

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 20 March 2023

Report Title

Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023-2026

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report introduces the proposed Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2026, which explains how the Council and its partners will address the challenges of homelessness and rough sleeping, by focussing on six key priorities:

1. Make homelessness a rare occurrence by focusing on prevention and early intervention.
2. Minimise the use and improve the quality of temporary accommodation and end the use of hotels.
3. Increase access to affordable housing options.
4. Improve access to housing support, employment and health services.
5. Support people with complex needs.
6. End rough sleeping in Rotherham.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet approve the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023 - 2026.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023-2026

Appendix 2A Initial Equality Screening Assessment

Appendix 2B Equality Analysis Form

Appendix 3 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

[Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2019-2022](#)

[Housing Strategy 2022-2025](#)

[Housing Allocation Policy](#)

[Governments, Ending Rough Sleeping for Good Strategy 2022](#)

[Crisis's Plan "Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain](#)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No.

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023-2026

1. Background

- 1.1 Rotherham's first Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy was published in 2019. It fulfilled the Government's requirement for local authorities to have a Rough Sleeper Strategy and to regularly make an assessment of homelessness in their areas. The Strategy is now due for refresh.
- 1.2 The new Strategy builds upon the successes of the last three years. In particular, Rotherham's response to homelessness during the Covid pandemic, which included adoption of the "Everyone In" approach to safeguard homeless people, was a success and strengthened the Council's partnership working.
- 1.3 Over the last three years, the Council has also reduced the number of rough sleepers counted within the Borough from 16 in 2018/19 to none in 2022/23. The Council has:
- Increased Housing First by ten additional properties.
 - Commissioned an eight-bed emergency Homeless Accommodation Hub to support rough sleepers and a rapid rehousing approach.
 - Secured £2,975,000 grant funding from the Rough Sleepers Initiative and Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme.
 - Developed the Council's Rough Sleepers Initiative in-house team.
 - Improved housing pathways for those leaving prison or hospital.
- 1.4 In addition, the Council has:
- Completed thousands of pre-tenancy affordability assessments to help avoid future homelessness cases, including more than 2,200 since April 2022.
 - Supported residents with claims for benefit entitlements, generating more than £1.1m additional income for residents in the last year.
 - Supported over 400 people into employment and over 500 into training since October 2020.
 - Increased the number of supported housing units available, including increased support provision and more emergency accommodation for households who are victims of domestic abuse.
 - Worked with partners to provide outreach and resettlement support.
 - Co-designed a new service model for homeless people aged 16-25.
 - Produced a pocket guide and online help and information guide called H.O.M.E ("Helping Others Made Easier").
- 1.5 Despite these successes, in 2023 there remain considerable challenges. The cost-of-living crisis, a lack of affordable housing, and the growing numbers of households presenting with complex needs means further improvements are needed to our services and partnership working to prevent and address homelessness. New legislation and policy, including

the Rough Sleepers Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Act, provides further impetus for a refresh of the approach taken to these issues in Rotherham

- 1.6 The new Strategy has been developed through co-design, engagement and consultation with stakeholders, partners, customers, residents, and Council employees. The refreshed Strategy acknowledges that people with lived experience of homelessness are often best placed to advise on what will make a positive difference to their lives. The proposed Strategy covering April 2023 to March 2026 has been drafted and is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Context

- 2.2 The Strategy considers the context and challenges the Council faces, such as the impact of Covid (including the lifting of measures such as the temporary ban on evictions and withdrawal of “Everyone In”), the impact of the current cost-of-living crisis, the state of the housing market, and the welfare system. It also considers the wide range of complex needs and additional pressures that all council’s face.

- 2.3 The Strategy includes a clear recognition of the critical importance of homelessness prevention. This includes the provision of timely and accurate information, advice and assistance to enable people to seek and receive help earlier, targeted early prevention activities, stronger pathways and partnership working, and more emphasis on improving the affordability and sustainment of tenancies in the private rented sector. It also recognises the need to reduce the Council’s use of temporary accommodation, particularly expensive and poor-quality hotel accommodation.

2.4 Vision and principles

- 2.5 The vision for the new Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy reflects the continued need for the Council to work with partners to address the varied and complex issues that lead to homelessness, many of which extend beyond the provision of housing alone. The vision is:

- To work in partnership to end homelessness in Rotherham.
- Everyone has a secure affordable place to call home.
- The right support at the right time is in place to prevent homelessness and enable recovery.

