

Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 - 2026

For Cabinet on 17 March 2022

Summary

Lead Member: Cllr Andrew Fairweather

Lead Director: Paul Taylor, Director of Change and Communities

Head of Service: Gary Stevenson, Head of Housing, Health and Environment

Report Author: Sue Oliver, Private Sector Housing Manager

Classification: Public document (non-exempt)

Wards Affected: All

Approval Timetable	Date
Housing Advisory Panel	1 February 2022
Management Board	16 February 2022
Communities & Economic Development CAB	2 March 2022
Cabinet	17 March 2022

Recommendations

Officer recommendation as supported by the Portfolio Holder:

1. That Cabinet adopts the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy at Appendix A.
2. That the Housing Advisory Panel monitors, reviews and evaluates the action plans that sit under the four key ambitions every six months, to ensure that our priorities remain in the right direction and reflect local and national priorities.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Our current Housing Strategy is the West Kent Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016 – 2021 which reaches the end of its term in summer 2021. We worked in partnership to deliver this Strategy with Sevenoaks District Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, and we have a long history of working together successfully on housing and homelessness initiatives. The Councils have decided to have their own strategies for the next five years, to ensure a focus on each local authority area, although partnership working will of course continue.
- 1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to conduct a review of the nature and extent of homelessness every five years, and to develop a Strategy setting out how services will be delivered in the future to tackle homelessness and the available resources to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- 1.3 In 2018, the Government published a national Rough Sleeping Strategy which set out a vision to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it completely by 2027, and that local authorities should update their homelessness strategies to include rough sleeper strategies.
- 1.4 We are not required to produce a Housing Strategy, although it is good practice to do so, to ensure that we have an integrated and comprehensive Strategy that sets out all of our aims and how we will deliver them.
- 1.5 To ensure continuity with our previous Strategy and the delivery of the work contained within it, this Strategy, which was approved for consultation in 2021, spans the five year period 2021 – 2026, commencing 1st April 2021 and ending on 31 March 2026 .
- 1.6 At Appendix A of this report is the Council’s Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 – 2026. We have incorporated rough sleeping for the first time, in line with the Government’s requirements.
- 1.7 The Strategy received approval from Cabinet to consult with partners and the local community at the meeting on 28 October 2021, and the consultation has now taken place.

2. Content of Strategy

- 2.1 Section 1 of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 – 2026 contains an introduction, which explains how the Strategy links into the Council’s Five Year Plan, sets out our vision, and considers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the borough’s residents, in particular on housing need.
- 2.2 The vision for this Strategy is to:

Enable access to safe, secure and affordable housing, preventing homelessness and ending rough sleeping.

- 2.3 Section 2 of the Strategy contains a profile of the Tunbridge Wells area, with reference to house prices, deprivation, tenure types and size of accommodation, and the needs of specific groups, in particular young people and older people.
- 2.4 Section 3 of the Strategy relates to the West Kent Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016 – 2021 and contains a summary of what has been achieved.

3. Ambitions for 2021 - 2026

3.1 The Strategy sets out our ambitions for the next five years, which are:

- Preventing homelessness and ending rough sleeping;
- Increasing the supply and choice of affordable homes;
- Improving housing and meeting need;
- Promoting homes that sustain health and well-being.

Within each of these four ambitions, we set out why this is a priority, our current position, and our plans for delivery for 2021 – 2026. Each ambition contains a number of aims, how we will deliver each aim, by when and the lead officer with responsibility for delivery.

Preventing homelessness and ending rough sleeping

- 3.2 The prevention of homelessness is a national and local priority, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has meant that the Housing Options team takes a proactive approach to help people threatened with homelessness, helps them to sustain tenancies and prevent them from becoming homeless again.
- 3.3 The Government wants to end rough sleeping by the end of 2024. Rough sleeping is the most extreme form of homelessness and to end it, secure and affordable housing is needed. Rough sleepers often have complex health and support needs, and so require a range of co-ordinated interventions including stable accommodation, and health and clinical support.
- 3.4 The action plan for preventing homelessness and rough sleeping contains four key areas:
- A1 – Preventing homelessness and supporting households at risk of homelessness
 - A2 – Ending rough sleeping
 - A3 – Working with private sector landlords to house homeless and at risk households
 - A4 – Moving homeless households onto permanent homes

