

**HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 DECEMBER 2022**

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 2022.

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 2021. **Appendix 1** of this report provides an update on the Strategy's action plan.
3. The Housing Options service has continued to see a high numbers of homeless presentations, with the number of households placed in emergency accommodation during 2021-22 increasing by over 22% compared to 2020-21. This level of demand for emergency accommodation has continued to increase for the first two quarters of 2022-23.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that Members:-
 - (a) Note the contents of this report.
 - (b) Agree a review and refresh of the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy action plan for 2023-24, in accordance with paragraphs 23 to 24 of the main 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	This report has no implications for crime and disorder
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Diversity	There are no issues which this report needs to address
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 supports the Council plan to review 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

5. Since 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 is left homeless or having to rough sleep.
6. As well as the pressures created since the Covid-19 pandemic, the lifting of the ban on section 21 ("no fault") evictions in June 2021 has also created an increase in homeless presentations and requests for housing advice. In 2021-22, we received 1,745 presentations to the Housing Options service, compared to 1,417 in the previous year, an increase of 23%. In the first two quarters of 2022-23, this number has continued to increase, with 941 presentations made during that period. The number of presentations and enquiries in the first two quarters of 2022-23 as a result of section 21 notices being issued was 135 (14% of all presentations).
7. Our existing temporary accommodation provision includes temporary Council housing, emergency supported accommodation, hotels and out of area placements. In 2021-22, we placed 281 households in temporary accommodation compared to 230 for the previous year, an increase of 22%. In the first two quarters of 2022-23 this demand has also continued to increase, with 178 households being placed in temporary accommodation.

8. In addition, in 2021-22 there were 3,697 nights spent in emergency accommodation recorded, compared to 4,116 for the previous year (a 10% decrease). However, for the first two quarters of 2022-23, a total of 3,263 nights were spent in emergency accommodation, a sharp increase on the previous two years. 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).
9. However, 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, since the Covid-19 pandemic, we have found the options available to rehousing people from temporary accommodation has decreased.
10. An ongoing 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.
11. To illustrate this point, in 2021-22;
 - (a) 42% of clients presenting had a mental health need (compared to 18% in 2020-21).
 - (b) 20% of clients presenting had a drug dependency (compared to 10% in 2020-21).
 - (c) 22% of clients presenting had an offending history (compared to 10% in 2020-21).
12. However, despite these challenges, the following has been achieved in the past 18 months:
 - (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 also recruited a specialist Housing Options (Domestic Abuse) Officer, ensuring support for victims within safe accommodation and working with all partner agencies.
 - (c) 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.
 - (d) 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.
 - (e) From a successful bid for funding through the Rough Sleeper Initiative, we have;
 - (i) Funded an Outreach Support Worker, delivering street support and floating support to prevent people from rough sleeping.

- (ii) Recruited a Housing Options Navigator, carrying out triage, duty to refer and low level case work.
- (iii) Recruited a Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator, working across the Tees Valley to support Local Authorities in delivering their homelessness and rough sleeping strategies, coordinating rough sleeper counts and analysing data and returns for Government.
- (iv) Delivered 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.
- (f) We have secured an extension to the Government’s Accommodation for Ex-Offenders scheme funding to support a minimum of 30 ex-offenders into new private tenancies by March 2023.

13. However, despite the significant challenges since 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. Housing 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 Quarters 1 and 2 of 2022-23 compared to previous years

	2020-21 Total	2021-22 Total	2022-23		
			Q1	Q2	Total
The number of presentations to the Housing Options service	1,417	1,745	449	492	941
The number of households placed in emergency accommodation	230	281	70	108	178
The number of days spent in emergency accommodation	4,116	3,697	1,519	1,744	3,263

Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

- 14. 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.
- 15. 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.

16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. Progress on the Strategy’s action plan is monitored through the multi-agency Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Forum.
20. **Appendix 1** of this report provides an update on the Strategy’s action plan. Of the 28 actions in the Strategy, all have either being completed or remain ongoing due to the continuing demands on services.

