

Somerset West and Taunton

Scrutiny Committee – 5th February 2020

Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 - 2023

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Fran Smith

Report Authors:

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1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 District Councils have a statutory duty to adopt a Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy. This strategy sets out the strategic goals for the four Somerset Housing Authorities including a detailed action plan to show how the strategy will be delivered. Our existing Somerset Homeless Strategy was adopted in May 2018; this was an interim strategy which only ran until December 2019 so we now need to update the strategy taking into consideration the priorities identified in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Needs Assessment 2019, together with the new requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2019.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to enable Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the content of the proposed Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (and Action Plan) 2019-2023 (SH&RSS)

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the proposed Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and Action Plan (2019-2023), and provides:
 - in principle support for the adoption of the SH&RSS, subject to
 - any comments for consideration by the Executive (10th February 2020) who will be asked to formally recommend the adoption of the Strategy to Full Council

3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 The development of the draft SH&RSS has highlighted a number of key risks, as described below:

Description	Likelihood	Impact	Overall
Impact of HRA on staffing levels and associated risks to service delivery – Additional pressures on staff, delay in	4	4	16

appointments to deal with homelessness applications which make it difficult to keep up with casework, and associated impact on quality of advice. Housing options staff are much sought after – risk of losing staff to other authorities			
Mitigation: Ensure processes are regularly reviewed to ensure work load is managed and staff are supported to deliver a good quality service. Provide staff training where needed to help staff be successful in their role	2	3	6
Action Plan is too aspirational – there is a lack of resources to accomplish all that is needed to support vulnerable individuals and families	4	4	16
Mitigation: Resources across the housing, health and care systems are stretched. The Action Plan will require on going partner engagement to define priorities and to coordinate resources (this to include external resources e.g. grant applications). The action plan will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis	2	2	4
Escalating B&B provision / costs – attributable to an increase in the number of homeless applicants that are assisted under the HRA, and stretched capacity within Temporary Accommodation	4	4	16
Mitigation: Continue to use and develop homelessness prevention measures to avoid the need for B&B. Seek to expand capacity within TA	3	3	9
Increase of ASB and crime on the streets - due to the inability to reduce / prevent homelessness and rough sleeping	3	4	12
Mitigation: We have achieved success in this area recently, with the funding secured to develop the Rough Sleeper Initiative (Taunton). The adoption of this strategy will help support future funding bids to maintain such essential support networks	2	3	6
Government funding: Loss of Govt funding if we fail to meet targets	3	3	9
Mitigation: Ensure the correct processes are in place (including the management and monitoring of both Homefinder and the action plan attached to this strategy) to ensure we can evidence the requirements needed to access funding	1	2	3

Reputation – failure to have a strategy and clear processes on how we deal with homelessness and rough sleeping. Homeless decisions on applications would be invalid	4	5	20
Mitigation: Adopt the homelessness strategy and supporting action plan, and review in four years	2	2	4

4 Background and Full details of the Report

4.1 The 2002 Homelessness Act places a duty on Local Authorities to develop a homelessness and rough sleeper strategy and an obligation to renew it every five years. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, introduced new measures for dealing with homelessness including:

- Increasing the length of time a housing authority should treat someone as threatened with Homelessness from 28 to 56 days
- The introduction of Personalised Housing Plans for clients to outline the circumstances of homelessness, the housing needs of the client, any support required to secure and sustain accommodation, steps that the client is required to take along with the steps the Local Authority is required to take to assist the client
- a new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible households threatened with homelessness
- a new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants
- a new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

4.2 The current interim strategy was developed by the four District Councils in Somerset and was adopted in 2018. Since the adoption of the Interim Strategy we have collectively conducted a Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Needs Assessment which has been used as the evidence base for the 'Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 – 2023' as well as considering the new requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

4.3 A Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Needs Assessment 2019 (Appendix 1) was carried out to assess the need within the county. This has been used to inform the new Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-23 (Appendix 2). The strategy includes 6 priorities for 2019-23:

- Provision of adequate, affordable accommodation
- The provision and effective use of temporary accommodation
- Support the Government's commitment to combat rough sleeping
- Support prevention and early intervention

- Enable specific client groups to access suitable accommodation
 - Maintain strong working relationships across partnerships
- 4.4 The SH&RSS will be implemented by each district through the Homelessness Managers Group (HMG) who will be responsible for the day to day delivery of this strategy and actions contained within the action plan; including monitoring progress against actions and targets at the monthly HMG meetings. There will also be a link with the Somerset Strategic Housing officers Group (SSHG) who are responsible for the delivery plan for the Somerset Housing Strategy 2019-2023, so close links will be maintained between both groups to ensure we keep track of progress on actions overall.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 These proposals relate directly to the Housing and Communities priority, and will help enable the delivery of a number of the supporting objectives:

3.0 Homes and Communities	
A district which offers a choice of good quality homes for our residents, whatever their age and income, in communities where support is available for those who need it	
3.1	Increase the number of affordable and social homes in our urban towns, rural and coastal communities; including those built by the Council.
3.3	Reduce anti-social behaviour through working with residents and our partners as well as tackle economic, social and health inequalities within the groups and communities that need extra support.
3.4	Work to end homelessness and rough sleeping in the District.
3.5	Engage with the voluntary sector in their mission to help support our communities

