



CABINET REPORT

Report Title	Approval of Northampton's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan 2020-23
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Expected Date of Decision:	20 May 2020
Key Decision:	Yes
Within Policy:	Yes
Policy Document:	Yes
Directorate:	Housing and Wellbeing
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Ward(s)	All

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to ask Cabinet to approve Northampton Borough Council's new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan 2020-23 ("the Strategy").
- 1.2 Implementation of the Strategy will continue until the transition to a new unitary West Northamptonshire Council on 1 April 2021, which will become the local housing authority for all of West Northamptonshire on that date, and by which time it is likely that a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will have been developed for the new authority.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Approves the Council's new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan for the period 2020-2023; and

- (b) Delegates to the Director of Housing and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing, to make any minor changes to improve the layout and readability of the Strategy and Action Plan prior to publication.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 (“the Act”) requires the Council to undertake a Review of Homelessness (“the Review”) in the Borough of Northampton (“the Borough”) for the purpose of formulating and publishing a new Homelessness Strategy (“the Strategy”) at least once every five years, based on the findings of that Review. It must allow for the inspection, without charge, of the results of the Review by members of the public.
- 3.1.2 The Council must then take that Strategy into account in the exercise of its local housing authority functions. The Act also requires the social services authority for Northamptonshire, namely Northamptonshire County Council (“NCC”), to take the Council’s Strategy into account in the exercise of their own functions in the Borough.
- 3.1.3 A Homelessness Review means a review of the level, and likely future levels, of homelessness in the Borough and the activities that are carried out for the purpose of:
- preventing homelessness;
 - securing that accommodation is or will be available for people in the Borough who are or may become homeless; and
 - providing support for people in the Borough who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.
- 3.1.4 A Homelessness Strategy is a strategy formulated for the objectives of :
- Preventing homelessness in the Borough;
 - securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people who are or may become homeless; and
 - securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in the Borough who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.
- 3.1.5 A Strategy may include specific objectives to be pursued, and specific action planned to be taken, in the course of the exercise of the functions of the Council as a local housing authority, as well as by NCC as a social services authority.

- 3.1.6 In formulating or modifying a Strategy, the Council must have regard to its Housing Allocation Scheme and its Tenancy Strategy, the latter to which the registered providers of social housing in the Borough must have regard when formulating policies regarding the tenancies they grant.
- 3.1.7 In recent years, substantial amendments have been made to the primary homelessness legislation which the Council's Strategy needs to consider, including, most notably, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came into effect in April 2018.
- 3.1.8 In February 2018, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government ("MHCLG") published its Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities and, in August 2018, it published its National Rough Sleepers Strategy and directed local housing authorities to include rough sleeping in their Homelessness Strategies.

The Council's Homelessness Review

- 3.1.9 The purpose of the Council's Review of Homelessness , which was carried out during October and November 2019 and which was conducted having considered MHCLG's 2018 Code of Guidance, was to:
- Examine current levels of homelessness and housing need, break down the underlying causes of homelessness and the types of household that become homeless, and consider whether certain groups or types of household are at higher risk of homelessness or require specific intervention;
 - Identify current provision in the area; mapping services and activities and the resources available to the Council and its statutory and voluntary sector partners to prevent and relieve homelessness; and
 - Identify gaps and weaknesses in the current provision and estimate likely future levels of homelessness and the range of factors that may affect and contribute to them.

Northampton's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-23

- 3.1.10 The findings from the Homelessness Review were then used to inform the development of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Objectives and Action Plan during a series of workshops with stakeholders who work with single homeless people, rough sleepers and families.
- 3.1.11 When the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was completed, a 28-day public consultation was held in February and March 2020.
- 3.1.12 The Strategy (see **Appendix C**) takes into account the new legislation and guidance, the findings of the Review of Homelessness (see **Appendix A**) and the results and analysis of the public consultation (see **Appendix B**).