- 2.6 This is supported by four guiding principles for how the Council will design, develop and deliver services:

- Partnership working.
- Person centred approach.

- Solutions focused.
- Responsiveness.

2.7 **Proposed key priorities of the Strategy**

2.8 Six key priorities have been developed to achieve the vision within the Strategy for the period 2023-26. A summary is provided below.

2.9 **Priority 1 - Make homelessness a rare occurrence by focusing on prevention and early intervention**

2.10 The prevention of homelessness is a national and local priority, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 re-enforces the Councils intention to be proactive to help people threatened with homelessness, helping them to sustain occupancy of their homes and prevent them from becoming homeless.

2.11 Many people approaching the Council are already in crisis before they approach the homelessness service. This provides limited time to resolve their housing situation and therefore increases demand for emergency temporary accommodation.

2.12 The Strategy seeks to fundamentally shift the focus to early prevention. Focusing on early homelessness prevention means the Council can help people remain in their homes or find a new home without experiencing homelessness.

2.13 **Priority 2 - Minimise the use and improve the quality of temporary accommodation, and end the use of hotels**

2.14 Although the number of households making a homeless application in 2021-2022 reduced to 987 from 1,458 in 2020-2021, the demand and need for emergency temporary accommodation has not reduced. Reducing the number of homeless people housed in temporary accommodation supports the Council Plan theme of ensuring people are safe, healthy and live well.

2.15 Barriers to securing move-on options from temporary accommodation tend to include the complexity of household need and the availability of suitable and affordable housing options, both in the social and private housing sectors.

2.16 The Strategy's main focus is to prevent homelessness and therefore the long-term goal is to reduce the use of all forms of temporary accommodation. In the short term, the Strategy seeks to end the use of expensive and poor-quality hotel accommodation, which will mean the Council will need to expand availability of self-contained temporary accommodation to make sure that the Council has sufficient, good quality temporary accommodation available.

2.17 Priority 3 - Increase access to affordable housing options

2.18 It is much more difficult for households who are on low incomes to access housing. Not having affordable housing options can lead to homelessness as well as causing difficulties for households to sustain their existing home.

2.19 The Housing Strategy 2022-2026 aims to increase affordable homes through the delivery of new affordable housing and bringing existing empty homes back into use. However, demand continues to exceed supply. The private rented sector (PRS) is in high demand, which is increasing the value of market rents above Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. The gap between average market rent and LHA as of 1st April 2022 was 27% for a two-bed property, and 12.5% for a three-bed property. This creates difficulties in sourcing suitable PRS properties to prevent or address homelessness.

2.20 The Strategy seeks to improve the housing options available to homeless households, including increasing the accessibility of private rented housing. The Council also wants to make sure that all households in Rotherham are given fair access to social housing and our duties are effectively met.

2.21 Priority 4 - Improve access to housing support, employment and health services

2.22 Having access to good quality advice and information can play a key role in homelessness prevention and intervention, as well as tackling health inequalities.

2.23 The Council may find that more households are impacted by the cost-of-living crisis and find themselves turning to the Council for housing support. Support is often needed to help households navigate through the benefit system, or to overcome complex barriers to finding and staying in employment. Homeless individuals can also often experience multiple long-term health conditions and face multiple barriers to accessing healthcare.

2.24 The Strategy seeks to ensure that households that are affected by the cost-of-living crisis and homelessness issues have access to quality housing support, employment and health services.

2.25 Priority 5 - Support people with complex needs

2.26 The Strategy acknowledges the necessity to respond to the increasing number of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who have complex needs. Complex needs may include entrenched street homelessness, repeat service use or being otherwise vulnerably housed, mental, psychological, or emotional health needs, drug and/or alcohol dependency. Some individuals will have had contact with the criminal

justice system, have physical health needs and have experience of domestic violence and abuse.

2.27 The Strategy seeks to increase specialist housing provision and support for people with complex needs to enable them to sustain their housing.

