

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Report of Councillor Ashley Yeates Cabinet Member for Communities & Housing

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Key Decision? Y

Local Ward

Members

Lichfield
district council
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Cabinet

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The council is required to publish a homelessness strategy that outlines the main causes of homelessness and our strategic plans and actions in place to tackle them every five years. In 2018 the government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy along with guidance that requires local authorities to update their homelessness strategies to incorporate rough sleeping by the end of 2019. Our current Homelessness Strategy covers the period 2013 to 2018 and rather than directly replace it, to ensure that we take a comprehensive and joined up approach to all matters relating to housing, we are combining it with the Housing Strategy to create a Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024. To meet the government's deadline, we are seeking Cabinet approval of the section of the draft Strategy that covers homelessness and rough sleeping prior to its publication on the website. We will then complete the rest of the Strategy, carry out consultation and seek approval of it early next year.
- 1.2 To inform our Strategy we have completed a Homelessness Review which provides a comprehensive review of available data and evidence relating to homelessness. This has been used to establish our priority to **'Prevent and relieve all forms of homelessness including rough sleeping'** and we have established three objectives to work with partners to achieve this:
- Improve the range of suitable housing options for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
 - Identify and provide support to those who face barriers to accessing and maintaining suitable accommodation, and
 - Tackle rough sleeping so that no one needs to sleep rough

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Homelessness Review (**Appendix 1**) and the homelessness and rough sleeping section of the draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 (**Appendix 2**) for publication as a draft document on the website.
- 2.2 That delegated authority be given to the Cabinet Member for Community and Housing in consultation with the Head of Regulatory Services, Housing and Wellbeing to make any minor changes to the appearance, format and text of the homelessness and rough sleeping section of the draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 or the supporting documents prior to publication on the website in the interests of clarity and accuracy.

3. Background

3.1 Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their district and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review every 5 years. This must outline the main causes of homelessness and the strategic plans and actions in place to tackle them. In 2018 the government launched its new Rough Sleeping Strategy¹ in which it set out its aims to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. It requests that all homelessness strategies are reviewed and rebadged by the end of 2019 to include a specific focus on addressing rough sleeping. The strategy is based around three core principles of prevention, intervention and recovery.

3.2 Our current Homelessness Strategy covers the period from 2013 to 2018 and rather than directly replace it, we are combining it with the Housing Strategy that also needed reviewing, which is permissible under paragraph 2.9 of the Homelessness code of guidance². As well as saving resources, our combined approach means that homelessness and rough sleeping can be read as 'part of the bigger picture' within a wider housing strategy and are not seen in isolation from the range of other housing factors that would usually also be covered in the housing strategy. This approach will ensure that the council takes a comprehensive and joined up approach to all matters relating to housing, homelessness and rough sleeping.

3.3 The Strategy has been informed by the Homelessness Review 2019 at **Appendix 1** which provides a comprehensive review of a wide range of evidence relating to homelessness. The purpose of the review is to determine the extent of homelessness in the district and examine trends to formulate our strategy. Research for this began in 2018 and officers have analysed all available data since the last Strategy was developed in 2013/14 until 2019. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) which came into force on 3rd April 2018 has fundamentally changed the way that local authorities deliver their statutory homelessness duties; it has also changed the way that homelessness data is measured and collated meaning that, in many cases data from 2018/19 cannot be directly compared with that from previous years. The first section of the review therefore examines data collected prior to the HRA giving a picture of homelessness since the last Homelessness Strategy was produced and the remaining part looks at information obtained since the HRA was enacted. Key issues that we have identified are:

- Homeless applications (assessments) increased by 81% from 2017/18 to 2018/19. A rise was predicted as following the HRA we now have statutory duties to try to prevent or relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants, not just those who are statutory homeless, however the rise was more than we expected.
- The number of applicants accepted as being owed the main housing duty reduced by 44% from 56 to 24 between 2017/18 and 2018/19; the new duty to prevent homelessness for 56 days and then if necessary, try to relieve homelessness for a further 56 days before applicants would be owed the main housing duty is the most likely reason for the reduction.
- The top three reasons for being accepted as statutorily homeless have consistently been due to family/parents no longer willing or able to accommodate, relationship breakdown and the ending of a private rented tenancy; these were also the most common reasons identified in the 2013-18 Homelessness Strategy.
- There has been a significant rise in the number of households that made a homeless application due to a private landlord ending their assured shorthold tenancy, from 13 households in 2017/18 to 49 in 2018/19, a rise of 277%.

