



|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Report for:</b>      | <b>Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (H&amp;OSC)</b> |
| <b>Date of meeting:</b> | <b>3 June 2020</b>   |
| <b>Part:</b>            | <b>1</b>   |
| If Part II, reason:     |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Title of report:</b>                      | <b>Homelessness &amp; Rough Sleeper Strategy</b>   |
| <b>Contact:</b>                              | Councillor Mrs Margaret Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing<br>Cynthia Hayford, Homeless Prevention Team Leader  |
| <b>Purpose of report:</b>                    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide members with an overview of strategy development for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping.</li> <li>2. To provide members with an update on the key priority areas for homelessness in the next five years.</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Recommendations</b>                       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. For members to provide feedback on the 5 commitments set out in the strategy.</li> </ol>   |
| <b>Period for post policy/project review</b> | This strategy will be reviewed and monitored annually, in conjunction with annual service plans and the HRA Business plan.   |
| <b>Corporate objectives</b>                  | Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those in most need.   |
| <b>Implications:</b>                         | Failure to develop a new Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy would mean the Council were in breach of fulfilling its statutory requirements.  |
| <b>'Value for money' implications</b>        | The Council along with the Homeless Forum, monitors the housing service's approach to managing the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping service. In addition regular benchmarking of H-Clic data (data returns to central government) and other Hertfordshire County services is undertaken to ensure the service offers value for money. |
| <b>Risk implications</b>                     | Failure to have an up to date Homeless & Rough Sleeping strategy is a contravention of statutory legislation.  |
| <b>Community Impact Assessment</b>           | Attached at <i>Appendix 4</i>  |
| <b>Health and safety Implications</b>        | Failure to appropriately delivery the statutory homeless service in line with legislation and guidance, could have serious health & safety/safeguarding if the council does not ensure that eligible applicants receive appropriate assistance.  |
| <b>Consultees:</b>                           | Natasha Beresford, Strategic Housing Group Manager   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>Fiona Williamson, Assistant Director Housing</p> <p>Mark Gaynor, Corporate Director of Housing and Regeneration</p> <p>Homeless Forum</p> <p>Multi Agency Response Panel/Homeless Action Review Team</p> <p>Herts County Council</p> <p>Tenants &amp; Leaseholders Committee.</p>                   |
| Background papers:   | <p>Appendix 1 Homelessness &amp; Rough Sleeper Strategy</p> <p>Appendix 2 Homelessness Strategy Update</p> <p>Appendix 3 Evidence base for homelessness and rough sleeping review</p> <p>Appendix 4 Community Impact Assessment</p> <p>Appendix 5 Current structure chart</p>                          |
| Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviation in the report: | <p>Homeless Reduction Act (HRA)</p> <p>Housing and Communities Overview &amp; Scrutiny (H&amp;OSC)</p> <p>Multi Agency Response Panel (MARP)</p> <p>Homeless Action Review Team (HART)</p> <p>Housing Quality Network (HNQ)</p> <p>Ministry for Housing Communities &amp; Local Government (MHCLG)</p> |

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Every Local Authority in England should by law have an up to date preventing homelessness strategy that sets out its plans to prevent and tackle homelessness. This is a statutory requirement as set out in Section 1(1) of the 2002 Act giving housing authorities the power to carry out a homelessness review for their district and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review.
- 1.2. Local Authority homelessness strategies should have a lifetime of no longer than 5 years, and local authorities should keep their homelessness strategy under review, modify it from time to time in order to respond to new policy direction, caselaw, prevailing conditions in the borough and to comply with legal duties.
- 1.3. The introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) brought along several challenges for local authorities including Dacorum. More staff

were needed in the Homeless Prevention Team and this resulted in five additional Officers to the team, which were agreed at Cabinet in 2016. Current team structure attached as *Appendix 5*. We were also successful in a growth bid this year for two new posts, 1-year fixed term Homeless Prevention Officer and a Triage Officer. Service delivery has completely changed in terms of tasks for processing cases, this was outlined in previous report presented to members in July 2019.

