

Agenda item:

Title of meeting: Cabinet Member for Housing Decision Making

Date of meeting: 21st October 2019

Subject: Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023

Report by: James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services

Wards affected: All

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

1.1.To present the updated final homelessness strategy which outlines Portsmouth's preventative approach to understanding and responding to customers and residents who face homelessness.

2. Recommendations

2.1.To endorse the council's Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 and associated action plan.

3. Background

3.1. There is a duty on all local authorities to provide an advice service to all homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 defines homelessness as a person who has no accommodation available for his occupation which they are entitled to occupy, have an expressed or implied licence to occupy, or can occupy by any enactment or rule of law. A person is also homeless if they have accommodation but cannot secure entry to it.

3.2. Homelessness impacts on all Portsmouth residents and those with a local connection to the city who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

3.3. Between April 2016 and March 2018, 2,382 homeless applications were made to the authority, with almost 50% resulting from a private rented sector tenancy ending.

3.4. A related, but separate issue is rough sleeping, and Portsmouth has seen a significant increase in the number of people sleeping on the city's streets over the last decade. In November 2017, 42 people were identified as rough sleeping during the Annual Rough Sleeping Count. This strategy should be read in conjunction with Portsmouth's Street Homelessness and Rough

Sleeping Strategy 2018 - 2020, which was agreed by councillors on 11th September 2018.

4. **Legislative requirements**

- 4.1. The Homelessness Act 2002 gave housing authorities the power to carry out a homelessness review for their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy. The council's most recent homelessness strategy ran from 2008 - 2013.
- 4.2. An exemption from this requirement was granted for 'excellent authorities', who included Portsmouth, but this was revoked by the Local Audit and Accountability Act (2014) and all housing authorities are now required to publish a homelessness strategy.
- 4.3. Following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which introduced additional duties for the housing authority and its partner agencies, the council drafted a new strategy which supports a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to the prevention and relief of homelessness.
- 4.4. To be effective, the homelessness strategy will need to be based upon realistic assumptions and be jointly owned with partners, who share in the responsibility for its delivery.
- 4.5. The strategic vision: "Working Together to Prevent Homelessness" supports the corporate plan to help customers and residents live healthy, safe and independent lives.

5. **Consultation**

- 5.1. The draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-2020 was agreed by the Cabinet Member for Housing on 29th January 2019 and was then consulted upon. Consultation on this strategy took place between 30th January and 30th April 2019.
- 5.2. The council asked to hear from anyone who has an interest in the issues surrounding homelessness in the city, either in response to this draft strategy, or with other constructive information which could have been used to form the final strategy and action plan.
- 5.3. The council received eight substantive responses by email, of which three came from other functions within the council, and no responses in writing.
- 5.4. A key theme found across the consultation feedback related to the need for closer working relationships between agencies, for example between the local authority and the private sector, between statutory agencies and non-statutory agencies, and between health and learning disability services and homelessness services.
- 5.5. A further, prevalent theme of the consultation responses was an emphasis of the importance of considering the specific needs of certain groups of people,

for example those with autism, learning disabilities, physical and mental health problems, or rough sleepers. Responses highlighted the need to understand how such characteristics could affect people when homeless, and to understand what support people might need in order to effectively sustain accommodation.

- 5.6. These themes from the feedback has influenced the final strategy. Section 5 of the strategy details how housing assessments and housing plans for those threatened with or experiencing homelessness should be informed by the individual needs of that person, and by the views of any relevant professionals or supporting agencies. They should be holistic, taking into account any specific vulnerabilities or support needs that might relate to such characteristics as learning disabilities, health problems or substance misuse issues
- 5.7. The action plan underscores the need for closer working between partner agencies (for example actions number 2 and 9), and the need to tailor assistance according to the specific needs of applicants (for example actions number 14 and 15, which were both added following consultation).