¹ In August 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published their first dedicated rough sleeping strategy <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy>

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a969da940f0b67aa5087b93/Homelessness_code_of_guidance.pdf

- The HRA has changed the most common type of household accepted as homeless; in 2018/19, it was single person households who made up the majority of homeless acceptances (53%), with female single parents, that were previously the main household type reducing to the third highest. This is another reflection of the new requirement to assist all eligible households not just those with a priority need.
- In 2018/9 11 people aged 65 or over were accepted as homeless (including 7 aged 75 or over), compared to only 4 in the five years from 2013 to 2018. We have also seen an increase in younger age groups being owed a duty.
- In 2018/19 of the 230 applicants found to be owed a duty, 151 (66%) were assessed as having a support need. Of these 46% were due to a history of mental health problems. Our records show that 24% of those with a support need were found to have two or more support needs and 19% had three or more support needs.
- Between 2013 and 2017 the numbers of official rough sleepers remained low, having fluctuated from 1 rough sleeper to 3, but in 2018 this rose to 5 with unofficial sightings being even higher.
- Our use of temporary accommodation peaked in 2015/16 with an average length of stay of 19 weeks. Whilst this dropped to 15 weeks in 2018/19, the average length of stay in B&B has increased over time. We continue to be a high user of temporary accommodation compared to the other Staffordshire local authorities (second only to Tamworth in 2018/9), which was also identified in the last Homelessness Strategy.
- In 2018/19, only 25% of households were prevented from becoming homeless by being able to remain in their existing home; the remaining 75% were found alternative accommodation before they became homeless. Moving home causes more disruption and is more costly so it is therefore preferable for households to remain in their existing home if at all possible.
- The majority of households (67%) who were owed a duty in 2018/19 had their homelessness prevented or relieved through the allocation of a registered provider property.

3.4 To consult our partners on the emerging evidence and help formulate our approach, a Homelessness Forum consultation event was held on 11th September 2019. This was attended by 30 delegates from 16 local partnership organisations, statutory and voluntary organisations and Registered Providers (RP's) of social housing. We have shared the review with all that attended the event and will also be consulting them on our draft Strategy.

3.5 From examining the evidence in the review and discussions with partners we are proposing to have one priority to cover this section of the Strategy: **'Prevent and relieve all forms of homelessness including rough sleeping'**.

We are proposing to achieve this priority by working with our partners on the following objectives:

One: Improve the range of suitable housing options for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Two: Identify and provide support to those who face barriers to accessing and maintaining suitable accommodation.

Three: Tackle rough sleeping so that no one needs to sleep rough.

3.6 We are developing an action plan, which forms an evolving part of the overall Strategy and sets out what we will do to achieve our objectives. It will act as a health check on the effective delivery of our service and will be updated annually on the council's website once live.

3.7 Several initiatives are now in progress which will form key areas of our action plan. The first is for those individuals who have more complex needs and require ongoing support to sustain a tenancy. We have recruited a Tenancy Sustainment Officer to provide personalised support to a customer for up to six months to ensure their tenancy starts well. This support will also be offered to individuals who are already in accommodation, but where it is at risk of breaking down and will form part of a suite of homeless preventative offers to support the Housing Options Team fulfil our statutory duties. The role will also be a key link between the council and private landlords, to enable us to also expand our private rented sector offer and hopefully encourage more landlords to work with us.

3.8 For rough sleepers, in conjunction with Cannock Chase District Council, we have commissioned a delivery partner Spring Housing to provide an independent and impartial outreach service. In addition to this, Spring will provide at least 5 units of supported accommodation to create a seamless pathway into accommodation for these customers. The accommodation will support those individuals with the most acute needs, forming part of the Housing First model³, but also flex to cater for those with lower level support needs who may be at risk of homelessness. It is being partly funded by government following successful bids to its Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) and Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP) fund. We are also using some Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) to fund it; it is a two year project that we will look to extend if successful outcomes are achieved and the funding source remains. The council has committed to purchase some properties to use as part of the initiative and following initial engagement with rough sleepers, discussions have commenced with Spring on the types and locations of properties that are needed. This 'Housing First' offer will supplement our winter night shelter that we hope will be running again after opening for the first time last winter.

