HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 OCTOBER 2021

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY UPDATE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. For Members to consider progress against the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and receive an update on homeless services provision during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

Summary

2. The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was approved by Cabinet in July 2019 and an update was provided to this Scrutiny Committee in October 2020. **Appendix 1** of this report provides an update on the Strategy's action plan.

3. The Covid-19 pandemic has continued to place significant demands on the Council's Housing Options service with occupation of bed and breakfast and emergency accommodation during 2020-21 increasing by over 176% compared to 2019-20. This level of demand for emergency accommodation has remained the same for the first quarter of 2021-22.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report.

Anthony Sandys
Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no impact on the Council's Crime and Disorder responsibilities as a result of this report
Health and Well Being	Protecting the health and well-being of homeless people and rough sleepers is a key priority of the Council's strategy
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There is no impact on Carbon Impact and Climate Change as a result of this report
Diversity	The Council's strategy supports the promotion of diversity
Wards Affected	All wards will be affected by this report
Groups Affected	Homeless people, rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report contributes to the Council Plan by involving Members in the review of the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
Efficiency	Increased demands on the Council's homeless services will continue to have budget implications
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Covid-19 Pandemic

5. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council has continued to deal with a significant increase in demand for Homeless and Housing Options services. Whilst these services would normally work in a proactive way with clients to prevent homelessness, the increase in presentations and demand for emergency accommodation has meant that services have had to be more reactive to ensure that no-one was left homeless or having to rough sleep as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The risk of infection and the risk of not being able to self-isolate or shield are high for people in this situation.

6. As part of the Council's 'Everybody In' agreement, anyone who presents to the Council as homeless, regardless of their need, has been placed in emergency temporary accommodation. Our existing temporary accommodation provision includes temporary Council housing, emergency supported accommodation, hotels and out of area placements.

7. As a result of our commitment to ensure everyone who is homeless is offered accommodation, in 2020-21 we placed 230 households in emergency accommodation compared to 174 for the previous year, as well as increasing our self-contained temporary accommodation from 11 to 15 units. In the first quarter of 2021-22 this demand has

remained high with 110 households being placed in emergency accommodation.

8. Whilst the overall numbers requiring emergency accommodation in 2020-21 has increased by 32% compared to the previous year, the Covid-19 pandemic has also presented different challenges to the Council. Ordinarily, a person placed in emergency accommodation would only stay a few nights, before moving to more permanent accommodation. This then frees up that emergency accommodation for someone else. However, during the pandemic people placed in emergency accommodation have had to stay there for several weeks at a time to ensure they remain safe. Sourcing permanent move on accommodation during the pandemic for these people has also been very challenging.

9. As a result, for 2020-21 there were 4,116 nights spent in emergency accommodation recorded, compared to 1,486 for the previous year (a 176% increase). Again, this has continued into the first quarter of 2021-22 with 1,134 nights spent in emergency accommodation. This has meant that our existing emergency accommodation provision has been rapidly used up, meaning that we have had to find a number of alternatives (such as more expensive hotel and out of area accommodation).

10. Whilst most of the placements in emergency accommodation are single people, we are seeing increasing numbers of families presenting as homeless. Since April 2021, 19 families have been placed in emergency accommodation although 13 of these have moved on to permanent accommodation. The average stay in emergency accommodation for these families has been 83 days, which is well in excess of the target of 6 weeks (42 days). The length of time in moving families into permanent accommodation is adding to the workload of the Housing Options Team and we currently have 8 other families staying with friends or sofa surfing waiting for temporary accommodation to become available.

11. Our approach to dealing with homeless clients is unchanged in that every person matters and can, with the appropriate intervention, move from rough sleeping into long-term, sustainable accommodation. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, we have found the options available to rehousing people from temporary accommodation has decreased.

12. An emerging challenge for the Housing Options Team has been finding suitable accommodation and support for those individuals with complex needs. This includes clients with multiple needs, repeat homeless presentations and clients who have lost their accommodation due to their behaviour.

13. To illustrate this point, in 2020-21:

    (a) 18.5% of clients presenting had a mental health need.

    (b) 10.3% of clients presenting had a drug dependency.

    (c) 10.0% of clients presenting had an offending history.

    (d) 23.3% of clients had presented more than once.

    (e) 67.0% of clients presenting had more than one need.

14. However, despite the challenges of Covid-19 over the past 18 months, good progress has been achieved as follows:

    (a) We have recruited a specialist Housing Options (Mental Health) Officer who will work alongside Mental Health teams to specifically support those homeless clients with complex needs.

    (b) We have linked in with Public Health for Housing Options staff to work alongside the new ACCESS Workers, which aims to fast track clients into Drug and Alcohol services and supports the rough sleeping agenda.

