

Executive
22 April 2021

Title: Homelessness Strategy 2021-26
Lead Officer: Lisa Barker
Portfolio Holder: Jan Matecki
Public report
Wards of the District directly affected: All

Contrary to the policy framework: No
 Contrary to the budgetary framework: No
 Key Decision: Yes
 Included within the Forward Plan: Yes
 Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken: Yes
 Consultation & Community Engagement: Yes
 Final Decision: No
 Accessibility checked: Yes. Some style changes identified which will be made at design stage.

Officer/Councillor Approval

Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	30/03/2021	Chris Elliott
Head of Service	22/03/2021	Lisa Barker
CMT	31/03/2021	Bill Hunt
Section 151 Officer	30/03/2021	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	30/03/2021	Andrew Jones
Finance	1/04/2021	Victoria Bamber
Portfolio Holder(s)	1/04/2021	Jan Matecki

1. Summary

- 1.1. A homelessness strategy is a statutory document and the most recent for Warwick district was adopted in 2017 to run for three years until 2020.
- 1.2. This report presents two complementary documents for adoption as the new strategy to direct work on homelessness for the period 2021 to 2026.

2. Recommendations

That Executive recommends that Council:

- 2.1. Approves the "Warwick District Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-26" attached as Appendix One to this report.
- 2.2. Approves "Preventing Homelessness in Warwickshire: a multi-agency approach, 2021-23", attached as Appendix Two to this report, as a supplementary and complementary strategy.
- 2.3. Delegates authority to the Head of Housing Services, in consultation with the Housing and Culture Portfolio Holder, to review and amend the the action plan of the strategy from time to time during the lifetime of the strategy.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1. In accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002, Local Housing Authorities have a duty to carry out a review of homelessness in their district from time to time and to prepare and publish a strategy in response to the findings. A homelessness review should consider, for that district:
 - (a) The levels, and likely future levels, of homelessness.
 - (b) The activities which are carried out for the purpose of: preventing homelessness; securing that accommodation is or will be available for people who are or may become homeless; and providing support for people who are or may become homeless, or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.
 - (c) The resources available to the authority, the social services authority, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons for such activities.

The Homelessness Strategy should then be directed towards ensuring sufficient and satisfactory provision for preventing homelessness, and for securing accommodation and support provision for people who become homeless.

- 3.2. The previous review was carried out in 2016 and the strategic response was incorporated into the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-20. During 2020 a new homelessness review has been undertaken and the results of this, together with our forward plans for dealing with the issues identified, are incorporated into this new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

- 3.3. A number of broader cross-cutting themes linked to homelessness have been identified over recent years that can better be addressed by a partnership response at a county level. We have therefore worked with the County Council and the four other District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire to produce a joint countywide Homelessness Strategy: "Preventing Homelessness in Warwickshire: a multi-agency approach, 2021-2023". This work was assisted by the Strategic Homelessness Board that, as well as the councils, includes:
- HM Prisons & Probation Service;
 - p.h.i.l. (Preventing Homelessness Improving Lives);
 - The Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire;
 - South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust;
 - Warwickshire Police;
 - Warwickshire & West Mercia Community Rehabilitation Company; and Warwickshire Cares.
- 3.4. The joint countywide strategy sits alongside, and is complementary to, this strategy in providing a comprehensive and holistic approach to the issues of homelessness and rough sleeping for Warwick district and beyond. It covers a shorter period of time, reflecting the greater degree of complexity of the issues and uncertainty involved in such a partnership approach, which has not been tried before. However, it is this "Warwick-only" strategy, as it is based upon a homelessness review, that is strictly speaking the statutory document with the joint strategy in a supporting role.
- 3.5. Homelessness is a dynamic issue, influenced by Government policy and legislation. Impacts can be felt immediately or may take more time to bed in. Responses to changes driven by external factors such as the 'Everyone in Initiative' need to be swift to enable measures to be put in place that tackle the issues at hand and ensure that homeless people get the support and services that they need.

4. Policy Framework

4.1. Fit for the Future (FFF)

- 4.1.1. The Council's FFF Strategy is designed to deliver the Vision for the District of making it a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. To that end amongst other things the FFF Strategy contains several Key projects.
- 4.1.2. The FFF Strategy has 3 strands, People, Services and Money, and each has an external and internal element to it, the details of which can be found [on the Council's website](#). The table below illustrates the impact of this proposal in relation to the Council's FFF Strategy.

4.2. **FFF Strands**

4.2.1 **External impacts of proposals**

People - Health, Homes, Communities – Homelessness and rough sleeping are the most acute of all housing needs and having a clear strategy to deal with these issues is crucial in addressing the overall housing needs of the district.

Services - Green, Clean, Safe – Tackling rough sleeping can contribute to a reduction in actual and perceived levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Money- Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment – Assisting people who are rough sleeping to come in off the streets can support the local economy by removing perceived threats or negativity from town centres. Accommodating people who are homeless provides a basis for them to rebuild their lives and, where appropriate, to gain employment.

4.2.2. **Internal impacts of the proposal(s)**

People - Effective Staff – Having a strategy that provides a clear sense of direction in dealing with homelessness and rough sleeping gives managers a firm foundation for planning services and training staff. It also gives staff a better understanding of how their day-to-day work contributes to achieving wider objectives, offering the prospect of greater job satisfaction.

