

**HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
28 FEBRUARY 2024**

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 2023-24.

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 December 2022. **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 2022-23 increasing by 41% compared to 2021-22. This level of demand for emergency accommodation has continued to increase for the first three quarters of 2023-24.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that Members:-
 - (a) Note the contents of this report.
 - (b) Agree to develop a new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2025-30, in accordance with paragraph 21 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	There are no implications
Health and Wellbeing	There are no implications
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Diversity	There are no implications
Wards Affected	All wards will potentially 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. Over the past 3 years, 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 2022-23, we received 1,842 presentations to the Housing Options service, compared to 1,745 in the previous year, an increase of 6%. In the first three quarters of 2023-24, this number has remained high, with 1,077 presentations made during that period.
7. Our existing temporary accommodation provision includes temporary Council housing, emergency supported accommodation, hotels and out of area placements. In 2022-23, we placed 395 households in temporary accommodation compared to 281 for the previous year, an increase of 41%. In the first three quarters of 2023-24 this demand has continued to increase, with 351 households being placed in temporary accommodation for that period.
8. In addition, in 2022-23 there were 7,308 nights spent in emergency accommodation recorded, compared to 3,697 for the previous year, an increase of 98%. In the first three quarters of 2023-24, this number has also continued to increase, with 5,647 nights spent in emergency accommodation during that period. 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, over the past few years, 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 2022-23;
 - (a) 409 clients presenting had a mental health need (33% of the total).
 - (b) 161 clients presenting had drug issues (13% of the total).
 - (c) 214 clients presenting had an offending history (17% of the total).
12. However, despite these challenges, the following has been achieved in the past 12 months:
 - (a) Our specialist Housing Options (Mental Health) Officer has continued to develop her role, working closely with social workers and West Park Hospital. This is a continuing challenge due to the increased demand on mental health services throughout the sector. However, her role has helped with a reduction in discharges for clients with no fixed abode and 102 people with mental health needs have been supported into accommodation.
 - (b) Our specialist Housing Options (Domestic Abuse) Officer has also worked hard this year to build relationships with the women's refuge, which has helped to streamline the process for women moving on into permanent accommodation. We have also funded 2 properties with Harbour for Domestic Abuse victims. Whilst there, the women receive intensive support from both the Domestic Abuse Officer and a Harbour support worker. Over this last year, we have successfully housed 6 families in the two properties who have moved on to more permanent tenancies. In addition, 56 people at risk of domestic abuse have been supported into stable accommodation.
 - (c) The ACCESS Team, which aims to fast track clients into Drug and Alcohol services and supports the rough sleeping agenda, has continued to work directly with Housing Options Officers and one of their team now spends at least one day a week in the Housing Options Office to ensure a joined up approach in supporting clients.
 - (d) We have continued to develop the Next Steps project (which comprised 4 properties purchased and refurbished in the Northgate area as temporary accommodation). 9 households have been supported by both the 700 Club and our Housing Plus Team to address any barriers to finding accommodation and moving on after their time in the

placement.

- (e) The Rough Sleeper Initiative funding has continued this year and we have been able to carry on with the following:
 - (i) Funded an Outreach Support Worker, delivering street support and floating support to prevent people from rough sleeping. Over the past year, 24 street link reports have been made, 9 street walks carried out and 8 individuals engaged with.
 - (ii) Continued to fund a Housing Options Navigator post, who is carrying out triage, processing all the duty to refer referrals we receive – 336 received to date since April 2023 and low level case work.
 - (iii) Our Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator is working across the Tees Valley to support Local Authorities in delivering their homelessness and rough sleeping strategies, co-ordinating rough sleeper counts and analysing data and returns for Government. She is developing a gap analysis for Darlington, to ensure any future bids for funding target priority areas.
 - (iv) We have continued with the Housing First model in 2 Council properties, which prioritises getting people quickly into stable homes. Both properties have had 2 occupants over the last year who have successfully moved on to more permanent accommodation. During their stays, they have addressed issues with debt and addiction through engagement with support from the 700 Club.
- (f) We have received further funding from the Government’s Accommodation for Ex-Offenders scheme, to support ex-offenders into new accommodation by March 2024.
- (g) We have housed 15 people through the “No Second Night Out” initiative to prevent rough sleeping and 10 people through the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

13. However, despite the significant challenges, 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, 2 and 3 of 2023-24 compared to previous years

	2021-22 Total	2022-23 Total	2023-24			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Total
The number of presentations to the Housing Options service	1,745	1,842	345	395	337	1,077

The number of households placed in emergency accommodation	281	395	121	122	108	351
The number of days spent in emergency accommodation	3,697	7,308	1,477	2,180	1,990	5,647

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 its supporting guidance required homelessness strategies to be rebadged as Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies.
16. There are five key supporting objectives to our 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. Members will recall from the last update presented in December 2022, that all of the 28 actions in the Strategy have either being completed or remain ongoing due to the continuing demands

on services.

21. A new strategy will be due in 2025 and work will commence shortly to start developing this with our strategic partners. The next update for this committee will, therefore, be to consider the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2025-30.

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>