3.2 Issues

Key findings from Northampton's Review of Homelessness

3.2.1 The key findings from the Review are as follows:

- The number of homeless households for whom the Council has accepted a rehousing duty has increased significantly over the past few years. Together with a severe shortage of suitable move-on accommodation, this has resulted in a large increase in the number of homeless households (families and single people) living in temporary accommodation.
- Higher temporary accommodation numbers have resulted in the Council becoming increasingly reliant on expensive nightly-purchased temporary accommodation that is procured from private landlords.
- The increase in the number of homeless households accepted for rehousing is driven by two main causes: the ending of tenancies in the private rented sector and households being excluded by their parents or other members of their own family.
- This in turn is affected by: (a) diminishing affordability in the private rented sector and the structural problems that are making it difficult for households on a low income to access the private rented sector, and (b) the year-on-year decline in general needs social lettings and households' decreasing access to affordable housing.
- Although new homes are being built for affordable rent, this new housing supply has not kept pace with the steady decline in social lettings in recent years.
- Violent and non-violent relationship breakdown remains a main cause of homelessness.
- Since the 2011 Census, the increase in households renting privately and the decline in homeownership have continued, both in absolute numbers and proportionately.
- In line with the main causes of homelessness, most of the households approaching the Council when they are threatened with homelessness are living in the private rented sector or living with family or friends.
- The profile of the households approaching the Council for assistance under the homelessness legislation is disproportionately young (compared to all residents of Northampton) and disproportionately likely to be headed by a female main applicant.
- A notable aspect of the demographic profile of approaching households is the prevalence of single main applicants; only 17% had a partner in their household.
- A large minority of main applicants were in work (41%)
- Three quarters of households had no recorded support needs. Structural homelessness appears to be a bigger driver for approaching households than unmet support needs and personal causes of homelessness.
- Mental health problems are the most common support need overall and were very common among rough sleepers. Most rough sleepers had multiple support needs.

- Rough sleeping has increased and the Nightshelter continues to receive a steady stream of referrals. Although we acknowledge the limitations of the methodology that the Government has set for conducting Rough Sleeper Counts – and the fact that such Counts provide only a ‘snapshot’ figure that does not include everyone who is sleeping rough – we estimate (based on our six-days-a-week Outreach sessions and the intelligence we receive from local services) that, on any one night, 50 - 60 people sleep rough in Northampton.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

3.2.2 Based on the findings of the Review of Homelessness and the outcome of the Homelessness Forum Workshops held with, four strategic objectives were identified for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, each with their own sub-objectives and actions:

- (1) Creating effective and collaborative partnerships
- (2) Preventing homelessness through early and targeted intervention
- (3) Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation and ensuring a sufficient supply of suitable housing for homeless households
- (4) Reducing rough sleeping and enabling rough sleepers to thrive

Objective 1: Creating effective and collaborative partnerships

3.2.3 A recurring theme during the development of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was the importance of instilling a culture of homelessness prevention within all organisations and not just within the statutory services.

3.2.4 Everyone agreed that more can and should be done to harness the full potential of all services and organisations in the borough.

3.2.5 There was also strong support for the idea of creating a more collaborative environment in which all services and organisations communicate better with one another, there is a lot less duplication, and effective and collaborative partnerships are able to flourish.

3.2.6 In order to achieve this objective, it was agreed that:

- **A Single Homelessness Forum** and a **Family Homelessness Forum** would be established and meet quarterly; and
- **A Shared Directory of Services** (containing details of the services available for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness) would be produced and published on the Council’s website in order to improve everyone’s awareness and understanding of local services, what they offer, what they don’t offer and how people can access them.

Objective 2: Preventing homelessness through early and targeted intervention

- 3.2.7 Another recurring theme during the development of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was the importance of early and targeted intervention to prevent homelessness when more options are available.
- 3.2.8 Early and targeted intervention to prevent homelessness is a primary focus of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which created a new Prevention Duty, owed to all eligible households threatened with homelessness within 56 days
- 3.2.9 For most people who are threatened with homelessness – and the services that are working with them – the best outcome is achieved by acting quickly to prevent them becoming homeless in the first place.
- 3.2.10 Acting quickly to prevent homelessness is important for everyone (single people, childless couples and families with children) and, over time, it will help to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation and the number of people sleeping rough.
- 3.2.11 Early and targeted intervention will focus on the main causes of homelessness: the loss of private rented accommodation and relationship breakdown (including family exclusion).
- 3.2.12 In order to achieve this objective, it was agreed that:
- **The Housing Advice & Options Service changes** (including the appointment of additional staff and the creation of specialist advisers) will increase the amount of homelessness that can be prevented;
 - **The creation of self-serve Housing Advice** (by providing more interactive and user-friendly web pages on the Council's website) will help young people, care leavers and people leaving prison to help themselves;
 - **Better use of the private rented sector** (achieved by strengthening relationships with private landlords through the Landlord Forum and persuading landlords, with the assistance of financial incentives, to offer new lettings to households nominated by the Council or renew tenancies they were planning to bring to an end) will help reduce the number of private tenants that become homeless.
 - **The Home Visiting Officer** will continue to reduce the number of households that become homeless when they are asked to leave the home of a family member or friend. After completing a holistic assessment of the household's housing needs and financial resources, they will work with the household to address their housing needs and help them to secure suitable settled housing.
 - **By enabling victims of domestic abuse to remain safe in their homes, maximising the number of spaces in the refuges and improving move-on from the refuges**, it will be possible to reduce the number of people who become homeless due to domestic abuse.

