

**22 April 2024**

**Homelessness and Rough Sleeping  
Strategy 2024 - 2029**



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**Report of Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration,  
Economy and Growth**

**Electoral divisions affected:**

Countywide.

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2024-2029) (as set out in Appendix 2). The report includes feedback from the second phase of the consultation and takes into consideration comments made by members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee from 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

**Executive summary**

- 2 The Homelessness Act 2002 brought about a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness, in particular, the requirement for the development and publication of a homelessness strategy for every housing authority every five years. The new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2024-2029) will replace the current strategy adopted by Cabinet in July 2019.
- 3 The revised strategy has been developed following a detailed review of homelessness and rough sleeping. It establishes four priorities to tackle homelessness between 2024 to 2029; these are:
  - a) priority 1: prevent people from becoming homeless;
  - b) priority 2: improve access to and supply of accommodation;
  - c) priority 3: ensure the appropriate support is available for people who are homeless (work with partners to build resilience in people); and
  - d) priority 4: reduce rough sleeping.

- 4 This draft strategy will address the varying housing and support needs across the 10 main cohorts of people who present to housing as homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 5 Some of the key findings from the review include:
  - a) a large increase in the number of people requiring early advice;
  - b) the number of people being able to remain in their existing home has considerably reduced;
  - c) an increase in the numbers of people with a support need, in particular those with complex needs;
  - d) access to accommodation for certain cohorts is difficult;
  - e) a reduction in affordable accommodation; and
  - f) there is insufficient supported accommodation for rough sleepers.
- 6 The scope of the strategy recognises all types of homelessness needs for people who are:
  - a) considering their housing options and require advice;
  - b) at risk of homelessness;
  - c) statutory and non-statutory homeless;
  - d) street homeless and are rough sleeping;
  - e) children who experience homeless; and
  - f) people who are moving on from homelessness (moving from temporary or supported accommodation and require longer term accommodation).
- 7 Following feedback from the second phase of the consultation, which took place from October to December 2023, a one-year delivery plan has been developed. A Homelessness Forum will be established in the coming months and will take responsibility for the development and implementation of the delivery plan.
- 8 A light touch review will be carried out annually to address any policy or funding changes as well as taking into consideration any significant

differences in demand to the service. The delivery plan will be updated accordingly following the annual review.

### **Recommendation**

- 9 It is recommended that the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report and provide any further feedback to inform the final strategy to be approved by Cabinet in July 2024.

## Background

- 10 The County Durham Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been developed in line with the Government's Code of Guidance for reviewing homelessness and formulating a strategy. An in-depth review of homelessness and rough sleeping was carried out, analysing data from April 2019 through to October 2022, to determine current and future trends of people presenting to housing solutions as homeless or at risk of homelessness including rough sleepers. It should be noted that this period included the years of the Covid Pandemic during which many Government initiatives were introduced to support households and prevent homelessness, including the Everyone In programme, ban on evictions and increased benefits payments. It is possible therefore that some of the figures are not truly reflective of the levels of homelessness.
  
- 11 This draft strategy is very different from previous strategies. It will address the varying housing and support needs across the 10 main cohorts of people who present to the council as homeless or threatened with homelessness. These cohorts are:
  - a) general homeless (with no support need);
  - b) complex needs;
  - c) young people;
  - d) domestic abuse;
  - e) offenders;
  - f) larger families;
  - g) rough sleepers;
  - h) care leavers;
  - i) hospital discharge; and
  - j) veterans.
  
- 12 Informal consultation was carried out between December 2022 to March 2023 on the proposed four priorities with the draft priorities amended to reflect the feedback. The priorities set out the key areas where the council will focus activity to deliver the vision 'Durham is a county where we all work together to eradicate homelessness and rough sleeping and where everyone has a safe place to call home'. The four priorities are:

