

Cabinet

23 June 2026

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

For Decision

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr G Taylor - Housing and Homelessness

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director:

S Crowe - Executive Director Housing, Communities, Prevention

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Report Status: Public [Choose an item.](#)

1. Executive Summary:

- 1.1 The current Dorset Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (HRSS) was published in July 2021 and will reach the end of its five-year statutory period in July 2026.
- 1.2 [The Government's National Plan to End Homelessness](#) was published in December 2025 and introduces a stronger national emphasis on prevention, local accountability and outcome-focused action planning. Local authorities are expected to critically assess their homelessness strategies, move from reactive crisis responses towards a prevention-led model, and publish action plans that include local targets aligned to the national Outcomes Framework.
- 1.3 Although the National Plan was published in December, the associated strategy and accountability guidance toolkit, including detailed requirements for action planning, did not receive ministerial approval until late May 2026 prior to being made available to Local Authorities. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has advised that it recognises that local authorities were awaiting this guidance and that, as a result, some authorities may experience a gap

between published strategies. MHCLG has further indicated that it does not intend to raise compliance issues where an authority has a clear plan to publish a successor strategy and produces the required Action Plan in Autumn 2026.

2. Recommendation:

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the proposed approach to managing the transition from the current Dorset Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to the next statutory strategy, and delegates authority to the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Executive Director of Housing, Communities and Prevention, to approve the updated interim Action Plan for publication in Autumn 2026.

2. 3. Reason for Recommendation:

- 3.1 Developing our new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will provide excellent opportunities to further build upon and expand our Prevention and Communities agenda as part of the newly formed Housing, Communities and Prevention Directorate.
- 3.2 Whilst our Homelessness prevention performance continues to exceed national performance, we believe we can do more, by better use of data and working with the Revenues and Benefits Team to identify households who may, potentially, be at risk. Utilising our work with the “Our Future Council Team”, to undertake campaigns, utilising data held across the Council to assist in identifying households who may be at risk of homelessness, allowing prevention work to commence even before a formal enquiry has been made, and feeding that data into the Council’s “front door”, approach.
- 3.3 One of our key pressure points remains the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, and while we cannot totally eradicate its use we are aiming to eliminate use especially placing families with children in B&B accommodation for longer than 6 weeks. We are also progressing work to ensure our current stock of temporary accommodation is fit for purpose in the longer term by undertaking a full stock condition survey, which will aid decisions on future retention, disposal and investment. Onboarding of new Temporary Accommodation will fall into the remit of the TA leasing scheme approved by Cabinet last year.
- 3.4 We also want to consult more widely as we develop the Strategy and will explore the use of Community Conversations and seeking the views of rural communities as well as the traditional pressure areas to the South of the County.

- 3.5 Strategy development will be running in tandem with the Supported Housing Strategy, the latter of which is conducting a comprehensive supported needs assessment. This will then bring into greater focus the need to work across the Council, with our external partners to look at how we might be better placed to respond to people with complex needs. This would include responding to and supporting the hospital discharge pressures that we are facing.
- 3.6 The strategy will also aim to build upon the excellent relationships we have with our Voluntary Sector partners who currently provide valuable rough sleeping pathways, providing support and opportunity to help people deal with their current crisis and to assist in the development of skills and knowledge to help them get back on their feet
- 3.7 Taken together with the Strategy development and the new opportunities that the prevention focus gives, we want to produce an action-based document that not only meets the wider government agenda to eradicate homeless but one that is geared to meeting the identified needs in Dorset.

4. The Report

- 4.1 The Government announced its intention to introduce a National Plan to End Homelessness in 2024, at the point when preparatory work for Dorset Council's next HRSS would ordinarily have commenced. It was anticipated that the National Plan would introduce new strategic expectations for local authorities. On that basis, it was considered prudent to await the national framework before finalising a new local strategy, to reduce the risk of producing a strategy that would not meet the forthcoming requirements.
- 4.2 The National Plan was formally published in December 2025. It requires councils to strengthen the focus of local homelessness systems on prevention, outcomes and accountability. As a condition of funding, councils are expected to publish and regularly update action plans. These plans must set out local targets that improve performance against each of the national Outcomes Framework metrics, taking account of local context, and explain how the authority will deliver those targets.
- 4.3 The national approach is intended to ensure that local action is targeted, transparent and capable of demonstrating progress. It also allows councils to include additional local indicators where these are necessary to reflect local circumstances. For Dorset Council, this provides an opportunity to ensure that the new strategy is both compliant with national expectations and tailored to the specific homelessness pressures, housing market conditions and partnership landscape in Dorset.

5. Legal Considerations

- 5.1 Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their district and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review. Section 1(4) requires a new homelessness strategy to be published within five years of the date on which the previous strategy was published.
- 5.2 The Act does not include any provision enabling the Council, the Secretary of State or any other body to extend the five-year period. The wording of the duty is mandatory, and the statutory framework is designed to ensure that homelessness strategies remain current, evidence-based and responsive to changing local need. This is particularly important given the interaction between the strategy and wider statutory duties, including those introduced through the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- 5.3 Non-publication of a successor strategy within the statutory period would therefore represent a legal risk. However, MHCLG has advised that it does not intend to take compliance action against authorities whose strategies lapse during this transitional period, provided that the authority is taking appropriate steps to develop a successor strategy and publish an updated Action Plan in Autumn 2026.
- 5.4 The Council will therefore take the following steps to support transparency and demonstrate active progress towards a lawful and nationally aligned position.

Requirement	Proposed Council Response
Publish a clear statement of the intended process, including estimated timescales, consultation arrangements and co-production plans where applicable.	A statement will be published on the Council's website and shared through relevant communication channels.
Make the strategy development plans available to stakeholders for transparency and public compliance purposes.	Stakeholders will be informed of the development timetable, consultation arrangements and opportunities to contribute.
Publish a new Action Plan by Autumn 2026.	The interim revised Action Plan will be finalised and published in Autumn 2026, subject to the delegated approval recommended in this report.

5.5 Section 5A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires the Monitoring Officer to prepare a report to the Cabinet where it appears to him that a proposal, decision or omission by the Council has given rise to or is likely to or would give rise to a contravention of any enactment or rule of law. The purpose of a Section 5A report is to draw likely unlawfulness to the attention of the Cabinet so that appropriate action can be taken to bring the Council back into a lawful position.

5.6 Given that the Council is already:

- actively managing the position and
- responding to the national policy transition and
- progressing the work necessary to publish a successor strategy once the relevant guidance has been approved

And given MHCLG's position that it does not intend to take compliance action the Monitoring Officer has decided that it would not be proportionate to issue a Section 5A report. to the Cabinet.

5.7 The Monitoring Officer is required to consult with the Head of Paid Service and the Section 151 Officer before issuing a Section 5A report and they support the decision not to issue a report at this time.

5.8 Work to develop the new HRSS and associated Action Plan is underway. The Council has commissioned a comprehensive needs assessment and will use this evidence base to support consultation, co-production and strategic prioritisation with key homelessness stakeholders. The intended timetable is set out below.

Milestone	Target Date
Interim revised Action Plan finalised and published	Autumn 2026
First draft of proposed strategy prepared	Mid-October 2026
Formal consultation begins	November 2026
Formal consultation concludes following a 12-week period	February 2027
Final draft strategy and action plan prepared following consultation	April 2027
Governance process commences	May 2027

Strategy and Action Plan presented to Cabinet	June 2027
New strategy and action plan published	July 2027

- 5.9 This approach will ensure that the final strategy is informed by the forthcoming national guidance, a robust local evidence base, stakeholder engagement and formal public consultation. It will also provide an interim mechanism for maintaining momentum and accountability through the publication of the updated Action Plan in Autumn 2026.
- 5.10 The proposed approach supports the Council's ability to respond strategically to homelessness and rough sleeping during a period of national policy transition. It enables the Council to align local priorities with the National Plan to End Homelessness, strengthen prevention-led working, and establish a clearer framework for measuring impact through local targets and outcome-based action planning.
- 5.11 The approach also reduces the risk of producing a strategy that requires early revision once the national guidance is finalised. By sequencing the work in this way, the Council can ensure that the successor strategy is legally robust, operationally deliverable and capable of supporting effective partnership action across Dorset.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 A consultant has been instructed to undertake a full needs assessment, develop the consultation process, and support the co-production of the new strategy and action plan with key homelessness stakeholders and Dorset Council officers to deliver the first draft of the strategy. This work is fully funded through the Homeless Prevention Grant allocation and has been capped at £40,000.
- 6.2 The approach also reduces the risk of producing a strategy that requires early revision once the national guidance is finalised. By sequencing the work in this way, the Council can ensure that the successor strategy is legally robust, operationally deliverable and capable of supporting effective partnership action across Dorset.

