

People and Overview Committee

6 July 2021

Dorset Council Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 - 2026

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Portfolio Holder: Cllr G Carr-Jones, Housing and Community Safety

Local Councillor(s): All Councillors

Executive Director: V Broadhurst, Interim Executive Director of People - Adults

Report Author: Sharon Attwater
Title: Service Manager Housing Strategy and Performance
Tel: 01929 557371
Email: Sharon.attwater@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendation: That members of the committee recommend that Cabinet:

Endorse the work and recommend to Full Council:

1. The adoption of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 - 2026
2. Delegation of authority to the Portfolio holder for Housing and Community Safety to make minor amendments to the strategy and action plan and any amendments necessary to reflect legislative change.

Reason for Recommendation: To ensure Dorset Council has a legally compliant Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy that meets our responsibility for tackling and preventing homelessness.

1. Executive Summary

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 local authorities have strategic responsibility for tackling and preventing homelessness. In accordance with the provisions in The Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole (Structural Changes) Order 2018 Dorset Council requires a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy by 1 April 2022.

This report outlines the process in drafting a new strategy and asks the committee to consider the draft strategy and action plan and recommend to Cabinet the approval of the Dorset Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 - 2026.

2. Health and Wellbeing Implications

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) published independent research on the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping in 2019. The rapid evidence assessment concluded:

For families, causes are linked to:

- Domestic Abuse
- Relationship breakdown
- Financial Issues
- Poverty
- Lack of suitable housing

For single households, causes are linked to:

- Relationship breakdown
- Mental Health
- Substance misuse

The strategy identifies and supports action to improve the health and wellbeing of homeless and rough sleeping households and addresses each factor.

3. Financial Implications

The resources required to deliver the housing service strategy are expected to be affected. A service wide restructure will be completed in 2021 which is intended to reprioritise council resources to deliver the strategy and action plan. Where necessary, relevant costs will be identified through the 2022/23 budget setting process.

It is also anticipated that Dorset Council will continue to provide capital contributions – this is a required criteria the council must meet in order to submit bids for some of the external homelessness and rough sleeping funding streams in the future.

In addition, the strategy anticipates continued Government support for homelessness and rough sleeping households e.g. Next Steps Accommodation Programme, Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme and Rough Sleeping Initiative. Funding opportunities tend to be short notice and short term and rely on the submission of successful funding bids submitted by the council. A reduction in government funding would reduce Dorset Councils ability to deliver the strategy.

4. Climate implications

It is not anticipated that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will have an adverse effect on the environment or climate change.

5. Other Implications

Partnership Working

The housing service works closely with internal and external partners on areas of mutual interest, including adult and children’s services, homelessness support providers; safeguarding boards; social landlords; private landlords; voluntary and community sector; NHS, Police and National Probation Service. This work includes having joint approaches to lessons learnt and good practice.

Property and assets

In order to address the current shortfalls in accommodation and support the council’s responsibility to provide suitable temporary accommodation, the strategy anticipates an increase in property assets from the following identifiable sources:

- Acquisitions – leased and purchased
- Improved access to private rented sector accommodation
- Social landlord development programmes and management arrangements
- Use of council assets

A new Dorset Council Housing Strategy will emerge during 2021 and will support an incremental increase in the amount of suitable accommodation available to

Dorset residents offering additional support to the delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy aims.

Community Safety

The strategy identifies appropriate partners to form the Dorset Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Steering Group including representatives from:

- HMP Guys Marsh
- HMP Portland
- National Probation Service
- Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner

Safeguarding Children and Adults

The strategy seeks to maximise opportunities at all stages to strengthen support and makes provision for the creation of appropriate multi-agency thematic casework groups.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the council's approved risk management methodology, the following High risks have been identified and proposed mitigation noted:

- Risk Category Strategic Priority - A new Dorset Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is required by 1 April 2022.
- Mitigation - Advanced approval provides necessary mitigation to commence activity and achieve identified target dates.
- Risk Category Service Delivery - A period of implementation is necessary to establish governance arrangements and appropriate memberships
Mitigation - Housing service resources will be required to support this work and are being planned.
- Risk Category Strategic Priority – There is no current strategic framework directing a programme of work reflecting the council's responsibility to tackle homelessness for the next 5 years.
- Mitigation – Advanced approval provides necessary mitigation to commence activity and achieve identified target dates.
- Risk Category Service Delivery – Demand on council capital investment may be required in order to access short notice external funding streams.
- Mitigation – council feedback has been submitted to Government promoting longer notice of funding opportunities; inclusion in programme of capital funding at budget planning process.

Current Risk: Low

- Risk Category Legislation – Changes to legislation occur during the lifetime of a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy and require minor amendments
- Mitigation – the draft policy includes the ability for minor amendments to reflect current legislation can be made with approval from the housing portfolio holder.