- 1.4. One of the requirements upon local authorities following the implementation of the HRA was to complete quarterly data returns to central government via a new system called 'H-Clic' which has replaced the previous P1E reporting system. Since implementation last year, we have identified the following:
  - Approximately 40% of all approaches are made when the applicant is already homeless (known as relief cases).
  - A further 48% of all approaches are made when the applicant is threatened with homelessness (known as prevention cases).
  - Applicants that were not threatened with homelessness, and requiring basic advice and assistance in relation to their housing situation made 10% of all approaches.
  - 60% of all households that have approached the council are single with no dependents.
  - Of the above 60% a high proportion (about 80%) have an identified vulnerability or need such as mental health and/or drug and alcohol use. However, this does not necessarily translate to there being a priority need for homelessness assistance or temporary accommodation
  - Some of the challenges with H-Clic are mostly that it works on a very black and white basis and don't always allow accurate reporting when the cases don't follow the normal process.
- 1.5. The findings at 1.4 have been incorporated into the evidence based at *Appendix 3*, which have formed part of the review of the current strategy. The draft Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy replaces our 2016-2020 Homelessness Strategy previously reviewed by members. The new strategy will outline our key priorities for preventing homelessness and reducing rough sleeping in the borough from 2020-2024.

## **2. Review of the 2016-2020 Homelessness Strategy**

- 2.1. Throughout the life span of the strategy we have engaged with our partners via the Homelessness Forum, Multi Agency Response Panel (MARF) and Homeless Action Review Team (HART), regular updates have been provided to members and Corporate Management Team. This engagement has to identify the trends of homelessness and worked with key partners to prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping.

**2.2.** The current strategy runs from 2016 to 2020 and was updated in 2019 due to legislative change. The strategy highlighted the impact of Welfare reform, Universal Credit and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The strategy was based around five key commitments.

**2.3.** The Service has delivered a range of initiatives and services to fulfil the requirements set out in the 5 commitments of the 2016-2020 strategy and had also in this period been awarded the Gold Standard by the National Practitioner Support Service.

**2.4.** Key highlights through the delivery of this strategy document for the service have been:

- Maximise the use of temporary accommodation and were able to generate over £250k income for general fund.
- There has been continued prevention and no use of B&B for young children and families. In more recent times due to the unprecedented situation with COVID-19, the service has had to use B&B for single adults and couples to enable a successful response to the governments 'Everyone In' request.
- Introduction of a new Civica homeless system module.
- Success in securing additional tranches totalling over £300k of additional grant funding to support the homeless and the eradication of rough sleeping.

Full review of the strategy is attached as *Appendix 1*.

### **3. Consultation**

**3.1.** To develop the new strategy, the service has worked closely with the Housing Quality Network (HQN), as we felt it was important to use an external specialist facilitator to draw out independent views from our partners and stakeholders. A consultation event was held in October 2019 with members of the Homeless Forum, which included a range of stakeholders including, the Police, Probation, Health, local Registered Providers, Charitable organisations, elected members, several local voluntary support services and staff from several key departments in the council.

**3.2.** Feedback was also given by the Tenants and Leaseholders via the Tenant & Leaseholder Committee on 21 November 2019.

**3.3.** Feedback from service users was gained by holding a focus group with those who have experienced homelessness.

**3.4.** The responses received through the consultation stages have been incorporated into the final document.

#### **4. Working in Partnership**

- 4.1.** Our strong relationship with our partners and many other public sector and voluntary organisations enables us to deliver an excellent level of service whilst maximising resources and avoiding duplication of effort.
- 4.2.** An example of some of our successful partnership working is with St Albans District Council and Hightown Housing Association in managing the Rough Sleeper Initiative project. This has led to the recruitment of a Housing First Project Lead, Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker, a Community Engagement & Recovery Worker and a Pathways and Outreach co-ordinator Officer who we are working closely with us to complement our statutory delivery and support us to eradicate rough sleeping in Dacorum.
- 4.3.** This excellent partnership working, has seen us reduce the number of rough sleepers from 23 at the height of summer 2019 to 5 at January 2020. Each identified rough sleeper has a targeted action plan implemented by a multi-agency project group working together to achieve positive outcomes for all clients where possible.