Objective 3: Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation and ensuring a sufficient supply of suitable housing for homeless households

- 3.2.13 The sharp rise in the number of households living in temporary accommodation, together with the increase in the amount of time that households are required to spend in temporary accommodation, was highlighted as one of the main issues in the Review of Homelessness in Northampton.
- 3.2.14 Managing such a large number of homeless households in temporary accommodation takes up a lot of time and can adversely affect the amount of time that the Council is able to spend on preventing homelessness and meeting households' housing needs.
- 3.2.15 In addition to the impact that living in temporary accommodation is having on the lives and life chances of the households affected, the cost of accommodating hundreds of households in temporary accommodation is having a huge impact on the Council's budget. The new Strategy has been formulated in order to help achieve a reduction in that cost.
- 3.2.16 In order to achieve this objective, it was agreed that:
- **Increasing the supply of affordable housing** is the most effective way of improving the rates of homelessness prevention and relief, and reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation and the amount of time they spend in such accommodation;
 - **Improving households' move-on into social housing** can be achieved by increasing the proportion of general needs properties that are allocated to homeless households and working with social landlords to ensure that homes are let and re-let as quickly as possible;
 - **Alternative, more cost-effective temporary accommodation** can be secured by increasing the number of council homes that are used as temporary accommodation, awarding housing applicants extra priority if they continue living with friends or family instead of moving into temporary accommodation, and working with Registered Providers; and
 - **Improving the standard of local housing** will ensure that all of the private rented accommodation that is used to discharge the Council's homelessness duty is suitable and in a good state of repair. The Housing Enforcement Team will take action against criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords who knowingly let out substandard, unsafe and/or unlicensed private rented housing.

Objective 4: Reducing rough sleeping and enabling rough sleepers to thrive

- 3.2.17 The Government's target, set out in its national Rough Sleeping Strategy of 2018, is for rough sleeping in England to be halved by the year 2022 and to be reduced to zero by the year 2027.
- 3.2.18 Strategic Objectives 1 and 2 in this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy – and the corresponding actions in the Action Plan – will contribute positively to the achievement of the Government's objective.
- 3.2.19 During the Homelessness Workshops, participants emphasised the need to create an environment in which rough sleepers can thrive, realize their full potential and escape from the cycle of repeat homelessness.
- 3.2.20 Although it will be easier to accommodate rough sleepers who have high support needs if they are addressing their support needs, it is important that those who are not doing so are helped to manage better and access the services they need, regardless of their housing situation.
- 3.2.21 Feedback from the Workshops highlighted the importance of day centres, and the daytime activities and services that are available to rough sleepers through these centres and elsewhere in the town. For entrenched rough sleepers, who may find it extremely difficult to leave the streets, these daytime activities and services can make a real difference to their lives.
- 3.2.22 Homeless Link, a national umbrella group for homelessness groups and organisations which helped to facilitate the Workshops, agreed to establish a 'Communities of Practice' group in Northampton to bring together frontline workers from different organisations to find creative solutions for the issues they face. These issues will include working with rough sleepers with high and complex needs such as mental health problems, a history of offending, and drug or alcohol dependency.
- 3.2.23 In order to achieve this objective, it was agreed that:
- **Shared single homelessness assessment forms and processes** will be developed and implemented jointly by the Council and its partners;
 - **Barriers to timely move-on from supported housing** will be identified and overcome;
 - **The Nightshelter's role and effectiveness** will be evaluated;
 - **An evidence-based strategy for future Nightshelter provision in West Northamptonshire** will be developed;
 - **Dedicated housing and support** will be provided for women;
 - **Joint training in trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing and strengths-based practice** will be commissioned;

- **People who have lived experience of homelessness** will be involved in the design and delivery of rough sleeper services
- **A Community of Practice** will be established and meet quarterly;
- **Ongoing MHCLG funding will be sought, in 2020/21** to support the work that is already being done to tackle, prevent and reduce rough sleeping in Northampton;
- **The help available for young people (under 25)** will be evaluated and recommendations made for improvement; and
- **The support available for ex-offenders** will be evaluated and recommendations made for improvement.

3.3 Choices (Options)

Option 1 (recommended)

- 3.3.1 Cabinet can choose to approve the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan (Appendix C). This option is recommended because the Council has a statutory duty to develop and publish an updated or new Homelessness Strategy not more than five years and publication of the previous Strategy following review. This must include details of the action being taken to tackle rough sleeping.
- 3.3.2 Approval of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan will mean that it can be published as required by the Homelessness Act 2002 and implementation will begin in earnest.