Ending Rough Sleeping for Good Strategy 2022

21. In September 2022, the Government published a new “Ending Rough Sleeping for Good” strategy. The strategy aims to build on the progress made so far to reduce levels of rough sleeping and provides £2 billion of funding over the next 3 years to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.
22. The strategy also aims for more effective support to end rough sleeping and a tailored offer of support where it does happen. The goal is for rough sleeping to be prevented but when does happen, it is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Refreshed Action Plan for 2023-24

23. Whilst there is no statutory requirement to produce a new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy until 2025, it is recommended that the actions contained within

the existing strategy are reviewed and refreshed for 2023-24 in light of:

- (a) The actions contained within the existing strategy were developed pre-Covid and primarily focussed on delivering the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. These actions have either been successfully completed or are being delivered on an ongoing basis.
 - (b) The existing pressures on our Homeless and Housing Options service originated from the Covid-19 pandemic and the demand for services continues to increase.
 - (c) The Government's "Ending Rough Sleeping for Good" strategy.
24. It is recommended that the refreshed action plan for 2023-24 is developed by the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Forum.

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 and ongoing
1.4 Increase the use of social media	Regular updates and information now available through social media	Complete and ongoing
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 Government	Complete
1.7 Improve Support to people with mental health issues	Regular meetings are taking place between Adult Social Care and Housing Services to consider cases and improve processes. Housing Options (Mental Health) Officer is now in place	Complete and ongoing

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 ICT system in place	Complete
2.2 Maintain and if possible, improve access to private sector housing	Following a successful funding bid, 4 empty homes were brought back into use. The properties have been refurbished and repurposed for those at risk of rough sleeping	Complete
2.3 Improve access to private sector housing for those who have difficulties funding a bond	Bond scheme is in place	Complete

2.4 Address the housing and support implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act	Review of Housing Related Support commissioned services has been completed by Adult Social Care	Complete
2.5 Review existing support contracts	As above	Complete
2.6 Support the development of appropriate supported housing	As above	Complete
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 and ongoing

3. Reduce rates of repeat homelessness

Action	Comments	Status
3.1 Improve the chances of people avoiding repeat homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 and ongoing
3.2 Address the issues of those who have the most challenging behaviour	Adult Social Care and Housing meetings are addressing this issue, but it is recognised that there are a handful of individuals who lose their accommodation due to behaviour which includes a mix of offending, substance misuse and mental health issues	Ongoing
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
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	This is now in place with Rough Sleeper Initiative funding for an outreach support worker. Also discussed as part of the Homeless Forum and Rough Sleeper Action Groups	Complete and ongoing
3.6 Recognise the specific needs of those with dual diagnosis	Housing Options Officer (Mental Health) is now in place. This post works alongside Adult Social Care	Complete and ongoing

	staff at West Park hospital and with Public Health and the Access Team	
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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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and ongoing
4.2 Reduce the number of people sofa surfing	No First Night Out has been delivered by Darlington since 2018. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic we followed the Government's 'Everyone In' agenda and have continued to do so. All approaches to us will be assessed appropriately and if the person is homeless and has a local connection, offers of temporary accommodation will be made regardless of priority need	Complete and ongoing
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	Completed as part of the review of Housing Related Support commissioned services	Complete

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 with regular meetings being held	Complete and ongoing

<p>5.2 Improve partnership working</p>	<p>Good links established through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing Homelessness Forum • Preventing begging meetings • Working alongside commissioned providers of housing related support • Regular meetings between Adult Social Care and Housing • Sub-regional meetings • North East Regional Homeless Group • Government funding bids 	<p>Complete and ongoing</p>
<p>5.3 Improve internal Council joint working</p>	<p>Regular meetings taking place between Adult Social Care and Housing</p>	<p>Complete and ongoing</p>