

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

Tuesday 8 November 2022

**Homeless Prevention Strategy Action Plan Update
2019 - 2024**

Executive summary

This report provides the Environment Select Committee with an update on progress on the Homeless Prevention Strategy Action Plan that was adopted by Full Council in November 2019, which included a 5 year action plan.

Proposal

That the committee note the progress made on the Homeless Prevention Strategy Action Plan.

Reason for proposal

The Environment Select Committee requested an update on progress with the Action Plan due to potential delays following the period of Covid.

Author:

Mrs Nicole Smith, Head of Housing People Services
Nicole.smith@Wiltshire.gov.uk

Homeless Prevention Strategy Action Plan Update 2019 - 2024

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Environment Select Committee with an update on progress to deliver on the Homeless Prevention Strategy Action Plan that was approved by Full Council in November 2019,

Background

2. The Homeless Prevention Strategy Action plan was split into 5 priority areas, each having agreed key actions. Below is a table to confirm the total agreed actions for each priority area, total completed, those started but not yet completed and those not yet started.

	Total Actions	Completed	Started	Not yet started
Priority 1 To Reduce Rough Sleeping	17	14	3	0
Priority 2 To Identify and Prevent Homelessness at the earliest possible stage	5	3	2	0
Priority 3 To ensure services are designed to prevent homelessness or support those who are homeless	11	8	1	2
Priority 4 To ensure those who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless can secure and keep a suitable home	8	8	0	0
Priority 5 To maintain effective strategic direction and partnership working	8	7	0	1
	49	40	6	3

Since November 2019 we have seen a significant increase in demand as well as having to respond to a national pandemic. However, as you can see from the table above we have made significant progress in achieving the agreed actions with only a few outstanding. See Appendix 1 for the Homeless Prevention Strategy Action Plan.

Main considerations for the committee

3. Looking at each priority individually I will highlight some of the positive work that has been completed and is ongoing since the adoption of the Homeless

Prevention Strategy as well as some other exceptional work that has been completed by the Housing team in addition the activity recorded in the action plan

Priority 1 To reduce rough sleeping

4. Rough sleeping has been a priority since 2019 and it expanded considerably during Covid 19 due to the government campaign 'Everyone In'. Through government grant funding we have established a team who are able to support both outreach and in-reach work as well as having specialist posts to provide individual tailored support to some of our most entrenched rough sleepers
5. As well as completing 14 actions out of the original 17 agreed, we were required by government to produce a Rough Sleeper Strategy which identifies how we intend to work to reduce rough sleeping in Wiltshire and provide dedicated intensive support to 15 identified entrenched rough sleepers
6. Through multi agency bids we have been successful in being awarded rough sleeper grant funding as part of the governments Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI). Figures are year 1 (£312,245), year 2 (£298,549), year 3 (£309,000), year 4 (£494,918) and the last bid round for which we were also successful and were awarded £546,940 per year 2022-2025, which was for a 3 year programme (2022-2025) to help provide stability for some of our initiatives, which include:-
 - Funding for the rough sleeper team (Staffing costs)
 - Specialist tenancy support for entrenched rough sleepers
 - Our 7 bed 'The Haven' accommodation for rough sleepers
 - A new 10 bed 'The Bridge' accommodation for rough sleepers in Trowbridge (opening Nov 22)
 - Flexible surge accommodation fund
 - Personalised budgets
 - Private rented sector initiative
 - Training
7. We have secured 'The Haven' a 7 bed property specifically for rough sleepers with complex needs, and are in the process of securing a 10 bed property in Trowbridge 'The Bridge' for the same client group. As move on we have purchased through NSAP 1 x 3 bed HMO and 3 x 1 bed properties and through RSAP we are in the process of securing a further 5 x 1 bed properties and 2 x 3 bed HMOs, all currently going through conveyancing.
8. We have piloted with Aster Housing Association a 'Housing First model. This is where we allocate a suitable property to a rough sleeper and provide multi agency wrap around support to help them manage and maintain the tenancy. This has been successful and delivered positive outcomes and we are expanding this model to secure further properties for our more complex and challenging rough sleepers.
9. Many of our rough sleepers have drug and alcohol issues and with Public Health we have been successful in securing £800k over a 2 year period (22/24) through the Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant (RSDATG). This service will provide dedicated support for clients who are either at risk of homelessness or who are rough sleeping. We continue to work with Public Health to maximise

all potential opportunities to ensure that rough sleepers have good access to health services

