

| Report of: | Meeting | Date |
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| David McArthur (Housing Services Manager) | Overview and Scrutiny | 21 st October 2019 |

Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Review

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1** To provide an update to committee on the homelessness review and proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and Action Plan, enabling any comments to be considered during the consultation period before a final draft is proposed for Council approval.

2. Background

- 2.1** The Homelessness Act 2002 requires the local authority to conduct a five-yearly review of recent homelessness trends, evaluate prevention activities, plan the procurement of accommodation and subsequently develop a preventative strategy. There is also a specific requirement within the Ministry of Housing's Code of Guidance on Homelessness to ensure all strategies are refreshed and compliant with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17).
- 2.2** Section 3 of the Homelessness Act 2002 states that before adopting a homelessness strategy local authorities shall consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate. Within this parameter it is a decision for the local authority as to whom it shall consult. For a homelessness strategy to be robust, it is recommended that participation is sought from a wide range of partner agencies (statutory and voluntary sector), stakeholders, elected members, service users, and staff within the local authority itself.
- 2.3** The review of homeless trends depicts a borough with an increasing demand on the Housing Options Team. Factors such as welfare reform and the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act have seen approaches increase from 371 in 2016/17 to 536 in 2018/19. However the continued emphasis on prevention has ensured the use of temporary accommodation has decreased, and the number of full homeless applications has significantly dropped with only 2 in 2018/19. The main

causes related to the loss of last settled home have consistently been exclusion from the family home by parents and fleeing domestic abuse.

- 2.4** The draft strategy and action plan has been developed through the review and discussion with our key partners including supported accommodation providers and registered social landlords. The draft strategy seeks to embed and deepen what we know works well in prevention, to further reduce the use of temporary accommodation, reduce rough sleeping, and setting out new activities and proposals which strengthen those services and aim to further address the social, human, moral and financial costs of homelessness.

3. Key issues

- 3.1** The draft homelessness strategy is a response to a period of unprecedented change, including the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which came into force in April 2018, public services facing significant financial challenges and social housing and welfare reforms.
- 3.2** The effectiveness of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which has an emphasis on the prevention of homelessness, is twinned with the effectiveness of partnership work with statutory, voluntary and third sector agencies to ensure households' needs are met and that they are assisted as they engage and work through their personalised plans, which is another duty introduced by the Act.
- 3.3** The Act also has a focus on helping households to access housing and we need to make sure that we have effective pathways to work collaboratively with and encourage households to secure their own accommodation.
- 3.4** The Council will embed and deepen its current overall approach to preventing people from losing their homes and will improve the number of prevention outcomes, so that by 2023 Wyre is an exemplar borough in tackling homelessness. It will aim to reduce use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation to zero, and place further emphasis towards alleviating rough sleeping. While the recorded numbers of street sleepers are consistently very low the Council recognises that it must do more to identify hidden street homelessness and provide an appropriate pathway into safe, secure accommodation for those rough sleeping.
- 3.5** Following our homelessness review and with regard to national, regional and local context, policy and strategies we have defined three key objectives:
1. Prevent homelessness

2. Provide pathways to short and long term accommodation for those homeless and at risk of homelessness
3. Contribute to the improvement of the health and wellbeing of those homelessness and at risk of homelessness

3.6 Evidence highlighted in the strategy shows that nationally homelessness levels have steadily increased over the last five years. This is due in part to the impact of the welfare reforms and rising cost of the private rental market making it more difficult to find suitable and affordable accommodation for many households.

3.7 The timing of this homelessness strategy is particularly relevant in light of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Homelessness Reduction Act changes the way homelessness advice and assistance is provided by local authorities and places additional statutory responsibilities upon local authorities. The strategy therefore sets out what we have already achieved in the first year of the Act in addition to setting out an action plan which outlines our ongoing and future aims.

3.8 The consultation ends shortly but any comments or suggestions will be taken into consideration in the preparation of the final draft for Council approval.

| report author | telephone no. | email | date |
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List of appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy