

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

3 July 2023

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Review 2023

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr J Somper, Adult Social Care, Health and Housing

Local Councillor(s): All

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

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

The Dorset Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was approved in July 2021 and complies with our obligations in the Homeless Act 2002. It provides a plan to tackle and prevent homelessness in our area for 5 years and will be revised if there are changes to homeless legislation or significant revisions to statutory guidance on homelessness.

The strategy is supported by an action plan that explains the roles of relevant organisations, actions, deadlines, resources, and intended outcomes.

The approved strategic objectives are:

- a) reduce current and future likely levels of homelessness.
- b) prevent homelessness.
- c) ensure there is enough suitable accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

- d) 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.
- e) appropriately resource the delivery of this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

This is the first review to consider the progress against the action plan, the strategy, and any identified modifications for recommendation to cabinet.

Recommendation:

To receive and comment on the review.

Reason for Recommendation:

To ensure the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy and action plan are delivered appropriately and the objectives are achieved.

1. Report

- 1.1 The strategy sets out delivery arrangements for the strategy. Since the approval of the strategy a new Dorset Council service manager for housing advice and homelessness was appointed. The service agreed the prioritisation of activity in the plan should focus on essential operational matters.
- 1.2 The existing strong partnership arrangements and regular joint working in place with relevant organisations and services have been used to focus on addressing the most urgent homeless matters first, responding to the current cost of living pressures and impacts on increased levels of homeless service demand.
- 1.3 The first homeless forum is scheduled for 4th July 2023. This will include feedback from the work undertaken as part of this strategy.
- 1.4 The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Local Communities (DLUHC) have invited Dorset Council homeless service to attend a peer group of suitable local housing authorities for benchmarking activities.
- 1.5 A lived experience panel is yet to be set up but will be completed in 2023.

2. Levels of Homelessness in Dorset

- 2.1 The full national data set is not yet published for overall comparison. However, data for the Dorset Council area is available and has been used

to compare 2021/22 and 2022/23. The current cost of living issues are evident in the local area as households and landlords react to financial pressure and uncertainty. There has been an overall increase of 17.25% in our homeless approaches between 2021 and 2022. This increase in demand has led to an uplift in the work carried out by our homeless service. The number of initial assessments increased by 17% leading to an increase in other duties. These were prevention duty owed cases that increased by 13% and an increase of 44% in successful prevention outcomes. Additionally, the number of relief duties increased by 62% and increase of 67% in successful relief outcomes. The number of main duty cases also increased by 46.5%.

- 2.2 Nationally the numbers of households sleeping rough is rising, however, single night numbers in our area are low and gradually reducing. Our data illustrates a monthly average of 30 and highlights there is a steady flow coming into the area across a month. Our numbers can fluctuate when the severe weather protocol is triggered due to extreme hot or cold weather conditions and because Dorset is a holiday destination.
 - 2.3 Detailed data is available in appendix 1
 - 2.4 The existing imbalance between supply and demand has been exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis. Our programme to increase the supply of temporary accommodation increased as we responded to increased demand levels and multiple new government grant funded schemes. We increased the number of temporary accommodation units we can access from 224 units in 2021 to 369 in 2022. The programme continues with current bids submitted to new schemes focussed on delivering accommodation to specific homeless cohorts.
 - 2.5 The top reasons for homelessness across the southwest using 2021/22 data are the end of assured shorthold tenancy (AST); friends and family eviction; and domestic abuse. In Dorset, relationship breakdowns (non-violent) replace domestic abuse (which is number 4) and ending an AST the highest.
3. **Progress toward achieving the objectives and actions of the strategy.**
 - 3.1 The action plan details 37 actions to complete over the 5-year period of the strategy and they were heavily front loaded to the first 2 years. The delivery of the actions has been impacted by increase in homelessness approaches and our need to respond to the needs of our local people. There are 31 actions due to have been completed by now. Of these, 12

are complete, 12 are underway and 7 are not started. A detailed breakdown of work carried out is at Appendix 2.

- 3.2 Since the strategy was approved, we have implemented new software, ensured our staff are trained and supported and continue to configure new enhancements as data analytics and service design has completed. Our homeless households now benefit from modern, easy to use electronic services that include online self-referral, online homeless applications, SMS messaging and customer portal to track progress where they can self-serve or work with support providers. Those who need assistance can access this via support providers or the homeless service.
- 3.3 We have examined our data at numerous stages in the customer's homeless journey as detailed in the action plan and identified additional information and advice to be added to our housing allocation policy to support homeless households who wish to access social housing.
- 3.4 Pre-prevention resources have been increased within the service to reduce the number of households who become homeless, helping them to sustain their current accommodation, better manage their finances and signpost to other services they need.
- 3.5 We have worked with adult services, health, criminal justice services and the voluntary sector to increase bespoke resources for households who are at risk of homelessness or are homeless.
- 3.6 We have worked with Children's Services to complete training, provide support to colleagues and vulnerable households. New care leaver protocols and 16–17-year-old protocols were jointly created, and implementation is progressing.
- 3.7 Opportunities to improve health and homelessness services continue to develop. We were able to contribute to a health review about the provision of supported accommodation for households leaving mental health hospitals, attend an engagement event leading to a draft homeless health strategy and continue to be part of the Integrated Care Board.
- 3.8 Our new software has improved our ability to analyse our data. We are delivering better quality data inputting and monitoring arrangements via the actions identified.
- 3.9 In addition to this strategy and action plan a new Bed & Breakfast Exit Plan has been approved by DLUHC. Feedback from a recent audit have

also been considered. Actions required by each of these programmes overlap and are replicated. To meet the commitments of all plans and continue to meet the increased levels of demand for homeless services, changes are required to the original timescales of this action plan. Details of the proposed changes consider any necessary prioritisation and are in Appendix 3

4. **Financial Implications**

Temporary accommodation budgets are overspent, and this is exacerbated by the levels of housing benefit the council can recover. Private rent levels are high and often unaffordable to homeless people. This is expected to continue if the level of demand continues to rise. We mitigate this by focussing on prevention activities, increasing the amount of temporary accommodation units we have and stopping the use of bed and breakfast placements for homeless households. We continue to maximise external capital grant opportunities when possible.

5. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

None

6. **Well-being and Health Implications**

Being homeless impacts negatively on a person's health and well-being. We are aware of the levels of low, medium, and high needs within our rough sleeping cohort and those with multiple needs. We use this information to plan and monitor the most appropriate services and support.

7. **Other Implications**

None

8. **Risk Assessment**

8.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

9. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

Actions identified in the approved EqIA are in progress as they are linked to specific tasks in the action plan.

10. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Homeless data

Appendix 2 – Detailed progress report

Appendix 3 – Revised action plan

11. **Background Papers**

Approved Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 – 2026 [here](#)

Approved Homeless and Rough Sleeping Action Plan [here](#)