3.9 A project is also being developed to look at the available options to support those begging in the street that would work alongside the Housing First initiative to try to reduce the visible presence of street begging in the city centre. One option being considered is the creation of a 'diverted giving scheme' that would seek to dissuade people from giving money directly to street beggars but instead to a fund that would support people on the street to move away from begging and into a better alternative lifestyle, or for example, would assist the provision of a winter night shelter. The project would be delivered by the Lichfield District Community Safety Partnership and the proposal will be considered in detail by the District Board later this year.

Alternative Options	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To not publish a new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024: this is not recommended as we have a statutory duty to publish a homelessness strategy every five years after we have carried out a review of homelessness. 2. To do nothing: this is not an option as the governments Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 requires us to have a plan in place to halve rough sleeping by 2020 and end it by 2027. 3. To have a separate homelessness strategy; the synergy between this and the housing strategy mean that it will be beneficial and more cost effective and efficient use of staff time to have both in one combined document.
Consultation	<p>We held our first Homelessness Forum on the 11th September that was well attended by 30 representatives from 16 organisations working with homeless and vulnerable people across the district. At the Forum we shared our emerging evidence and sought views on the priority and emerging objectives for this section of the Strategy, which were well received. We have also obtained feedback from this group on the homelessness review. The short time scale set by government for having a strategy in place that considers rough sleeping by the end of 2019 has</p>

³ The Housing First model originated in America with several pilots now having taken place in the UK. The premise of this model is the provision of accommodation with the only conditionality being the willingness of the individual to maintain the tenancy, the level of support provided is tailored to the individual.

	<p>inhibited our ability to complete further consultation until now, but we will be consulting all our relevant partners and stakeholders on the draft full Strategy document early next year.</p> <p>At its meeting on the 17th October 2019, the Community Housing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Homelessness Review and draft strategy section. Members were supportive of our approach and felt that both documents were extremely informative and well written. Members supported the priority and objectives and endorsed both documents to go to Cabinet for approval prior to publication on the website.</p>
<p>Financial Implications</p>	<p>Our action plan has been drawn up within existing budgets supplemented by additional government funding. We have received three years Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) of £326,000 that we have been using to employ additional Housing Options Officers to be able to cope with the increased work and demands placed on us by the HRA. It will also part fund the rough sleeper outreach and Housing First service by Spring that we are supplementing with government funding awards of Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) of £25,000 and Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP) of £54,750. FHSG was also initially being used to fund the Tenancy Support Officer post but we have now agreed with Bromford that they will be funding this two year post. We have also received new burdens funding of £54,000 which we are using to pay for the new homelessness database (housing jigsaw).</p> <p>Our plans are currently based on only receiving three years of FHSG, however we have been notified that we are very likely to receive it for 2020/21. Additional staff resources needed after this funding has been fully utilised will be a budget pressure for the service should the HRA remain in its current form and the government no longer provides reimbursement for the costs we incur for its implications.</p> <p>We received a payment of £5,000 from the governments Cold Weather fund, which we match funded to assist Churches Together to establish the night shelter in several churches in Lichfield City in February and March 2019. It was announced that we can bid for circa £10,000 this year and so we have recently submitted a bid to enable the night shelter to be run again this winter.</p> <p>We have capital monies set aside in our capital programme⁴ for the purchase of up to four properties to be used to lease to Spring Housing as part of the Housing First initiative. Spring have informed us of the needs of the rough sleepers that they are working with and we are currently assessing suitable properties for purchase.</p>
<p>Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan</p>	<p>The Strategic Plan 2016-2020 sets out what we want to achieve in four main themes. The development of the Strategy will contribute most significantly towards the themes of ‘healthy and safe communities’ and ‘clean, green and welcoming places to live’ by preventing homelessness. In addition, the support element tied with accommodation will contribute to the ‘vibrant and prosperous economy’ by creating local jobs and allowing new business to locate and succeed. Spring already have a base here as they are currently managing a care leavers supported housing scheme in Lichfield city that has an office attached; the outreach workers and manager are using this as a base to work from.</p>

⁴ On 12th March 2019 Cabinet agreed to acquire property from a minimum approved budget of £400,000 up to a maximum of £809,000 of additional housing reserves with oversight by the s151 officer and monitoring officer. Additional expenditure will only occur if the project proves successful and further capacity is required.