Increasing the supply and choice of affordable homes

- 3.5 In late 2020, the Government announced plans to increase the supply of affordable homes including homes for social rent, and affordable home ownership. This is particularly relevant for the Council as home ownership is out of reach for many, in particular low and middle income households. The emerging Local Plan identifies a relatively high need for affordable housing, and as part of the work undertaken for the emerging Local Plan, a review titled “Affordable housing needs in the context of First Homes” was conducted in February 2021.
- 3.6 Affordable housing is normally provided and managed by registered providers which includes not for profit housing associations and for profit organisations. On the majority of sites it should mainly be available for social rent.
- 3.7 The Council’s ambition is to make the borough carbon neutral by 2030, and the policies contained within the emerging Local Plan will seek to support carbon reduction and the transition to a low carbon future.
- 3.8 The action plan for increasing the supply and choice of affordable homes contains two key areas:
- B1 – Maximising delivery of new affordable homes to meet housing need
 - B2 – Delivering low carbon and environmentally sustainable homes

Improving housing and meeting need

- 3.9 Good quality housing positively impacts on health, wellbeing, and life expectancy, and poor housing has detrimental effects on education, health and crime. We have a thriving private rented sector and for many, privately renting is an effective solution to housing needs. The sector has expanded in recent years and rents have risen significantly, which means that private renting is becoming out of reach for many lower income households.
- 3.10 The Private Sector Housing team ensures that standards are maintained and improved across all tenures and in particular the private rented sector, works to remove hazards, and to licence houses in multiple occupation (HMOs).
- 3.11 Housing Register statistics provide an important source of information as regards housing need. Most demand is for one and two bedroom units.
- 3.12 Energy efficiency and fuel poverty remain key challenges across all tenures, and particularly impact lower income homes. As benefit caps and rising housing costs place additional strain on household budgets, as well as the increases to the cost of gas leading to difficulties in paying bills, reducing energy costs and enabling warmer homes for low income households becomes a greater priority. The Council will continue to ensure that awareness of government funding initiatives is maintained, and submit bids for funding, so that residents can access retro-fitting for insulation and low carbon heating measures where relevant criteria are met.

- 3.13 The action plan for Improving housing and meeting need contains four key areas:
- C1 – Shaping a thriving, high standard private rented sector
 - C2 – Bringing long term empty homes back into use
 - C3 – Making best use of social rented housing
 - C4 – Reducing the environmental impact of homes

Promoting homes that sustain health and well-being

- 3.14 Poor quality housing harms both physical and mental health, and poor housing conditions present a greater risk to the health of older and disabled people, and people with long term health conditions.
- 3.15 Safe accessible housing can maintain or improve health and wellbeing and greatly improve quality of life, especially as people grow older. Minor repairs, as well as minor and major home adaptations are effective interventions for preventing falls and injuries, improving the performance of everyday activities and mental health. We work with partners to share best practice, identify areas for joint working and agree positive objectives for housing and the promotion of good health, in particular the Kent Housing Group.
- 3.16 The action plan for Promoting homes that sustain health and wellbeing contains three key areas:
- D1 - Shaping the housing stock
 - D2 – Supporting and maintaining the independence of residents
 - D3 - Developing integrated housing, health and care strategies

4. Consultation outcome

- 4.1 Consultation was conducted via the Council's consultation portal, and a series of questions were asked to assist respondents with their comments. The consultation opened on 24 November 2021 and closed on 14 January 2022. A broad range of people and organisations including partners who work with us to deliver services, interested parties in the local community and housing and health colleagues in other local authorities and organisations were consulted. Residents were also able to respond.
- 4.2 There were 63 visits to the consultation page, and thirteen responses were received via the portal. One was from a partner, one was from the Tunbridge Wells Constituency Labour Party and the remainder were either anonymous or appeared to be from local residents. A letter was received from the National Residential Landlords' Association.
- 4.3 The Housing Advisory Panel considered the comments on 1 February 2022, which focused mainly on tackling homelessness and the provision of affordable housing. The

comments received were positive with some suggestions for actions that the Council could consider taking, and these are largely already contained within the action plans.

5. Options Considered

- 4.1 Option 1 – agree to adopt the Strategy attached at Appendix A.
- 4.2 Option 2 – do nothing. Not adopting the Strategy would mean that the Council would not be complying with the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002, and the Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy.

6. Preferred Option and Reason

- 6.1 Option 1 – adopt the Strategy.
- 6.2 Having a current Strategy would mean that the Council is complying with the Homelessness Act 2002, the Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy and that ambitions and aims are in place for the next five years.

7. Consultation on Options

- 7.1 The cross-party Housing Advisory Panel considered the consultation responses on 1 February 2022 and agreed that no changes were required to the Strategy.

Recommendation from Cabinet Advisory Board

- 7.2 The Communities and Economic Development Cabinet Advisory Board was consulted on 2 March 2022 and recommended that Cabinet should adopt the Strategy.