#### **5. Additional challenges**

- 5.1.** As members are aware, there has been considerable impact on the Homeless Prevention team as a result of COVID-19. The service is continuing to work closely with our key stakeholders and partners to monitor the impact of the virus and has taken a lead in work across the county, by jointly chairing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Cell.
- 5.2.** We have taken into consideration the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and in particular pre-empting additional challenges that may be faced as we start to move towards recovery. With this in mind, our strategic approach has been focussed on essential activity to ensure continued efforts towards preventing homelessness in our borough. We will continue to work closely with colleagues at Ministry for Housing Communities & Local Government to deliver a consistent and co-ordinated response to guidance and legislation.
- 5.3.** The service is working closely with colleagues across the County and within our Community Safety & Safeguarding team to review and monitor the progress of the Domestic Abuse Bill, which is predicted to receive Royal Assent in the autumn and is highly likely to place additional demands on the service and place additional requirements on the council in respect of managing a response. Our new proposed strategy reflects this and we have committed to undertaking a review of Domestic Abuse services in the borough in partnership with our Community Safety colleagues.

## 6. The commitments

**6.1.** Using this feedback and information, along with relevant legislation and requirements, H-clic data and council data we have set out our five commitments for the new Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. These are:

**6.2. Commitment 1: Continue to work with partners to prevent homelessness wherever possible.**

- There is already an active homelessness forum which is well participated by partners and has improved our partnership working to prevent homelessness. We however aim to improve on this and work towards earlier intervention and promote Duty to Refer particularly amongst hospitals and health sector organisations.

**6.3. Commitment 2: Improve access, security and stability within the PRS.**

- We have in previous years managed to improve our working relationships with Housing Benefit and that has led to increase in the use of Discretionary Housing payments to pay for deposits, while we use our Homeless Prevention grant to pay rent in advance when required. We are however in process of scoping a new scheme to support landlords and improve access to the private sector and reduce demand on social housing.

**6.4. Commitment 3: Increase our effectiveness in preventing homelessness for those with complex needs (Mental Health, Drugs & Alcohol, Domestic Abuse & Modern Slavery).**

- Partnership working with work with health sector organisations has always been a challenge but we are committing to develop better relationships with them. Examples include current work with the Clinical Commissioning Group to maximise impact of new services in preventing and tackling homelessness. We also intend to, with the support of our partners provide increased tailored support to those with complex needs.

**6.5. Commitment 4: Provide tailored services to meet the needs of different groups.**

- We aim to improve appropriate accommodation options that are available for young people by working in partnership with other providers. Additionally by undertaking continued review of our existing stock we will be able to increase take up and reduce homelessness in the older population.

**6.6. Commitment 5: Eradicate rough sleeping.**

- The service will continue during 2020-21 to work in partnership with Hightown Housing Association to deliver against the requirements set out in our Memorandum of Understanding from the Ministry for

Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) to deliver a successful rough sleeper initiative. This initiative will be reviewed with further consideration given to the approach to be taken in 2021 onwards.

### **6.7. Conclusion**

- To conclude the draft 2020-2024 strategy demonstrates Dacorum Borough Council's commitment to the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping. Throughout the five commitments, we outline how this will be achieved by providing a holistic service, which is individual and tailored to each person's needs.
- As a service, we understand that working with others helps us to provide a joined up service both internally and externally, sharing of intelligence helps to deliver greater efficiency, as a result we have improved and built upon existing relationships with our Community Safety & Safeguarding Teams. In doing so we have been able to make the best use of resources available, reduce wherever possible duplication and provide the best possible service to those who are at threat of homelessness or are rough sleeping.
- Finally, we acknowledge that to be successful we have to be adaptable, which we have a proven track record in doing as shown by our recent response in relation to the COVID-19 situation. That is why we are committed to continuously improve our services and taking an informed approach to service delivery so that we can continue to meet housing need in the future.
- For members to offer comments on the strategy update.