. Some actions reflect continued work streams that will include current council agreed targets, whilst in others, development of our current work, or a new initiative is required, together with support from partners.
- 9.3. Officers will monitor performance against these benchmarks regularly throughout the life of the strategy, alongside the implementation of the councils Accommodation Procurement Strategy. Progress against these benchmarks will be used assess the impact of the Action Plan on improving our response to homelessness Lewisham.

Summary of strategy priorities and changes

Priority	Update
Prevention	No change to priority , but we have reviewed the activities in the accompanying action plan to reflect feedback from consultation.
Accessing Accommodation	No change to priority , but we have reviewed the activities in the accompanying action plan to reflect feedback from consultation.
Rough Sleeping	No change to priority , but we have reviewed the activities in the accompanying action plan to reflect feedback from consultation..
Being agile in response to Covid	Remove priority – feedback from consultation indicated that the activities that were set have broadly become business as usual
Partnership Working	No change to priority , but we have reviewed the activities in the accompanying action plan to reflect feedback from consultation.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. There are significant costs associated with housing generally, including managing the allocations service, managing the supply and provision of council housing and providing services to those experiencing homelessness or the threat of homelessness and rough sleeping. All of these are affected over time by demand. Development of the Housing Strategy 2020-26 and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy 2023-26 helps to manage this demand with the resources allocated for that purpose.

11. Legal Implications

- 11.1. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 requires local housing authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness (when anyone is threatened with it within 56 days) and to “relieve” homelessness (through maintaining or securing

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accommodation) for eligible applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

- 11.2. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to review homelessness in their district and prepare and publish a homelessness strategy based on the review. The council is required to take its Homelessness Strategy into account in the exercise of its functions. A 'homelessness strategy' means a strategy formulated by a local housing authority for: (a) preventing homelessness in their district; (b) securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in their district who are or may become homeless; (c) securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in their district: (i) who are or may become homeless; or (ii) who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again. In formulating or modifying a homelessness strategy a local housing authority must have regard to: (a) its current allocation scheme under section 166A of the Housing Act 1996, (b) its current tenancy strategy under section 150 of the Localism Act 2011, and (c) in the case of a London borough council, the current London housing strategy.
- 11.3. The Council is required to consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate before formulating or modifying a homelessness strategy. The consultation that has taken place is set out at in this report.
- 11.4. The Council must keep its homelessness strategy under review. A copy of the Strategy must be available for inspection at the council's principal office, or a copy provided to member of public if asked for, and the Council should publish the Strategy and review documents on the Council's website.
- 11.5. The council is also under a general duty, pursuant to s11 Children Act 2004, to have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area. The duty under section 11 would suggest a strategy that seeks to prevent children from becoming homeless which is one of the things the Homelessness Strategy seeks to achieve

12. Equalities implications

- 12.1. A draft Equalities Analysis Assessment has been completed and is included at Appendix 3.

13. Climate change and environmental implications

- 13.1. There are no anticipated climate change and environmental implications.

14. Crime and disorder implications

- 14.1. There are no anticipated crime and disorder implications.

15. Health and wellbeing implications

- 15.1. The Homeless and Rough Sleeping strategy has been developed in partnership with Public Health, NHS and community colleagues; therefore priorities under this strategy have evolved from a multi-disciplinary lens. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fact that health is a vital consideration in this strategy, particularly our service provision for rough sleepers who have a variety of complex health needs.

16. Appendices

- 16.1. Appendix 1: Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-26 & Action Plan
- 16.2. Appendix 2: Homelessness Statistical Review
- 16.3. Appendix 3: Equalities Analysis Assessment

17. Background papers

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17.1. Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-22

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