8. Implementation

- 8.1 If Cabinet adopts the Strategy on 17 March 2022, it will be added to the Council’s website, with a link being sent to partners and interested parties.

9. Appendices and Background Documents

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 - 2026
- Appendix B: Equalities Impact Assessment

10. Cross Cutting Issues

A. Legal (including the Human Rights Act)

Councils are required under the Homelessness Act 2002 to conduct a review of the nature and extent of homelessness every five years, and to develop a Strategy setting out how services will be delivered in the future to tackle homelessness and the available resources to prevent and relieve homelessness. Homelessness strategies now need to include rough sleeper strategies, and this Strategy covers both of these aspects.

The Strategy contains a number of actions that will be delivered during 2021 – 2026. Advice will be sought from Legal Services on these specific actions where necessary.

Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under the 2002 Act. Failure to accept the recommendations without agreeing suitable alternatives may place the Council in breach of legislation governing homelessness.

Claudette Valmond, Principal Solicitor – Commercial 15 October 2021

B. Finance and Other Resources

The Strategy document itself does not require funding, although some of the aims within the five year action plans will require funding and some of this will be from external sources. Finance will be consulted where necessary, to include guidance on capital and revenue funding, and Cabinet approval will be sought where relevant.

Jane Fineman, Head of Finance and Procurement 14 October 2021

C. Staffing

The Strategy contains a number of actions that will be delivered during 2021 – 2026. It is noted that some posts deliver projects that are externally funded, and advice will be sought from HR where necessary.

Nicky Carter, Head of HR 19 October 2021

D. Risk Management

The Strategy contains a number of actions that will be delivered during 2021 – 2026. Advice will be sought from the Head of Audit on these actions where necessary. Consideration will be given to these specific actions as they are planned and delivered, and where relevant risks will be included in the strategic risk register.

Sue Oliver, Private Sector Housing Manager 23 September 2021

E. Environment and Sustainability

One of the four over-arching ambitions of the Strategy relates to how we will increase the supply and choice of affordable housing. Within this, there is a section on reducing carbon, which refers to the council's Climate Emergency declaration and the relevant Local Plan policies (see pages 31 – 34). The action plan relating to how we will deliver low carbon and environmentally friendly homes contains the steps we plan to take to:

- Reduce the impact of new build schemes on the environment through planning policy and development management.
- Set sustainable design standards and ensure delivery of low carbon measures by private developers.

I note that the strategy contains a section on reducing carbon and delivering new low carbon homes. The domestic sector in Kent and Medway accounts for 28% of carbon emissions (Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emission strategy evidence base – 2017 data). Therefore, it is recommended that improving the energy efficiency and decarbonising heating systems for the existing housing stock will continue to be and is included as a key feature for all renovation projects that are influenced by and under the Council's direct control.

Similarly, it is recommended that opportunities for grant funding are explored and projects to improve the existing housing stock in general are developed to reduce carbon emissions to support the ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

Karin Grey Sustainability Manager 14 October 2021

F. Community Safety

Generally a healthy home is one that is affordable and secure and provides for all household needs.

The only specific community safety issue relates to ending rough sleeping, which is a positive initiative. Rough sleeping is a risk to the wellbeing of the rough sleepers themselves and can also be a frustration for residents and other users of public spaces.

Terry Hughes, Community Safety Manager 24 September 2021

G. Equalities

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached at Appendix B.

The scope of the EqIA is to consider how our services/policies meet the needs of those who are:

- homeless or threatened with homelessness
- rough sleepers
- in need of an affordable home
- living in the private rented sector
- living in fuel poverty

- require support from integrated housing, health and care providers

No potential negative impacts have been identified, however there are a number of aims over the next five years that will impact on some groups with protected characteristics, particularly disability, race, sex and age, both young people and older people.

Corporate Governance 15 October 2021

H. Data Protection

There are no data protection implications.

Corporate Governance 15 October 2021

I. Health and Safety

There are no health and safety implications.

Sue Oliver, Private Sector Housing Manager 18 May 2021

J. Health and Wellbeing

One of the four over-arching ambitions of the Strategy (see pages 42 - 46) relates to how we will promote homes that sustain health and wellbeing, and why this is a priority. Reference is made to the impact of poor quality housing on health, the findings of the Marmot Review and the Ten Years On review. The action plan relating to how we will deliver this ambition contains actions to:

- shape the housing stock and how we will ensure that homes meet the needs of residents
- support and maintain the independence of residents
- develop integrated housing, health and care strategies working with partners across Kent

Rebecca Bowers, Health Improvement Team Leader 1 October 2021