

Title of meeting: Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness

Date of meeting: 7th December 2023

Subject: Approving Portsmouth City Council's Homelessness strategy 2024-2029

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

Author: Jo Bennett - Assistant Director - Housing Need and Supply
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Wards affected: All

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To present the Homelessness Strategy which details Portsmouth City Council's approach to understanding and responding to customers and residents who face homelessness.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To approve the council's Homelessness Strategy 2024-2029 (Appendix 1) and associated action plan (Appendix 2), to be effective from the 1st January 2024.

3. Background

- 3.1 Local authorities are required to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on a review of homelessness in their area at least every 5 years (s.1 Homelessness Act 2002).
- 3.2 Portsmouth's previous homelessness strategy covered the period 2018 to 2023.
- 3.3 The review on which the strategy is based should consider (s.2 Homelessness Act 2002):
- 3.3.1 The levels of homelessness in the area.

- 3.3.2 The activities which are carried out for any the following purposes (or which contribute to achieving any of them):
- Preventing homelessness in the area
 - Securing accommodation that is or will be available for people in the area who are or may become homeless.
 - Providing support for people in the district who are homeless or who may become at risk of homelessness.

3.3.3. The resources available to carry out such activities.

3.4 The Portsmouth City Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Partnership Group have worked together to carry out such a review and to develop an ambitious strategy which calls on a partnership approach to preventing homelessness and ending rough sleeping in Portsmouth.

3.5 Although there is not a statutory requirement for one, Portsmouth also had a street homelessness and rough sleeping partnership strategy covering the same 2018-2023 period which outlined the city's approach to reducing rough sleeping.

3.6 The Council's administration and Partnership wants a joint homelessness and rough sleeping strategy that brings together and builds upon those two previously separate strategies. Rough sleeping is the sharpest end of homelessness but is not distinct from it. By tackling homelessness in the city as a whole, fewer people will be left with no option but to sleep rough.

4 Consultation

4.1 The review itself included a focus on the experience of people who have been homelessness or threatened with homelessness. 42 people who had used homeless services in recent months were interviewed, and asked what worked well for them and what did not.

4.2 The review and strategy were further shaped by consultation with key partner agencies, including colleagues from Children's Services and Adult Social Care, and members of the Portsmouth City Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Partnership Group. The Health and Wellbeing Board were also consulted, and various communication channels used across a wide network to provide the opportunity for partners and individuals to comment.

4.3 The draft Homelessness Strategy 2024-2029 was agreed by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness in September 2023 and was then formally consulted upon. Consultation on this strategy took place between 25th September and 22nd October 2023.

4.4 The objectives of the final stage of consultation were to:

- Assess levels of agreement with the five draft strategic aims

- Assess levels of agreement with the recommended areas of focus beneath each aim
- Understand disagreement with any of the aims or areas of focus.
- Explore any elements considered missing from the draft strategy.

4.5 The consultation received 81 responses in total, 76 of which came via an online survey. The vast majority of respondents agreed with the five proposed strategic aims (95%) and each of the suggested areas of focus laid out beneath each one (all over 90%). Some helpful suggestions were made as a result of the consultation responses, for example a suggestion to use cross-organisational knowledge and data to better understand the underlying *causes of the causes* of homelessness, with the aim of earlier 'primary' prevention. **The five strategic aims are set out in paragraph 5 below.**

4.6 These themes from the feedback have 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.

4.7 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). Chapter 10 of the review and strategy further details the consultation responses received.

4.8 The Homelessness Strategy consultation report is attached as Appendix 3.

5 The Five Strategic Aims

5.1 Learning from the review of homelessness in Portsmouth has led to five strategic aims being identified:

- I. **Prevent Homelessness.**
Prevent incidences of homelessness wherever possible. Relieve more homelessness where prevention is not an option.
- II. **End rough sleeping.**
Ensure rough sleeping is rare, brief, and not recurring.
- III. **Provide the right housing to relieve homelessness.**
Ensure people are provided with accommodation that meets their needs and lets them feel safe and secure.
- IV. **Provide the right support .**

Whatever accommodation a person has, ensure they can access the right support at the right time to help them sustain it.

V. Strengthen collaborative working.

Improve communication with people at risk of homelessness. Strengthen local partnerships to prevent homelessness more often.

5.2 The strategy has identified 27 action points to help achieve those strategic aims. These are attached as Appendix 3.

5.3 The strategy offers an ambitious vision and set of aims. Once launched the action plan will be refreshed and updated throughout the course of the life of the strategy.

6 Governance and oversight of strategy

6.1 The strategy will be monitored through various governance arrangements including reporting to Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Community, the City Councils housing and tackling homelessness portfolio, the Health and Wellbeing Board and oversight from the Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Partnership Group.

6.2 The strategy will be published on the council's website, shared with relevant partners, and made known to local residents.

6.3 Once launched, the strategy will create a significant work programme over the course of 5 years. As evidenced within the review, it is clear that the council's current allocation policy requires review and updating to ensure the best use is made of the housing stock available to the council. Likewise, a full review is required of supported housing provision in the city as well as rough sleeping services, to ensure those services are providing the right housing and the right support.

7. Reasons for recommendations

6.1. To ensure that the council's homelessness strategy is up to date and meets the needs of the customers and residents of Portsmouth.

6.2. To outline the strategic actions that the council and partners will take to prevent homelessness more often and to reduce the impacts of homelessness as much as possible.

6.3. To ensure the council continues to meet the statutory duties under Homelessness Act 2002, Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 to support the most vulnerable in society.

7. Integrated impact assessment

7.1. A full integrated impact assessment of this strategy has been written and is attached at Appendix Four.

8. Legal implications

8.1 The relevant legal drivers are set out in the body of the report (notably sec 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 - a basis from which an authority may wish to set a strategy). Paragraph 4.6 engages the basis of discharging any obligations in accordance with the duties under the Equality Act 2010 thereby aligning with the Public Sector Equality Duty in the sense of how and what factors may be considered in discharging the strategy. (see sec149- EA 2011).

9. Director of Finance's comments

9.1 A decision to approve the Council's Homelessness Strategy 2024-2029 and the associated action plan does not directly change the cost of the demand led homelessness support provision and the resource pressure resulting from the statutory responsibility outlined in the report. Indeed, the strategic actions to prevent homelessness occurring should reduce the demand for temporary accommodation, which is the most significant cost driver for the service.

9.2 The Housing Needs and Advice service receives significant levels of government funding, including Homelessness Prevention Grant. Some of the action points in Appendix 2 will require an investment in resources, most prominently staff time, to be funded through this targeted grant provision. The strategy does not commit this investment and the available resources will need to be carefully managed over the duration of the strategy.

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



Appendices:

Appendix One - Homelessness Strategy 2024-2029

Appendix Two - Action Points from the Homelessness Strategy 2024-2029

Appendix Three - Homelessness Strategy Consultation Report

Appendix Four - Integrated 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
Homelessness Act 2002	Homelessness Act 2002 (legislation.gov.uk)
Portsmouth City Council Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023	Portsmouth City Council Homelessness Strategy
City of Portsmouth Street Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023	City of Portsmouth Street Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Partnership Strategy 2018-2023
Housing Act 1996	Housing Act 1996 (legislation.gov.uk)
Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (legislation.gov.uk)
Portsmouth Allocation Scheme	Appendix 1 - Allocations Scheme 20190129 Portsmouth Allocation Scheme.pdf

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by on

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Signed by: