

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DECEMBER 2019

Title: Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 -2025

Submitted by: Head of Housing, Assets and Regeneration

Portfolios: Community Safety and Wellbeing

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment on the priorities and key actions of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2025, prior to its submission to Cabinet.

Recommendation

That Scrutiny consider and comment upon the contents of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2025.

Reasons

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on Council's to publish a Homelessness Strategy. The Homelessness Strategy provides the framework for the delivery of our services designed to prevent homelessness and support those who may become homeless.

Newcastle's fourth homelessness strategy was for the period of 2016 to 2021, during 2018 following the publication of the National Rough Sleeping Strategy, Local Authorities have been tasked to ensure they have an up to date Strategy, which ensures future work around rough sleeping aligns with the National Strategy. Also that all Homelessness Strategies are rebadged as Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies by Winter 2019. A draft for Newcastle-under-Lyme's fifth Homelessness Strategy has been produced and following the scrutiny process will be ready for Cabinet approval.

1. Background

1.1 The Council has a statutory duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to publish a Homelessness Strategy every five years. Newcastle's last Homelessness Strategy was published in 2016 and covered the period of 2016 to 2021.

1.2 In August 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) published the Cross-Government Rough Sleeping Strategy, which committed to ensuring that all local authorities have an up to date homelessness strategy, which is available online by winter 2019. Within the strategy is the requirement for all local authorities to review their homelessness strategies and make the necessary amendments to ensure that future work on rough sleeping aligns with the national strategy. They also asked that strategies be rebadged as Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies.

- 1.3 In response to the Cross Government Rough Sleeping Strategy, a new draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which sets out the Council's key priorities for the next five years been produced, informed by a recent review of homelessness in the borough and engagement with stakeholders.
- 1.4 Newcastle has had significant success in preventing homelessness, however since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, there are more statutory duties so more people qualify for assistance. We are experiencing an increase in the number of customers who are eligible for support and assistance in the Borough, particularly single people.
- 1.5 The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy provides the framework for the delivery of our services designed to prevent homelessness and support those who become homeless over the next five years.
- 1.6 During 2019, the Council's Housing Strategy Team have undertaken a comprehensive review of the current Homelessness Strategy to determine:
- an up-to-date understanding of homelessness and housing need in Newcastle;
 - current and likely future levels of homelessness and homelessness trends; currently provided to prevent homelessness, to secure housing for homeless people and to provide them with support;
 - the resources available to the Council, other statutory organisations and voluntary organisations to provide services for homeless people; and
 - gaps in provision.
- 1.7 Stakeholders have been consulted during the review process. All partner agencies, community and voluntary groups that attend the quarterly Homelessness Forum are key to the future success and delivery of the new Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy and Multi Agency Action Plan.

2. Issues

- 2.1 Preventing homelessness is better than dealing with the challenges that arise from homelessness. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has a focus on prevention and relief. The proposed future Strategic Priorities within this draft Strategy are:
- Priority 1 - Prevention of Homelessness
 - Priority 2 - Support homeless households into sustainable housing solutions
 - Priority 3 - Work in partnership to address the causes of homelessness
 - Priority 4 - Tackling Rough Sleeping
- 2.2 There is no single reason why someone can end up without a home. Often someone facing homelessness approaches the Council for housing assistance when they are at the end of their homelessness journey having suffered many crisis and interactions with other public bodies and voluntary agencies along the way. The new Homelessness Strategy builds on the success of the old strategy and proposes to continue to focus on prevention and early intervention, whilst undertaking targeted work on the identified issues.
- 2.3 The new Strategy clearly sets out the practical ways the Council will achieve its aims and objectives.

2.4 The Council recognises that homelessness is a complex issue that cannot be solved by the Council alone. This strategy will continue to build a stronger network of partnerships and services to help deliver its strategic priorities.

2.5 How we will achieve our priorities are addressed in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. The action plan will be monitored by the Housing Strategy Team and the Homelessness Forum. They will be responsible for ensuring the actions and outcomes contained in the action plan are implemented. There is flexibility within the action plan over the next five years, to allow for change dependent on future homelessness trends.

3. Proposal

3.1 It is proposed that Scrutiny consider and comment upon the contents of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2025 prior to the strategy being considered by Cabinet.

4. Reason for preferred solution

4.1 By Scrutiny members considering the strategy prior to Cabinet it gives members the opportunity to be proactive in making representations.

5. Options Considered

5.1 No other options have been considered because there is a statutory duty to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

6. Outcomes Linked to Corporate Priorities

6.1 The strategy supports all the Council's corporate priorities of:

- Local Services that Work for Local People
- Growing our People and Places
- Healthy, Active and Safe Borough
- A Town Centre for All

7. Legal and Statutory Implications

7.1 Homelessness Act 2002

The Act includes the requirement for Local Authorities to formulate reviews and strategies in order to tackle and prevent homelessness.

7.2 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Act places more emphasis on the prevention and relief of homelessness at an earlier stage.

7.3 Housing Act 1996

The Act includes the duty of the Local Authority to provide advisory services and assistance to voluntary organisations in respect of homelessness.

7.4 Local Government Act 2000

The Act gives Local Authorities the power to do anything likely to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area.

8. Equality Impact Assessment

- 8.1 No negative impacts are foreseen as a result of implementation of this strategy. There are opportunities to advance equalities, improve access to services and improving housing options advice for those with protected characteristics who may be vulnerable.

9. Financial and Resource Implications

- 9.1 Various budgets are in place to support the Council's statutory responsibilities for homelessness. The Government has previously awarded Homelessness Prevention Grant of £125,504 for 2019 – 2020. Homelessness Prevention Grant figures for future financial years have not yet been announced, so it is not known to date what amount we may get from this fund post 2020.
- 9.2 Government eligibility for funding has moved towards a prevention focus but the service continues to spend on temporary accommodation.
- 9.3 In order to achieve the priorities of this strategy there will be a reliance on grant funding, which is not guaranteed long term. The Council will need to ensure they remain committed to the prevention of homelessness agenda for the period of this Strategy.
- 9.4 There could be financial implications in respect of delivering the proposed action plan, if no further funding is obtained or made available to continue the Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator role, post 2021.

10. Major Risks

- 10.1 The risk of not having a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will result in the Council being open to legal challenge for failing to produce a mandatory document.
- 10.2 The risk of less funding being available for the delivery of homelessness services in the borough could have adverse effects on the levels of homelessness in Newcastle and although funds may not be available to deliver prevention services, the Council still has a statutory duty to assist those who are eligible and in priority need.

11. Key Decision Information

- 11.1 Endorsing and adopting the Homelessness strategy will ensure that the Council has an up to date strategy and action plan in place to address the needs and gaps in provision in order to help those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- 11.2 The strategy enables the emphasis on the prevention of homelessness to be at the forefront of Council thinking, whilst promoting value for money and cost effectiveness.

12. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

- 12.1 None.

13. Appendices

- 13.1 Homelessness Review.
- 13.2 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

14.1 Background Papers

- 14.1 None.

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