<p>Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications</p>	<p>In 2018/19 there were 230 households accepted as owed a prevention or relief duty. The majority (34%) were single adult males, with female single parents with one child being the next largest category at 24%. 96% were White, 1% were Multiple or other ethnic origin and 2% were Asian/Asian British. 23% were under 25, 73% were aged between 25 and 64, and 4% were aged 65 or over.</p> <p>The implementation of the HRA means that the council now has additional duties to prevent homelessness and we must help to secure accommodation for all eligible households, regardless of whether they are in a 'priority need' category. This has increased the help given to single people and those without dependent children, especially single men, who were previously not in a 'priority need' category.</p> <p>It is not anticipated that the Strategy or action plan will have any negative implications for equality, diversity or human rights. The final draft will be evaluated by our Equality Impact Assessment group next year.</p>
<p>Crime & Safety Issues</p>	<p>The provision of the Housing First scheme with supported accommodation options will potentially reduce the issues of anti-social behaviour created by some of our rough sleepers who have been using Friary Outer, Birmingham Road multi-storey and other car parks to sleep in, several of which are reported to be taking drugs and begging in the city centre.</p> <p>Although initial intelligence from partners suggested that there are also some individuals that visit the city to beg as a lifestyle choice, the current picture is less clear. Consequently, the initial priority is to create and maintain a comprehensive picture of those individuals who have a street based life. This will be part of a street begging project that will work alongside the Housing First initiative and seek to reduce the visible presence of street begging in the city. One option being considered is the creation of a 'diverted giving scheme' that would seek to dissuade people from giving money directly to street beggars but instead to a fund that would support people on the street to move away from begging and into a better alternative lifestyle, or for example, would assist the provision of a winter night shelter. Options around the implementation of this are currently being considered and will be presented to the District Board later this year; any scheme needs to ensure that only those genuinely in need are supported and the consideration for enforcement against those that continue to refuse to engage with support initiatives to beg, will be explored.</p>

<p>GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment</p>	<p>None identified.</p>
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	Risk Description	How We Manage It	Severity of Risk (RYG)
A	Actions identified in the Strategy are not delivered	Our action plan will be monitored through Pentana and an annual review conducted.	Green
B	There are insufficient resources to deliver the emerging Strategy	The priority, objectives and associated actions have been established using existing budget and resources.	Green
C	The priority and objectives cannot be achieved within the timeframe set.	The priority and objectives proposed are very broad and the action plan will contain the	Yellow

		detail to deliver the overall Strategy. Many actions are existing project/commitments. We will monitor the impact of our actions and would develop business cases for any additional funding needed over time.	
D	FHSG or similar government funding is not received in 2020/21 or future years	The detailed action plan we are developing for the whole Strategy is based on current budgets, which includes FHSG received for three years 2017/18-2019/20. We will regularly review our action plan and the staff and other resources needed to deliver it to ensure that the plan is achievable. If government homelessness funding ceases we will develop a business case for additional council funding if required.	Yellow

Background documents

Report to CHH O&S 17th October 2019 - Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

<https://democracy.lichfielddc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=143&Mid=1523>

Report to Cabinet 12th March 2019 - Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Pathway proposals and use of s106 commuted sums

<https://democracy.lichfielddc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=138&Mid=240&Ver=4>

Relevant web links

Lichfield District Homelessness Strategy and Review 2013-2018

<https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/downloads/file/126/lichfield-district-homelessness-strategy-2013-2018>

Lichfield District Council (2013-2017) Housing Strategy: <https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/Residents/Housing/Housing-strategy/Download-our-housing-strategies>

MHCLG (2018) Rough Sleeping Strategy:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf

Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2020- <https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/Council/Health-and-wellbeing-strategy.aspx>

Lichfield District Safer Community Partnership Draft Delivery Plan

<https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/downloads/file/1246/community-safety-delivery-plan-2019-22>