Services - Maintain or Improve Services – People who are homeless or rough sleeping are among the neediest of the council's customers. This strategy ensures that there is a clear plan to develop and enhance the services that address those needs in the coming years.

Money - Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term - None.

4.3. **Supporting Strategies**

4.3.1. Each strand of the FFF Strategy has several supporting strategies and the proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is one such supporting strategy.

4.4. **Changes to Existing Policies**

4.4.1. This report does not change existing policies but brings forward a new range of proposals in the policy areas of homelessness and rough sleeping because the existing strategy has now run its course.

4.5. **Impact Assessments**

4.5.1. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken. The strategy as a whole seeks to provide appropriate services to all those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or sleeping rough according to need, irrespective of personal characteristics. Many of the actions set out in the strategy will improve those services for the entire population of the district should they

need them and will therefore have positive impacts across all protected characteristics.

4.5.2. Specific positive impacts have been identified for the following protected characteristics: Age; Disability; Sex; Pregnancy and maternity. No negative impacts have been discerned.

4.5.3. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken for the joint strategy "Preventing Homelessness in Warwickshire: a multi-agency approach" by Warwickshire County Council's Equalities Team. This identified general positive impacts across all protected characteristics and specific positive impacts for Sex and Age. It identified no negative impacts.

5. Budgetary Framework

5.1. Existing housing services are currently fully funded through the base budgets for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and capital programme, subject to review through the annual budget-setting process. Where possible income is generated to offset the cost of housing the homeless via Housing Benefit Rebates and Universal Credit Claims where appropriate but these rebates do not cover the full cost of providing homelessness services.

5.2. The proposed strategy includes a number of projects in the action plan, some of which may require additional finance. If so there a number of alternatives that may be pursued:

- In 2017 the government introduced the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG). This has now been combined with Homelessness Reduction Grant to create the new Homelessness Prevention Grant from 2021/22. In the 2020/21 Financial year £228,035 in FHSG was awarded to the Council along with £54,803 in Homelessness reduction Grant. Similar combined amounts are expected annually and the grant is Section 31 Non Conditional Grant which means it can be spent on any activity that is linked to reducing homelessness. Unspent money may be carried forward to be used in later years so balances on this grant may be available for future projects.
- Central government has been actively offering funding for specific homelessness and rough sleeping initiatives in recent years with the Council successfully bidding and being awarded substantial value grants for a number of Homelessness schemes resulting in a positive relationship with MCHLG and other central government awarding bodies. Bids for these funds will be explored whenever relevant and appropriate.
- Partnership working with other local organisations, such as Warwickshire County Council and the other district and borough councils, sometimes secures additional funding for homelessness work that can deliver enhancements across boundaries.

5.3. If a specific initiative needed to deliver this strategy cannot be funded within either existing base budgets or the alternative funding streams highlighted in

paragraph 5.2 then a further Executive report setting options to meet the anticipated resource needs would be brought to a future Executive as necessary.

6. Risks

- 6.1. The principal risk involved in adopting a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is the risk of failing to deliver the actions set out therein. This bears reputational risk to the council. More importantly it also carries the risk that individuals and families that find themselves potentially or actually homeless, or rough sleeping, will be unable to access the services that they need to rebuild their lives.
- 6.2. The impact of this risk is high. However, the strategy itself is its own mitigation. By taking forward the actions proposed in a well planned, resourced, timetabled and managed way the likelihood of this risk materialising is greatly reduced.
 - Risk assessment will be a part of the project management framework for all of the actions, with progress on each action being the responsibility of a nominated lead officer, reporting to their line manager.
 - Strategic monitoring will be undertaken by the Housing Services management team on a quarterly basis, where overall progress will be tracked and any necessary short-term adjustments to priorities and resources can be considered and agreed.
- 6.3. The strategy as a whole will be reviewed each year when the latest data, changes in the policy environment, and progress against the action plans and objectives can be assessed. There are also risks involved in not having a strategy, but this is not an option, as discussed in section seven below.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

- 7.1. The option of not adopting a new strategy has been considered but this has been rejected because a homelessness strategy is a statutory obligation.
- 7.2. The option of developing the whole strategy on a countywide basis was considered. However, given the demographic differences between the five council areas of Warwickshire it was considered that such a document would be too unwieldy. It is therefore more appropriate to have a countywide strategy focussing on the key issues that can better be addressed on the wider geographic scale, alongside the localised strategy tackling the district issues. A decision on whether to renew the countywide strategy in 2023 will be taken closer to the time, once an assessment of its success has been carried out.
- 7.3. The option of developing a strategy for South Warwickshire was considered but not adopted at this time because currently the two areas experience quite different housing market and service pressures and the required service provision needs to reflect this. The countywide strategy referred to in

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7.2 above already picks up and highlight those issues that can best be dealt with across borders.

- 7.4. The option of having separate strategies for homelessness and for rough sleeping has been considered. However, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has indicated a strong preference, and a potential future statutory requirement, for combined strategies. To have produced separate strategies could therefore jeopardise funding bids for future central government housing and homelessness programmes.