10. This has all far exceeded what was originally proposed in our housing prevention action plan and extensive work has gone into supporting Rough Sleepers during the past three years to help support them to build more stable lives and secure long term accommodation.
11. Since the governments 'Everyone In' was announced in April 2020 we have supported 217 rough sleepers into longer term accommodation, however we are still seeing a flow onto the streets of around 14 new rough sleepers a month. Our next annual rough sleeper count, which is a statutory requirement to carry out and is done nationally, will be completed in November 22 in conjunction with our partners and in line with other neighbouring authorities. Last year the official annual rough sleeper count was 11, however we are expecting this figure to be higher this year.

Priority 2 To identify and prevent homelessness at the earliest possible stage

12. Of the five original agreed actions we have completed three and we are working towards the remaining two. It is important to recognise that we have delivered on other actions that were not listed within the original action plan and have been fundamental in helping to prevent homelessness.
13. We have developed a 'Tenancy Ready Training Module' which focuses on young people and care leavers to ensure they have the skills they need to be able to effectively manage a tenancy. All care leavers are now required to complete this module in advance of them needing to move on. We have also recruited Specialist Housing Caseworkers in:-
 - Young people / care leavers
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Criminal JusticeThese are dedicated specialist roles who work with applicants at the earliest stage possible to help with a managed transition and to prevent homelessness
14. We have also developed a 'Young Person Protocol' with a full training programme attended by operational staff from both Children's services and housing to be clear about the options available for young people who find themselves threatened with homelessness. Due to its success we are now developing a bespoke care leavers protocol which will be developed and launched in the same way later this year.
15. Due to the demands on our hospitals both during and post- covid, we have developed i working relationships with the hospital discharge teams with improved links to assist with timely and planned hospital discharges for those individuals with a housing need.
16. We terminated our floating support contract with Julian House and brought the service in house and the staff were transferred through TUPE. This generated a saving as we utilised our existing management structure and although we originally TUPEd two officers, we now have a team of six officers supported by a

team leader by utilising our HPG funding. They work with applicants who are either threatened with homelessness or who are homeless to help them to sustain their tenancy, maximise income, ensure referrals are made to receive appropriate support and look to reduce debts. This team has been fundamental in supporting some of our most vulnerable clients.

Priority 3 To ensure services are designed to prevent homelessness or support those who are homeless

17. Of the 11 actions in this section we have completed eight, with one on going and two not yet started. The key action taken forwards to ensure services are designed to prevent homelessness was the re structure of the housing team which was implemented in July 22 and creates a single point of contact for our customers and means that an officer will take complete ownership of the customers housing needs to provide consistency of support
18. The restructure was designed following in depth customer journey work carried out by the team, clearly mapping the contacts made by customers and identifying all contact that doesn't add value. This enabled the team to identify key principles for the service re-design ensuring that the structure was developed based on the needs of the customer
19. We have created a personalised pre action protocol for Wiltshire housing providers which builds on the statutory requirement to refer in a timely manner. This has meant we have a consistent approach being used by all housing providers to ensure timely referrals are made to our teams to determine if there is any action that can resolve or prevent homelessness
20. With the introduction of our specialist housing officers we have developed positive relations with police, probation, prisons, domestic abuse support services, children services, adult services and many other agencies to ensure referrals or duty to refer are made in a timely manner helping to ensure appropriate support and advice can be provided at the earliest opportunity to either prevent homelessness or manage homelessness in a planned way.
21. Due to the benefits of this work all three specialist posts have continued to be supported and are jointly funded by Housing, Children services, Public Health and the National Probation Service
22. We have also been working extremely hard with the Refugee and Resettlement team on the work to support and provide advice to Ukraine households who have come to the UK under the H4Ukraine scheme or family settlement scheme. We are now seeing an increased number seeking alternative, permanent accommodation as in most cases they were only accommodated on a temporary basis for an initial 6 months. Significant work is being done to try and prevent these families from needing to apply as homeless but applying as homeless is the safety net if suitable accommodation cannot be found in the private sector
23. With the increasing demands on our service, the impact of the pandemic and implementing a full re structure which required a significant amount of training and changes in working practices, it has not yet been possible to prepare for a peer review as stated in the action plan. This remains a priority and the service

