

**Adoption of Homelessness and
Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029
and Delivery Plan**

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

**Councillor James Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for
Resources, Investment, and Assets**

Electoral divisions affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to seek County Council approval to adopt the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (HRSS), as detailed at Appendix 2. Cabinet has agreed to adopt the accompanying 12-Month Delivery Plan, as detailed at Appendix 3, subject to the HRSS being adopted by County Council.

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 HRSS (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, as well as two rounds of consultation with partners and stakeholders, including residents. The first round of consultation ran from December 2022 to March 2023 and focused on developing the proposed four priorities for the strategy. The second round focused on the draft strategy, which ran from 30 October 2023 to 18 December 2023. All comments and feedback were reflected in the final version of the strategy.
- 4 The strategy 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.
- 5 The 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.
- 6 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.
- 7 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).
- 8 Following feedback from the second phase of the consultation, which took place from October 2023 to December 2023, a 12-month delivery plan has been developed. A homelessness strategy steering group will

be established in the coming months and will take responsibility for the development and implementation of the delivery plan.

- 9 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.

Recommendations

- 10 County Council is recommended to:
 - (a) adopt the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (HRSS) as detailed at Appendix 2.

Background

- 10 The County Durham HRSS 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.
- 11 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:
 - (a) the Everyone In programme;
 - (b) ban on evictions; and
 - (c) increased benefits payments.
- 12 It is possible therefore that some of the figures are not truly reflective of the levels of homelessness due to the initiatives set out in paragraph 11. The cost of living for people was starting to increase towards the end of the review period and has continued beyond. The impact of this will be monitored as part of the performance monitoring of the delivery plan.
- 13 The 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, which previous strategies did not. The enhanced data sets and evidence enables the revised strategy to drill down into specific cohorts to ensure a focused approach to delivery and developing improved customer experiences. 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.
- 14 Consultation was carried out between December 2022 to March 2023 on the proposed four priorities with key partners and residents. The main changes made as a result of the consultation was in relation to priority 4. Priority 4 was amended from 'end rough sleeping for good' to 'reduce rough sleeping' as it was felt the original priority was overly ambitious. Priorities one to three remained the same, due to the majority of feedback agreeing.
- 15 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.
- 16 Under each priority there are a number of high-level actions that 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:
 - i. drug and alcohol support workers;
 - ii. social workers; and
 - iii. trauma informed specialists;
 - (b) utilise the council house delivery programme for new build and acquisition;
 - (c) increase the supply of council owned and commissioned temporary accommodation, rather than rely on B&B and hotels;
 - (d) co-ordinate all existing support pathways and services; and

- (e) 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 HRSS provides the evidence to identify issues surrounding homelessness and rough sleeping and a clear approach to address these issues.
 - 18 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, including emerging work related to devolution. The delivery plan will be updated accordingly following the annual review.
 - 19 The HRSS 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. We also recognise that the Strategy and Delivery Plan are being developed in the context of emerging devolution work, including a Strategic Place Partnership between NECA and Homes England.
 - 20 An equalities impact assessment has been produced alongside the development of the strategy that ensures the document reflects and takes account of differing needs of our communities, this can be seen at Appendix 5. The strategy presents no negative impact on the protected groups. Homelessness manifests disproportionately within specific service user groups, for example, young people, offenders; those with mental ill health or are from lower socio-economic groups. In terms of protected groups this means that younger males (for example) are disproportionately impacted by homelessness however other protected groups can equally be impacted including women and pregnant women or those with a disability. The strategy is positive in that it aims to support all protected groups.
 - 21 A well-being assessment was carried out on the strategy, against the seven well-being principles. The assessment framework poses questions that can help to structure conversations and inform decisions about how local work and activities can support the wellbeing of people living in communities. The assessment highlighted areas of work that could be developed in liaison with people with lived experience, helping shape

services from the viewpoint of the customer. These have been added as actions to the delivery plan.

- 22 Further 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 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:
 - i. the Housing Forum,
 - ii. Health and Wellbeing Board; and
 - iii. 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.
- 23 The main messages from the consultation include:
- (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:
 - i. mental health;

- ii. finance; and
 - iii. 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:
 - i. single people;
 - ii. younger people; and
 - iii. 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; and
 - (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.
- 24 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.
- 25 A presentation to Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee was held on 18 December 2023. The comments received fed into the final strategy. A follow up session was held 22 April 2024 where it was demonstrated how the Committee's comments had been addressed. There were a small number of subsequent comments, and these have been included in the Statement of Consultation at Appendix 4.

Next Steps

- 26 Following adoption of the HRSS, the council will work with partners to develop the longer-term delivery plan and deliver the actions in the 12-month delivery plan to achieve the strategy's vision and priorities.

Background papers

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping review (data from 2019 to 2022)

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Draft

Housing Strategy Principle and Priorities Paper 2023

Other useful documents

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The recommendations in paragraph 9 reflect that the adoption of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is the responsibility of County Council as it is part of the council's budget and policy framework however, the implementation of strategies, once adopted and including the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, sits with Cabinet.

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every housing authority to develop and publish a homelessness strategy setting out their strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness. This should be updated every five years.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. It also requires housing authorities to provide homelessness services to all those affected, not just those who have 'priority need.' These include:

- (a) an enhanced prevention duty extending the period a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that housing authorities are required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage; and
- (b) a new duty for those who are already homeless so that housing authorities will support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation.

Finance

The HRSS identifies a series of actions and outcomes. Each of these will be associated with a project that may require a funding bid once the scope of the project is determined. The strategy does not guarantee funding for the projects listed.

The Council Housing Delivery Programme will enable the Council to build and acquire properties to manage as 'in house stock.' A Housing Revenue Account will be established once the required threshold is met.

Additional funding of £750k was required during 2023/24 for increased use of temporary accommodation (TA). Alongside this is the requirement of £2.4m of budget growth to offset the Housing Benefit subsidy loss created from the increasing pressures surrounding TA and supported accommodation.

Consultation and Engagement

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.

Further 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 housing strategy and was joined up where appropriate. Consultation was carried out with residents of County Durham and other key partners and stakeholders.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2010, public sector equality duty S149-157 of the Act, has been considered as part of a full equalities impact assessment, which is attached to this report at Appendix 5. The strategy presents no negative impact on the protected groups. Homelessness manifests disproportionately within specific service user groups. For example:

- (a) young people;
- (b) offenders; and
- (c) those with mental ill health or are from lower socio-economic groups.

In terms of protected groups this means that younger males (for example) are disproportionately impacted by homelessness however other protected groups can be impacted:

- (a) women;
- (b) pregnancy;
- (c) new mothers;
- (d) older men etc.

The strategy is positive in that it aims to support those groups.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

Protocol 1 Article 1: Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions including their property. The HRSS will provide

a framework to prevent homelessness and if it cannot be prevented, appropriate accommodation and support will be sourced for an individual and/or their family.

Article 8: provides a right to respect for private and family life. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home, and his correspondence. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. The council will ensure the HRSS will be consistent with the council's human rights obligations.

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 reviewed and monitored utilising existing staffing resource.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

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

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

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

Appendix 3: 12-Month Delivery Plan

Please refer to the attached 12-Month Delivery Plan.

Appendix 4: Statement of Consultation

Please refer to the attached Statement of Consultation.

Appendix 5: Equality Impact Assessment

Please refer to the attached Equality Impact Assessment.