- a) priority 1: prevent people from becoming homeless;
  - b) priority 2: improve access to and supply of accommodation;
  - c) priority 3: ensure the appropriate support is available for people who are homeless (work with partners to build resilience in people); and
  - d) priority 4: reduce rough sleeping.
- 13 Under each priority there are a number of high-level actions, which are in response to current and future pressures around homelessness in County Durham. Since the development of the last strategy the housing market and economic climate has changed therefore this strategy includes a range of new actions, for example:
- a) introduction of specialist officers within housing solutions including drug and alcohol support workers, social workers and trauma informed specialists;
  - b) utilise the council house delivery programme for new build and acquisition;
  - c) co-ordinate all existing support pathways and services; and
  - d) develop a housing first model for rough sleepers.
- 14 The strategy will be delivered in partnership via a newly established multi-agency homelessness forum. It will also provide a strategic framework to ensure that Durham County Council is well positioned to maximise future funding opportunities. The review document and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy provides the evidence to identify issues surrounding homelessness and rough sleeping and a clear approach to address these issues.
- 15 Current and future levels of homelessness will be continually monitored, including main reasons why people present as homeless. A light touch review will be carried out annually to address any policy or funding changes as well as taking into consideration any significant differences in demand to the service. The delivery plan will be updated accordingly following the annual review.
- 16 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy aligns with existing or emerging strategies including the County Durham Plan and the Housing Strategy for County Durham. It will also support delivery of the Inclusive Economic Strategy by seeking to ensure that a lack of access to good quality housing is not a barrier to economic growth.

- 17 An equalities impact assessment and wellbeing assessment have been produced alongside the development of the strategy, which will ensure that the document reflects and takes account of differing needs of our communities.
- 18 Consultation was undertaken on the document for a period of seven weeks from 30 October 2023 to 18 December 2023. This consultation ran alongside the consultation on the draft housing strategy and was joined up where appropriate. Consultation was carried out with residents of County Durham and other key partners and stakeholders including:
  - a) presentations to Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) and County Durham Partnership thematic groups including the Housing Forum, Health and Wellbeing Board and Economic Partnership etc.;
  - b) a survey for residents and the opportunity to e-mail feedback;
  - c) workshop for all Members of Scrutiny;
  - d) conversations with key partners and stakeholders including one-on-one sessions with our housing association partners and a presentation to the Housing Forum;
  - e) briefings for elected Members; and
  - f) discussions at a regional level with North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA) colleagues.
- 19 The main messages from the consultation are: -
  - a) Overwhelming support for the vision and the four priorities
  - b) Strong emphasis on the importance of partnership working to successfully deliver the strategy and achieve the vision and priorities
  - c) Prevention of homelessness was prevalent in the feedback, particularly working with families and young people to mediate and prevent them from being asked to leave the family home and prevention of evictions.
  - d) Ensure joint working with specialist support services to meet the needs of people with complex issues, for example mental health, finance, drug and alcohol addiction.
  - e) A joined up approach to assist those people living in poverty and prevent homelessness.

- f) Better access to affordable housing, including social housing and private rented, in particular for single people, younger people and larger families.
  - g) Review of the Durham Key Options policy to allow fair access and outcomes for people.
  - h) Strong links to health, housing and homelessness.
  - i) Improved partnership working to reduce rough sleeping, in particular a focus on mental health support, including addiction and supported housing for people who require long-term support.
  - j) Registered Providers of social housing are keen to work in partnership to support the vision and the priorities of the strategy, in particular the involvement in the Homelessness Forum.
- 20 All comments from the consultation have been taken on board and work has been carried out to ensure that the strategy, including the one-year delivery plan takes account of the feedback. Appendix 3 provides a detailed account of the consultation responses, along with a reply from the Council and what changes (if any) have made to the strategy and delivery plan.
- 21 Members from the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided feedback on the strategy following the meeting on the 18 December (included in Appendix 3). A summary of the feedback, including responses: -

### **General comments**

- a) A need to include a short-term delivery plan with the draft strategy to avoid any resulting delays in the delivery of actions
  - (i) Response – A one-year delivery plan has been developed to ensure implementation of the strategy can commence once it is adopted in July 2024, this is attached at Appendix 4. A longer-term delivery plan will be developed with key partners through the establishment of a Homelessness Forum.
- b) The strategy should be flexible and be able to respond to change at a national, regional and local level
  - (i) Response – A light touch review will be carried out annually to address any policy or funding changes as well as taking into consideration any significant differences in demand to the service. The delivery plan will be updated accordingly following the annual review.

- c) The need for accountability for the delivery of actions identified within the strategy and delivery plan.
  - (i) Response - The delivery of the strategy will be overseen by an internal housing project group, with accountability to the Homelessness Forum.