will work towards this with the aim of this taking place in 2024 when new working practices are embedded and we have completed mystery shopping and have taken forward recommendations from this work

Priority 4 To ensure those who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless can secure and keep a suitable home

24. All eight actions in this section have been completed
25. We have seen the development of Stone Circle to increase opportunities for homeless families to secure affordable accommodation in the private sector. We have also employed a dedicated private sector housing officer who negotiates on a daily basis with local landlords and lettings agents to maximise the opportunities available in the private sector. We are currently expanding this work with a further two offers, one of which will be dedicated to working with Ukrainian families to help them to secure accommodation in the private sector
26. Our enabling team continue to maximise all opportunities to deliver more affordable homes in line with the core strategy
27. With the increasing demands on the homeless service we review regularly our temporary housing portfolio. Due to covid we took on 4 x 3 bed HMOs and have maintained two of those to use for our single households who become homeless. We are currently managing an average of 85 families / singles in temporary accommodation and have not yet had the need to place in B&B, however with the increase in demand we are experiencing this has been raised as a likely risk.
28. As part of our department saving's we reduced our deposit bond scheme by maximising the opportunities to us by increasing the use of the Discretionary Housing Budget to help families secure private rented accommodation by funding rent in advance or deposits.
29. We have developed 3 x 2 bed properties specifically to be used for care leavers as shared accommodation. This was an initial pilot using Wiltshire owned properties but the pilot demonstrated that this was not an effective model as it has proven extremely difficult to match suitable care leavers to share the accommodation which led to increase void times.

Priority 5 To maintain effective strategic direction and partnership working

30. Of the eight actions in this section we have delivered seven and one is outstanding.
31. The response to the pandemic required enhanced joint working which has helped to build on and strengthen positive relationships in terms of how we respond to our client's needs. We offer bespoke training to both internal and external partners on many areas of housing, including on our duties and responsibilities, how our housing register work, duty to refer and detailed training on specific areas of the law, including our duties towards young people and care leavers.
32. We have established multi agency working around the needs and concerns of rough sleepers, particularly in relation to drug misuse and anti-social behaviour

to support a joint multi agency response. This allows us to best manage these issues across agencies.

33. We have been successful in working with our partners to achieve grant funding from government for Rough Sleepers, Severe Weather, Domestic Abuse and Drug and Alcohol Services.
34. We have improved our relationships with the MOD to support planned and managed discharges from the army with an agreed referral process and bespoke training taking place to ensure we receive early warnings of discharges.
35. In the last few months we have begun developing a performance framework through a Performance and Outcome group and Performance and Outcome Board.
36. We have also established and agreed suitable performance indicators that enable us to manage our service better and identify early trends. Through this work we are looking to establish some comparisons with neighbouring local authorities and help to develop some good practice which is one of the outstanding actions in this section

Environmental impact of the proposal

37. There are no environmental impacts to this update report

Equality and diversity impact of the proposal

38. This report is an update report and therefore has no Equality or diversity impacts

Risk assessment

39. There are no identified risks to this update report

Financial implications

40. There are no financial implications to this report

Legal implications

41. There are no legal implications to this update report

Appendix 1 Homeless Prevention Action Plan