Option 2 (not recommended)

- 3.3.3 Cabinet can choose not to approve the Strategy at Appendix C and to request changes to the Strategy. This option is not recommended because the Council has a statutory duty to publish a Homelessness Strategy, the Strategy has been co-produced with a broad range of services and organisations and the MHCLG requires all local housing authorities to have a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in place.
- 3.3.4 If approval of the Strategy is delayed, the Council is likely to attract criticism from the MHCLG and the many services and organisations that contributed to the development of the Strategy. It will also limit the amount of progress that can be made prior to the 'vesting day' of West Northamptonshire Council on 1 April 2021.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

- 4.1.1 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is in line with Council policy and will help the Council to meet its policy objectives of tackling, preventing homelessness and reducing the use and cost of temporary accommodation.

4.2 Resources and Risk

- 4.2.1 The cost of implementing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan will be met from the Housing and Wellbeing Service's existing budgets. Some of these budgets are currently funded by the MHCLG through the Rough Sleeping Initiative, Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and New Burdens funding (Homelessness Reduction Act 2017).
- 4.2.2 Levels of external funding will continue to be monitored. If there was to be a reduction in external funding the Action Plan would be reviewed and proposals put forward as to the options open to the Council to deliver differently, supported by a robust business case where necessary.

4.3 Legal

- 4.3.1 Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, which was amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, requires local housing authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness and to "relieve" homelessness for eligible applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 4.3.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to review homelessness in their district and prepare and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on the results of that review.
- 4.3.3 The Homelessness Review informing the Strategy and referring to these considerations is appended to this report at Appendix A.
- 4.3.4 Under section 182 of the Housing Act 1996, local authorities must have regard to any Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities when exercising its functions relating to homelessness and prevention of homelessness. The Strategy at Appendix C was formulated taking into account the current Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities published by MHCLG on 22 February 2018.
- 4.3.5 Section 3(8) of the 2002 Act requires the council 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 detailed in Section 4.5 of this report.

4.4 Equality and Health

- 4.4.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2006 lays out the Public Sector Equality Duty ("PSED") which requires the Council to have due regard when, making strategic decisions, to the desirability of exercising its functions in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage, especially when shaping policy and delivering services.
- 4.4.2 The Act requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

4.4.3 The Review of Homelessness (Appendix A) evaluated how different cohorts of people are affected by homelessness in Northampton. It identified that certain groups are more likely to be affected, as they are more likely to present themselves to the Council as homeless. These groups are:

- Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian and Other ethnic groups
- The 25-44 age group (this group is also more likely to have children)
- Women
- Households with children/pregnant women
- Children
- Lone parents
- Low income households.

4.4.4 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy seeks to address the needs of those groups that are worst affected by homelessness and, where possible, targets resources and specific initiatives at those at greatest risk.

4.4.5 The Strategy's focus on preventing and relieving homelessness will benefit these groups. There should be no potential negative impact on these groups.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

4.5.1 A wide range of services and organisations were consulted during a series of Workshops held during the second half of 2019 and the early part of 2020.

4.5.2 Most of the people who attended the Workshops work with single homeless people, rough sleepers and families. Some are social care professionals.

4.5.3 When the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was completed, a 28-day public consultation was held during February and March 2020. The feedback and analysis from the public consultation is contained in Appendix B.

4.5.4 The feedback received from partners and members of the public was overwhelmingly constructive and positive.

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

4.6.1 The new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will help meet the following priorities in the Corporate Plan 2019-21:

- **Improving the health and wellbeing of local people**
- **Resilient communities:** Implementation of the Strategy will support vulnerable people to achieve their full potential, encourage and support housing delivery and tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness.
- **More homes, better homes:** Implementation of the Strategy will reduce homelessness through homelessness prevention and intervention, explore options for establishing a permanent emergency nightshelter and reduce the overall cost of temporary accommodation.

- **Exceptional services to be proud of:** Implementation of the Strategy will provide high quality services and value for money services.

4.7 Environmental Implications (including climate change issues)

4.7.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this Strategy.

4.8 Other Implications

4.8.1 There are no other implications.

5. Background Papers

Part 7, Housing Act 1996

Homelessness Act 2002

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (2018)

6. Appendices

Appendix A – Review of homelessness in Northampton

Appendix B – Results and analysis of the public consultation

Appendix C – Northampton's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-23

7. Next Steps

7.1 If Cabinet approve the recommendations, the final draft will be re-formatted for publication on the Council's website in June 2020.

7.2 Implementation of Northampton's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will continue until it is replaced by West Northamptonshire Council's Strategy upon the dissolution of the Council on 1 April 2021.

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