    (c) We have purchased and refurbished 4 empty properties to provide up to 8 units of temporary accommodation as part of the Next Steps project. Support for clients placed in that accommodation is being provided by the 700 Club.

    (d) We have Successfully bid for additional funding through the Rough Sleeper Initiative to fund:
        (i) An Outreach Support Worker, to deliver street support and floating support to prevent someone from rough sleeping.
        (ii) A Housing Options Navigator, to carry out triage, duty to refer and low level case work.
        (iii) A Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator, to work across the Tees Valley to support Local Authorities in delivering their homelessness and rough sleeping strategies, coordinate rough sleeper counts and analysing data and returns for Government.
        (iv) Deliver the Housing First Model in 2 properties, which prioritises getting people quickly into stable homes. From this point, any other support needs they might have, such as alcohol and drug dependency, physical and/or mental health problems are addressed through co-ordinated and intensive support.

    (e) We have secured additional Government funding to support ex-offenders, which will provide private rented accommodation for a 12 month secure tenancy.

    (f) We are currently working with Adult Social Care in their commissioning review of housing related support services, to ensure that they better meet the complex needs of individuals in the future.

15. Despite the significant challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, everyone in need of emergency accommodation has been provided with somewhere to stay. In addition, most of the people placed in emergency accommodation have now moved on to more permanent housing. Council staff have proved typically resilient in dealing with these issues and ensuring that people who find themselves homeless or at the risk of homelessness continue to receive an excellent service.

Table 1 – Households placed in emergency accommodation for Quarter 1 of 2021-22 compared to 2019-20 and 2020-21

	2019-20 Total	2020-21 Total	2021-22			
			April	May	June	Q1 Total
The number of households placed in emergency accommodation	**174**	**230**	36	36	38	**110**
The number of days spent in emergency accommodation	**1,486**	**4,116**	442	299	393	**1,134**

Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

16. Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review every five years. Darlington's Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2019-2024 was approved by Cabinet on 9 July 2019.

17. The strategy consists of four main sections to satisfy the requirements of the regulations: A review, strategy, action plan and a new requirement to have a specific statement on rough sleeping. In recent years the Government has become increasingly concerned about the growth of rough sleeping. In 2018 the Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy and later in December its supporting guidance required homelessness strategies to be rebadged as Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies.

18. There are five key supporting objectives to the Strategy:

    (a) Those at risk of homelessness will be made aware of and have access to the services they may need to prevent it.

    (b) Suitable accommodation and support options will be provided for people who are, or who may become homeless.

    (c) Rates of repeat homelessness will be reduced.

    (d) The right support and services will be provided so that no person needs to sleep rough.

    (e) Strong partnerships will be built to deliver our aims.

19. The emphasis on prevention is not new but the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 introduced new challenges and a requirement for much greater co-operation across agencies.

20. The Strategy also sets out a "holistic" approach to assessing needs, recognising that a solution may not be directly related to housing and again requiring greater co-operation with other agencies. As a consequence, an important element of the Strategy is to

establish a new monitoring group to help provide a focus for co-ordination.

21. Progress on the Strategy's action plan is monitored through the multi-agency Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Forum.

22. **Appendix 1** of this report provides an update on the Strategy's action plan. Of the 28 actions in the Strategy:

(a) 19 have been completed.

(b) 7 are progressing and are on track to meet the timescales for delivery.

(c) 2 are progressing but are not on track to meet the timescales for delivery.

23. Overall, progress against the Strategy's action plan is good. The main reason for the actions that are progressing but not on track to meet the timescales for delivery is due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the complex needs of some individuals presenting as homeless are significantly challenging and will require continued multi-agency working and the commissioning of specialist services and accommodation.

Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy action plan update

1. Those at risk of homelessness will be made aware of and have access to the services they may need to prevent it

Action	Comments	Status
1.1 Establish an effective Duty to Refer	All information on the website and awareness raised with other partners	Complete
1.2 Improve Needs assessment to address individual issues	Gateway in place with holistic needs assessment	Complete
1.3 Improve information on the website	All information is on the website and regularly updated	Complete
1.4 Increase use of social media	Regular updates and information now available through social media	Complete
1.5 Address issues around discharges from hospital that lead to homeless applications	Homeless Duty to Refer procedure has been added to the discharge protocols for physical and mental health hospitals	Complete
1.6 Reduce risk of young people becoming homeless	Joint Protocol for 16/17 Year Old Housing and Children's Services signed off by MHCLG	Complete
1.7 Improve Support to people with mental health issues	Regular meetings with Adult Social Care and Housing to consider cases and improve processes. Housing Options (Mental Health) Officer is currently being recruited	Ongoing and on track