6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific resources requested as part of agreeing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-23, however there may be financial implications linked to the achievement of the action plan which will either be covered within existing budgets or come forward for funding as appropriate.
- 6.2 Risk: Housing Options (the delivery end of the homelessness and rough sleeper service) operate within a complex environment that is reliant on support services, private sector landlords, the voluntary and community sector etc. The action plan that supports the SH&RSS is critical in this context. Failure to support clients in their existing accommodation or to access suitable and affordable accommodation causes B&B costs to escalate.
- 6.3 Risk: There could also be the potential costs of legal challenges should internal protocols fail due to the set of review rights imposed by the Homelessness Reduction Act. There are financial implications if the Council is legally challenged due to its

decisions and there could be costs associated with any ombudsman enquiries as a result of procedural failures within the department.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 It is a legal requirement in accordance to the Homelessness Act 2002 that Housing Authorities have in place a Homelessness Strategy based on a Homelessness Review (e.g. Appendix 1) within their district. This exercise should be carried out and the strategic documents reviewed at least every five years.
- 7.2 The current strategy has an end-date of December 2019. So we are currently working from an out of date strategy. Homelessness decisions can be challenged on the basis of an out of date strategy. However, this is rare. Also, the four districts have made good progress towards the adoption of the revised strategy, which will be material evidence in any challenge.
- 7.3 As per 6.3, there could also be the potential costs of legal challenges should internal protocols fail.

8 Climate and Sustainability Implications

- 8.1 This strategy has no direct impact (positive or negative) on climate change / carbon emissions. Indirectly, there are implications for other service areas e.g. housing enabling and the provision of new build accommodation. There is a separate workstream looking at sustainable construction/energy efficiency of new build dwellings.
- 8.2 Adverse weather conditions (excessive heat or cold or precipitation) can have a significant and traumatic effect on vulnerable groups such as rough sleepers, enhancing vulnerability (and indeed a threat to life) and placing extra stress on services
- 8.3 The most extreme example of this was the flooding of the Somerset Levels in December 2013. Somerset, along with other areas in the country, experienced unusually heavy rainfall resulting in extensive flooding. Around 165 properties on the Somerset levels and moors were flooded to an average depth of 0.7m. Evacuation of homes began in early January 2014 and a major emergency was declared, with significant and extensive impact on council resources, including housing options who were on the front line of the response.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

- 9.1 The proposals will have a positive impact on safeguarding and community safety
- The strategy proposes enhanced / coordinated partnership activity around vulnerable people, along with more training for staff
 - The strategy supports enhanced / coordinated partnership activity in relation to rough sleepers. The Taunton Rough Sleeper Initiative has had a significant impact in both supporting this vulnerable group of people, as well as improving community safety within the town centre. The strategy and action plan supports the continuation of this work and will form the basis of further resourcing bids to Government and other fund holders.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1 A comprehensive EIA is attached at Appendix 3. The EIA has directly influenced the development of priorities and activities within the SH&RSS.

11 Social Value Implications (if any)

- 11.1 There are no direct Social Value implications. However, indirectly, we (districts and other partners such as the County Council) do commission services to support homeless and rough sleeping e.g. Pathways to Independence, Step Together etc.
- 11.2 Social Value considerations are built in to such strategic procurement activity
- 11.3 Locally, SWT is to reconsider its Social Value policy and objectives. A report will be presented to Members during Spring 2020. This, alongside a strategic review of our support to the voluntary sector, will naturally inform future commissioning intentions with the objective of delivering enhanced levels of Social Value.

12 Partnership Implications

- 12.1 The response to homelessness and rough sleeping is embedded in strategic and local partnership activity, as noted throughout the strategy and supporting action plan

13 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 13.1 Vulnerable individuals and families can often present with a range of physical and/or mental health problems. Vulnerable people are more likely to be at risk of homelessness. Rough Sleepers often have significant physical and mental health problems, often compounded by addictive behaviours. The life expectancy of rough sleepers is mid-40s. Female rough sleepers are some of the most vulnerable people within our society.
- 13.2 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy embraces and promotes a partnership response that includes key agencies such as Public Health, the Clinical Commissioning Group, Somerset Hospitals and social care (children and adults). Health and care partners are the commissioners for many of the homelessness support services such as P2I, Positive Lives and Step Together.

14 Asset Management Implications

- 14.1 None

15 Data Protection Implications

- 15.1 No direct implications.

16 Consultation Implications

- 16.1 Consultation and engagement has informed the development of the strategy and action plan. Please refer to section 4 of the Needs Assessment (Appendix 1). Consultation and engagement with partners will continue to inform the development of the action plan. This will be reviewed and monitored on a regular basis by the Homelessness Managers Group (HMG).

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – Yes**
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – Yes**

Reporting Frequency: ☐ **Once only** ☐ **Ad-hoc** ☐ **Quarterly**
 ☐ **Twice-yearly** ☐ **Annually**

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix 1	Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Needs Assessment 2019
Appendix 2	Somerset Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2023
Appendix 3	Equalities Impact Assessment

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