### **Priority 1**

- a) The current front-line approach for customer contact is very much digital based with a lack of face-to-face contact and there was concern about clients having access to the necessary technology to then be able to access the required support. It was suggested that there is a need to identify more opportunities for support to be provided via face-to-face contact with clients, particularly in view of the recent review of DCC Customer Access Point provision.
  - (i) Response - The front-line teams will make an appointment to see clients in Customer Access Points (CAP) should they be unable to communicate via telephone or e-mail. Home visits will be arranged for those clients who have vulnerabilities and are unable to communicate digitally or come into a CAP. Two visiting officers have recently been established to carry out home visits with families and younger people to prevent evictions where possible.
- b) Need to continually promote the support available and it was suggested the information in relation to available support should be available in community venues throughout the county.
  - (i) Response - The one-year delivery plan includes an action to update the webpages and to include relevant links to partner agencies. This work also includes working with key partners, including the family hubs to promote the services that the homeless team offers.
- c) Need to ensure that young people are aware of the support available both from a perspective that they may need to access the support but also so that they can promote what support is available within their local communities. It was suggested that information on available support be provided in schools and colleges throughout the county and that colleagues within the Housing Solutions Service may want to visit both schools and colleges to provide detail of available support.
  - (i) Response - Priority 1 in the strategy highlights the need to 'Develop creative approaches to working earlier with young people in schools, youth groups and young people within the



care system to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place'. The 12-month delivery plan includes an action to work with Childrens and Young People's Services (CYPS) and other council services to; share information about homelessness with young people in the care system and in schools/colleges, roll out a communications plan with Family Hubs, as well as fully understanding the potential demands to the service as young people progress to adulthood.

d) Concerning reasons for presenting as homeless, it was suggested that we need to monitor and record the numbers presenting because of the 'Cost of Living Crisis', with the increase in the mortgage rate and general rise in living costs. It was felt by members that more homeless presentations in the county would be attributed to this reason in the future.

(i) Response - Data dashboards track the numbers of people that present as homeless or at risk of homeless due to loss of their property in the private rented sector. This data is broken down into the reasons including landlord selling their property, rent arrears or the landlord re letting the property. Mortgage repossession is also monitored. Interventions are put in place according to the data. The private rented sector operates a 'stop before you serve' initiative, where they will mediate and negotiate with the landlord to prevent evictions and the client with financial and debt management advice. Two key workers work alongside the private sector team to identify cases at an early point in time that could lead to an eviction. This is reflected within the strategy and the one-year delivery plan to work with private and social landlords and supported housing providers to prevent evictions where possible.

## **Priority 2**

a) Suggested to work with Social Housing Providers in the county on pilot schemes to provide the opportunity for ex-offenders to be housed by these providers rather than the current situation where the available housing is provided by the private sector.

(i) Response - The one-year delivery plan includes an action to work with providers to explore potential initiatives that could support ex-offenders to access social housing, where they would otherwise be excluded from DKO.

- 22 Any final feedback from the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee will inform the final iteration of the strategy that will be presented to Cabinet in July 2024 for approval.

### **Background papers**

- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping review (data from 2019 to 2022)
- Housing Strategy Principle and Priorities Paper 2023

### **Other useful documents**

- None.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Compliance with legislation.

### **Finance**

None.

### **Consultation and Engagement**

Consultation on the draft strategy will be carried out in October 2023 through to December 2023 with the public and key partners/stakeholders.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

An equality impact assessment has been developed alongside the strategy around the protected characteristics. The main three where action is required are:

- a) age: work with children's services and registered providers to work with care leavers and older people as early as possible to prevent homelessness;
- b) disability: work with adult social care to provide accessible accommodation and dedicated support, specialist social workers and mental health support workers embedded in the services; and
- c) race: dedicated humanitarian support team; staff trained in equality and diversity.

Information from the review on the key priorities is being fed into this.

### **Climate Change**

None.

### **Human Rights**

None.

### **Crime and Disorder**

The Probation Service is an identified key partner who will work with the housing team to help achieve the priorities identified and meet the needs of people being released from prison and those living in the community.

### **Staffing**

The strategy will be delivered utilising existing staffing resource.

**Accommodation**

None.

**Risk**

None.

**Procurement**

Procurement guidelines and regulations will be met when procuring any additional services.

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## **Appendix 2: Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2024-2029)**

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Please refer to the attached draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2024-2029).

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## **Appendix 3: Consultation responses**

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Please refer to the attached document for a full account of the consultations responses

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**Appendix 4: Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Delivery Plan  
July 2024 – July 2025**

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Please refer to the attached Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Delivery Plan  
July 2024 – July 2025