2. Provide suitable accommodation and support options for people who are, or who may become homeless

Action	Comments	Status
2.1 Develop the allocations process to meet the needs of the Homelessness Reduction Act	Common Allocations Policy now updated and new system in place to deliver this from August 21	Complete
2.2 Maintain and if possible, improve access to private sector housing	Following a successful bid through the MHCLG Next Steps programme, Housing Options have worked with voluntary organisations, Private Sector Housing and Building Services to bring 4 empty homes back into use. The properties have been refurbished and repurposed for those at risk of rough sleeping	Complete

Action	Comments	Status
2.3 Improve access to private sector housing for those who have difficulties funding a bond	Bond scheme in in place but has been suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic	Complete
2.4 Address the housing and support implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act	The majority of the Housing Related Support commissioned services contracts have been extended, however there are some that will be completed for review by October 21	Ongoing and on track
2.5 Review existing support contracts	As above	Ongoing and on track
2.6 Support the development of appropriate supported housing	As above	Ongoing and on track
2.7 Address the challenges of Universal Credit	Effective links with DWP maintained and good quality information is available to those who need it	Complete

3. Reduce rates of repeat homelessness

Action	Comments	Status
3.1 Improve the chances of people avoiding repeat homelessness	- Information on the website. - No First Night Out initiative delivered. - Joint working with other services. - Regular begging meetings. - Good pathways from prison with Project Beta and Through the Gate	Complete
3.2 Address the issues of those who have the most challenging behaviour	This will be considered as part of the commissioning thematic review which has been delayed by Covid-19 and is due to be completed in October 21 This is an issue that has been difficult to address during the Covid-19 pandemic and needs to be fully addressed by the review Additional properties available through the Next Steps programme Additional funding secured through the ex-offender programme Ault Social Care and Housing meetings are addressing this issue, but it is recognised that there are a handful of individuals who lose their	Ongoing and on track

Action	Comments	Status
	accommodation due to behaviour which includes a mix of offending, substance misuse and mental health issues	
3.3 Identify and address the needs of those who are vulnerable but not eligible for additional support	Issues being addressed through regular meetings with Adult Social Care and Housing	Ongoing and on track
3.4 Analyse case management for occurrence of repeat homelessness	Analysis done through the statistics in the main report. New opportunities for individuals to progress through Next Steps and ex-offender funding	Complete
3.5 Analyse overall approach to repeat homelessness	Using the Gateway system to track "customer journey" and developing new responses to improve the process	Ongoing and overdue
3.6 Recognise the specific needs of those with dual diagnosis	When the Housing Options Mental Health Worker is in place this work will continue. The intention is that they will work closely with the Mental Health teams and Public Health through the Drug and Alcohol Services and with the new Access Workers in Public Health	Ongoing and overdue

4. Provide the right support and services so that no person needs to sleep rough

Action	Comments	Status
4.1 Reduce the number of people sleeping rough	• Regular begging meetings • Street link service • Information on the website • No First Night Out • Have a heart campaign • Outreach service • Additional funding secured through the Rough Sleeping Initiative for additional staffing resources • Bi-monthly rough sleeper counts	Complete
4.2 Reduce the number of people sofa surfing	No First Night Out has been delivered by Darlington since 2018. However, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic we have been following the Governments 'Everyone In' agenda and continue to do so. All approaches to us will be assessed appropriately and if the person is homeless and has	Complete

Action	Comments	Status
	a local connection, offers of temporary accommodation will be made regardless of priority need	
4.3 Develop a new preventative approach to those rough sleeping	Awareness of Duty to Refer and information in 4.1 are in place. Agencies throughout Darlington work together proactively to reduce rough sleeping	Complete
4.4 Improve response to those who rough sleep	All the services listed above are in place. The Housing First and Next Steps projects are in place. Additional temporary accommodation and prevention tools are also in place	Complete
4.5 Review pathways to independence	This is on the agenda for the next Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Forum. Following the commissioned review this will be completed	Ongoing and on track

5. Build a strong partnership to deliver our aims

Action	Comments	Status
5.1 Support and improve partnership development planning and information exchange	Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Forum established	Complete
5.2 Improve partnership working	Good links established through: • Preventing Homelessness Forum • Preventing Begging • Working alongside commissioned providers • Regular meetings with commissioning • Adult Social Care and Housing Meetings • Sub-Regional Meetings • North East Regional Homeless Group • MHCLG Rough Sleeper Advisors	Complete
5.3 Improve internal Council joint working	Regular meetings taking place between Adult Social Care and Housing	Complete