6. **Strategy**

- 6.1. In line with the corporate vision, and in response to the problems of rough sleeping, the city council has developed a model ('Accommodation First, Not Accommodation Only') and a strategy (the Street Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Partnership Strategy 2018-2020) that informs the approach to supporting anyone facing homelessness in the city. This strategy recognises that people often need more than just a place to live to be able to live healthy, safe and independent lives.
- 6.2. It is vital to work together to tackle the causes and effects of homelessness. This model captures the commitment evident across the city already to provide help and support through the various agencies and community support available. The city council want to build on this to enhance, support and co-ordinate the city to work together to prevent homelessness.
- 6.3. To achieve this, five key aims of the strategy have been identified:-
- 6.3.1. Prevent Homelessness
 - 6.3.2. Reduce rough sleeping
 - 6.3.3. Relieve homelessness
 - 6.3.4. Sustain tenancies
 - 6.3.5. Direct the strategy
- 6.4. The city council is committed to working together to prevent and relieve homelessness in Portsmouth wherever possible, and the strategy has identified 15 action points as follows:

Proposed Action	Strategic Priorities	Timescale
1. Reduce the use of B&Bs and hotel as emergency temporary accommodation.	3	Already started. Complete end 2020/21
2. Develop the working relationship between partner agencies to inform and develop practical and effective Personalised Housing Plans (PHPs)	1,5	Ongoing
3. Work with advice services to make sure more residents at risk of homelessness are identified at an early stage, when support could prevent homelessness.	1,2	Ongoing
4. Work closely with welfare benefit teams to be able to work proactively in the prevention of homelessness situations arising.	1	Ongoing
5. Identify and develop collaborative working with statutory services.	4	Ongoing
6. Work with the private rental sector to explore how additional advice, support or guidance could increase availability and affordability for tenants	3,4	Autumn 2019 onwards
7. Explore innovative funding solutions to help people access private rented sector.	3	2020
8. Use our learning from the review of supported housing services to inform the contract and commissioning process of all supported housing services.	4,5	Already started. Complete by summer 2020
9. Develop working relationships between different partner and stakeholder groups, including policies and procedures, to work together to help prevent homelessness or sustain accommodation.	5	Already started, ongoing
10. Explore the potential to extend the Local Authority Housing tenancy management approach to offer similar support in the private rented sector.	1	2020
11. Clearly signpost rent deposit schemes available to those who become homeless.	1,3	Autumn 2019- Spring 2020
12. Understand the role guarantors have in helping people facing homeless to access the private rent sector.	1,3	Autumn 2019- Spring 2020
13. Increase information for landlords and tenants on good tenancy management with the aim of reducing homelessness.	1,4	Ongoing
14. Ensure members of council staff have a good understanding of the particular needs of certain client groups (e.g. people with learning disabilities, autism, mental health problems, and those experiencing domestic abuse) and deliver services accordingly.	3	Ongoing
15. Understand the specific housing related needs of those who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse, and shape services accordingly.	3,4	Ongoing

7. Reasons for recommendations

- 7.1. To ensure that the council's homelessness strategy is up to date and meets the needs of the customers and residents of Portsmouth.
- 7.2. To outline the strategic actions that the council, working in partnership with others agencies, community groups and providers, will take to tackle and minimise homelessness, and its impacts, as much as possible.
- 7.3. To ensure the council continues to meet the statutory duties under Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and supports the most vulnerable in society.

8. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 6.1 Following the feedback from the consultation, a full Equalities Impact Assessment of this strategy has been written and is attached in Appendix 2.

9. City Solicitor's comments

- 9.1. Under the Homelessness Act 2002 all local housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their area. The strategy must set out the authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are or will be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.
- 9.2. The strategy must be kept under review and regard had, when modifying it, the local housing authority must have regard to its current allocation scheme and tenancy strategy.
- 9.3. Before modifying a homelessness strategy, the authority must consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate.
- 9.4. Following legislative changes, in particular the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, it is appropriate for the City Council to review, consult on and modify its strategy. Non-statutory guidance in relation to local housing authorities' homelessness duties has recently been updated to reflect these legislative changes and provide an outline of the powers, duties and obligations on housing authorities - "Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities" 2018.
- 9.5. The Cabinet Member has authority to approve the recommendations set out in this report in order to meet the authority's statutory obligations.

10. Director of Finance comments

- 10.1. There are no direct financial implications as a result of approving this Homelessness Strategy.

10.2. The costs of the consultation were met from the existing cash limited budget.

Signed by:

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James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Final Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023

Appendix 2 - Equalities Impact Assessment

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Housing Act 1996	https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/contents
Homelessness Act 2002	https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/contents
Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/13/contents/enacted
Portsmouth City Council's Street Homeless and Rough Sleepers Partnership Strategy 2018-2020	https://democracy.portsmouth.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=152&MIId=4062

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/

Deferred/ Rejected by on

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Signed by:
Councillor Sanders
Cabinet Member for Housing