

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

**Ordinary Decision**

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**Report of Corporate Management Team**

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

**Councillor Alan Shield, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Equality and Inclusion**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of the report is to obtain Cabinet's approval of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (as set out in Appendix 2) for a seven week public consultation from 30 October 2023 to 18 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 sets out how Durham County Council aim to achieve the four priorities of homelessness over the next five years covering the period 2024 to 2029.
- 4 The review analysed data from April 2019 through to October 2022 looks at the current and future trends in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping and the challenges that Durham County Council face as a housing authority. This period included the years of the Covid

Pandemic during which time the Government implemented a range of initiatives to prevent homelessness. The data has shaped the four priorities of the strategy which were consulted upon with the public, key partners and stakeholders from December 2022 to March 2023.

- 5 As a result of a more in depth review, this draft strategy is different from previous strategies. It 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.
- 6 Some of the key findings from the review include:
  - a large increase in the number of people requiring early advice;
  - the number of people being able to remain in their existing home has considerably reduced;
  - an increase in the numbers of people with a support need, in particular those with complex needs;
  - access to accommodation for certain cohorts is difficult;
  - a reduction in affordable accommodation; and
  - there is insufficient supported accommodation for rough sleepers.
- 7 The scope of the strategy recognises all types of homelessness needs for people who are:
  - considering their housing options and require advice;
  - at risk of homelessness;
  - statutory and non-statutory homeless;
  - street homeless and are rough sleeping;
  - children who experience homeless; and
  - people who are moving on from homelessness (moving from temporary or supported accommodation and require longer term accommodation).
- 8 A detailed delivery plan will be developed in liaison with key partners. 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.
- 9 If the draft strategy is agreed consultation will be undertaken on the document for seven weeks from 30 October 2023 to 18 December 2023.
- 10 Consultation will be undertaken with residents of County Durham and other stakeholders with a potential interest in the content of the document. The council will make use of its partnership structure to

assist in disseminating information about the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

- 11 Following the consultation the strategy will be modified as necessary and presented to Cabinet for adoption in Spring 2024.

## **Recommendations**

- 12 Cabinet is recommended to:
  - a. approve the draft strategy;
  - b. agree to a seven week public consultation from 30 October 2023 to 18 December 2023; and
  - c. note that a final version of the strategy will be brought back to Cabinet in March 2024 for approval.

## Background

- 13 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 has been 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.
- 14 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 housing as homeless or threatened with homelessness. These cohorts include:
  - general homeless (with no support need);
  - complex needs;
  - young people;
  - domestic abuse;
  - offenders;
  - larger families;
  - rough sleepers;
  - care leavers;
  - hospital discharge; and
  - veterans.
- 15 Consultation was carried out with the public and with key partners from December 2022 to March 2023 on the proposed four priorities. Following consultation, the priorities were amended slightly 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:
  - Priority 1: Prevent people from becoming homeless;
  - Priority 2: Improve access to and supply of accommodation;
  - Priority 3: Ensure the appropriate support is available for people who are homeless (work with partners to build resilience in people); and
  - Priority 4: Reduce Rough Sleeping.

- 16 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:
- introduction of specialist officers within housing solutions, including drug and alcohol support workers, social workers and trauma informed specialists;
  - utilise the council house delivery programme for new build and acquisition;
  - co-ordinate all existing support pathways and services; and
  - develop a housing first model for rough sleepers.
- 17 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.
- 18 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy aligns with existing or emerging strategies including the County Durham Plan and the Housing Strategy for County Durham.
- 19 An equalities impact assessment and wellbeing assessment are being prepared alongside the development of the strategy that will ensure that the document reflects and takes account of differing needs of our communities.
- 20 If the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is agreed, consultation will be undertaken on the document for a period of seven weeks from 30 October 2023 to 18 December 2023. This consultation will run alongside the consultation on the draft Housing Strategy and will be joined up where appropriate. Consultation will be carried out with residents of County Durham and other key partners and stakeholders with a potential interest in the document including:
- presentations to Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) and County Durham Partnership thematic groups including the Housing Forum, Health and Wellbeing Board and Economic Partnership etc.;
  - a survey for residents;
  - workshop for all Members of Scrutiny;
  - conversations with key partners and stakeholders including one-on-one sessions with our housing association partners and a presentation to the Housing Forum;

- briefings for elected Members; and
- discussions at a regional level with North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA) colleagues.

21 The outcome and feedback from the consultation will inform the final iteration of the strategy that will be presented to Cabinet in March 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 regarding the protected characteristics. The main three where action is required are:

- age: liaise with children's services and registered providers to work with care leavers and older people as early as possible to prevent homelessness;
- 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
- 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**

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Please see the attached draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.