Residual Risk: High

Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the council's approved risk management methodology, the following residual high risks have been identified and proposed mitigation noted:

- Risk Category Service Delivery – Availability of financial resources remains uncertain due to current climate and budgetary pressures.
- Mitigation – Maximisation of external funding streams and corporate commitment to financial support for strategy delivery.

Residual Risk: Low

Changes to legislation and guidance will be captured during the lifetime of the strategy and during each annual review.

Annual reviews will identify any appropriate revision of the strategy and monitor delivery.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

The housing service sought advice from the Dorset Council Equality and Diversity officer. The strategy has been approved by the Dorset Council Equality and Diversity Action Group.

The public consultation responses were analysed. Respondents with protected characteristics included age; disability; gender; race; sex.

Responses were compared to provision in the strategy and appropriate amendments made.

Supported by engagement feedback the policy strengthens support to vulnerable people to ensure all people can fully participate in the scheme.

An annual review will monitor delivery against the approved equality impact assessment.

8. Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan
- Appendix 3 – Review of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
- Appendix 4 – Equalities Impact Assessment
- Appendix 5 – Results of the public consultation
- Appendix 6 - Feedback consideration and actions

9. Background

- 9.1 Due to Local Government Reorganisation on the formation of Dorset Council a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is required in accordance with the provisions in The Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole (Structural Changes) Order 2018. Previously, the 5 district and borough authorities that formed Dorset Council applied a single homelessness strategy for the period 2015 to 2019. The new strategy will provide a strategic framework for the council to tackle homelessness for a maximum period of 5 years.
- 9.2 The design of a new strategy has involved a working group led by People and Health Overview Committee and additional Councillors made up of Graham Carr-Jones; Andrew Kerby; Gill Taylor; Laura Miller; Simon Gibson; Toni Coombes; Anthony Alford; Les Fry; Molly Rennie; Beryl Ezzard; David Walsh; Pauline Batstone; Daryl Turner; Kate Wheller; Clare Sutton; Rebecca Knox; Jane Somper; Stella Jones; Peter Barrow; Ryan Holloway and Kevin Moore. The group were supported by external consultants Neil Morland & Co. commissioned by the service and the following housing service staff: Andrew Billany; Fiona Brown and Sharon Attwater.
- 9.3 The group met twice and considered the contents of an independent review of homelessness in the Dorset Council area and the current service provision carried out by Neil Morland & Co., considered and agreed the strategy aims and the associated action plan.
- 9.4 The review benchmarked their findings against:
- All England
 - England excluding London
 - South West
 - Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
- 9.5 In preparing the strategy a wide-ranging public consultation took place. This ran from 22 March 2021 to 07 May 2020. Including the review and the public consultation, engagement took place with;

- Homeless Service Users
- Housing Services
- Social Landlords
- Internal stakeholders (Adults and Children's services)
- Provider Partners (e.g. homelessness support charities)
- Private Landlords
- Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Homeless Health Service for Dorset - NHS
- Town & Parish Councils
- Voluntary Sector Organisations
- Councillors

9.6 Analysis of feedback suggested:

- Response levels were fair and reasonably representative of the Dorset population
- 70% thought the strategy wholly or partially identified key issues affecting homelessness
- Support was across individuals and organisations
- Over 80% totally or partially supported the proposed actions in the strategy

9.7 Highlighted issues include:

- Support for use of evidence base
- The basic need for building more houses needs addressing
- Concern that funding might not meet the ambition of the plan
- The important link between health and homelessness

Appendix 5 contains the results from the public consultation.

10 Proposals

10.1 The draft strategy can be found in appendix 1. Key proposals in the strategy are:

- 5 Strategic Objectives
 - Reduce current and future levels of homelessness
 - Prevent homelessness
 - Ensure there is enough suitable accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness

- Ensure there are adequate services to support people who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, or were previously homeless, to prevent a reoccurrence of homelessness
 - Appropriately resource the delivery of this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy

- A comprehensive action plan that shows clearly:
 - Which organisations are going to be involved in completing each action
 - Specifics of each action to be taken
 - A deadline for when each action is expected to be completed
 - The resources that will be needed to complete each action
 - The steps that will follow each completed action

- New delivery arrangements
 - Establish a new steering group to oversee the delivery of the strategy
 - Short-life (12 months) task and finish groups
 - Refreshed homelessness forum
 - Thematic and multi-agency casework action groups
 - Dorset Homelessness Service Providers Forum
 - Service user panel

- Accountability structure
 - Dorset Council Cabinet – annual report
 - People and Health Scrutiny Committee – annual report
 - Cabinet lead for homelessness, Scrutiny chair for homelessness & Corporate Director for Housing and Community Safety – regular updates

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.