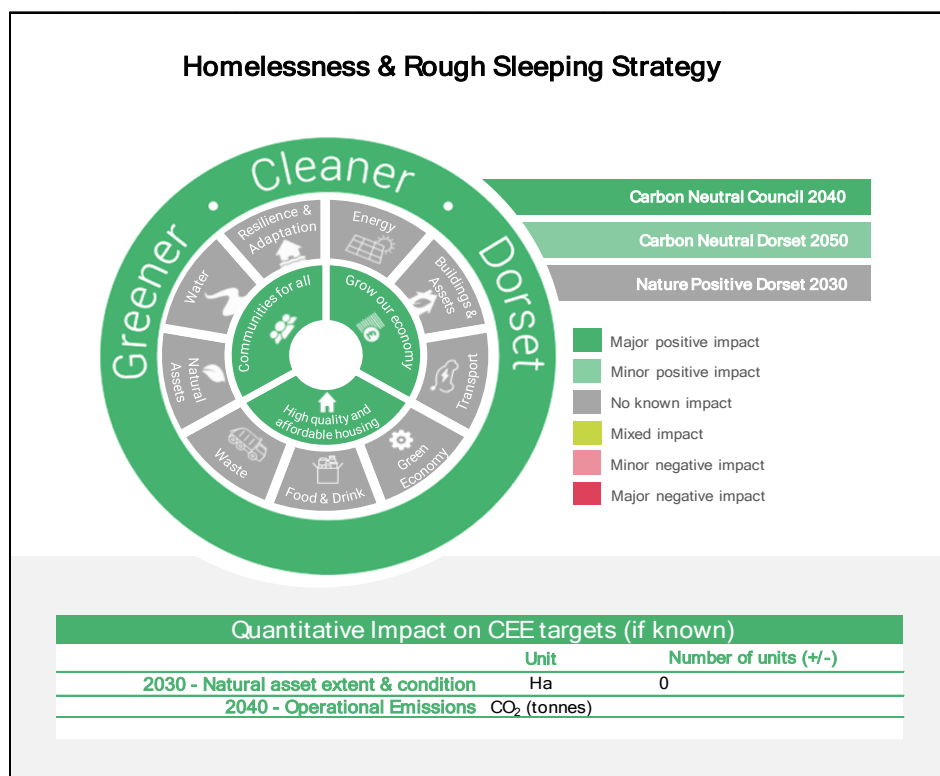
7. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact

Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	strongly supports it
High-quality and affordable housing	strongly supports it
Communities for all	strongly supports it

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations	Responses -will this be incorporated into your proposal? How? And if not, why not?
Energy	
No recommendations found for this category	
Buildings & Assets	
No recommendations found for this category	
Transport	
No recommendations found for this category	
Green Economy	
No recommendations found for this category	
Food & Drink	
No recommendations found for this category	
Waste	
No recommendations found for this category	
Natural Assets & Ecology	
No recommendations found for this category	
Water	
No recommendations found for this category	
Resilience & Adaptation	
No recommendations found for this category	

8. Well-being and Health Implications

- 8.1 Homelessness and rough sleeping are known to have significant impacts on health and wellbeing. During the interim period, the Council will continue to work within the framework of the current strategy and revised action plan ensuring that all relevant decisions continue to have due regard to statutory duties and government guidance, including Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, and the Council's own policies, including the Housing Allocations Policy. This will ensure that residents' health and wellbeing remain central to decision-making and that appropriate safeguards continue to be applied.

- 8.2 The Council will continue to develop and deliver practical interventions that reduce the health wellbeing impacts of homelessness. Examples include work to support households in temporary accommodation who have mental health needs, alongside projects designed to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and therefore minimise the disruption, uncertainty and wider wellbeing impacts that such placements can create for households. These examples demonstrate that, whilst the successor strategy is being developed, the Council remains focused on prevention, early intervention and targeted support for residents experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

9. Other Implications

None

10. Risk Assessment

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

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

11. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 11.1 No new equalities impact assessment (EQIA) is required now. The existing HRSS EQIA remains in place. A new EQIA will be completed as part of the delivery of the new HRSS and Action Plan.

12. Appendices

None

13. Background Papers

N/A

14. Report Sign Off

- 14.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director – Assurance and Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)