2.28 **Priority 6 - End rough sleeping in Rotherham**

2.29 Living on the streets places individuals at risk, causes health problems and affects people's wellbeing. Prolonged periods of rough sleeping also have a significant impact on mental and physical health. The numbers of people sleeping rough in Rotherham are relatively low compared to some boroughs and cities. This position has been achieved over the last three years with the development of the Council's Rough Sleeper Initiative Team and wider partnership working.

2.30 The Strategy seeks to build on what the Council and partners have achieved so far by maintaining rough sleeping at a zero level.

2.31 **Alignment with key strategies and plans**

2.32 In developing the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy, links have been made with other key strategic plans, in particular, the Housing Strategy, Domestic Abuse Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy.

2.33 The Strategy is also aligned to the Council Plan 2022-25 and will contribute to delivering its vision of:

- Every neighbourhood thriving.
- People are safe, healthy, and live well.
- Every child able to fulfil their potential.
- Expanding economic opportunity.

3 **Options considered and recommended proposal**

3.1 The social, economic, and political environment in relation to housing and homelessness issues changes quickly and Homelessness Strategies become dated, requiring regular review. It is important that the Council monitor external factors and continues to demonstrate an understanding of local issues.

3.2 It is recommended that this Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy be finalised and published. It should also be evaluated annually to ensure that the Strategy continues to broadly reflect local and national priorities. If those priorities change dramatically then prior to the planned refresh, consideration will be given as to whether the strategy refresh needs to be brought forward and appropriate approvals secured.

4 Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The co-design, engagement and consultation approach adopted between June 2022 to October 2022 involved listening and interacting with a range of people. This included homelessness service users, public, partners and colleagues, which has helped inform and shape the strategy. This engagement included speaking to people with 'lived experience' of homelessness, recognising that they are best placed to advise on what will make a positive difference, all of which is reflected within the Strategy.
- 4.2 A range of different engagement methods were utilised to provide opportunities to hear the views of as many people as possible. The Council held forums and involved Councillors and Council staff.
- 4.3 Two public surveys were conducted, one of which was specifically tailored for people who had lived experience of homelessness.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The proposed strategy is presented to Cabinet for approval, subject to which it will then be published on the Council's website in April.
- 5.2 The Assistant Director of Housing has overall accountability for delivering the Strategy's commitments.
- 5.3 An annual progress report will be prepared for the Improving Places Select Commission.
- 5.4 An action plan will be developed which will support the objectives set out in the strategy.
- 5.5 The progress of the strategy will also be provided to the Homelessness Strategic Board, future Homelessness Forums and the Strategic Housing Forum.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. Funding for the activity detailed in the Strategy, including for staffing, is already included in base budgets.
- 6.2 Where there is a need for the Council to commission services from third party organisations to deliver the Strategy, this must be done in compliance with the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended). Early consideration needs to be given in the development of any commissioned services to ensure the chosen delivery vehicle includes the flexibility to meet the requirements of the strategy.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 Legal implications are generally included in the body of the report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no implications contained within the report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The Children and Young People Service and Adult Care Services have been consulted and had an input into the draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023-2026.

9.2 Specific accommodation requirements for young people will form part of the Single Homelessness Accommodation Funding bid.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 An Equality Analysis has been conducted in line with the Council's procedures (Appendix 2). There are no further Equalities and Human Rights Implications identified outside of the Equality Analysis documentation.

10.2 The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy is aimed at improving homelessness services for all customer groups with housing or housing-related support needs. As such, no group or individual across Borough should be adversely affected or disadvantaged as a result of the Strategy. The Strategy actively recognises the difficulties faced by those facing homelessness and rough sleepers in accessing services and promotes inclusion.

10.3 The Strategy's aim is to remove barriers and provide support to those that are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless. Therefore, this Strategy will have a positive impact on the communities and those with protected characteristics.

10.4 The Strategy acknowledges that people experiencing homelessness who also have learning difficulties and or autism may require additional support to help access and engage with homeless provisions. The Council's specialist learning difficulties housing officer will help to remove such barriers and act as an advocate within housing. By increasing staff awareness through training and development and identifying when learning disability or autism might be a relevant issue for an individual, specific approaches and strategies that are known to be helpful to best engage and support the individual will form part of the considered reasonable adjustments.

- 10.5 Where an applicant's first language is not English the Strategy demonstrates the Council responsibility to provide translated information and interpreting services, which will be publicised to residents and community organisations.
- 10.6 The Council will continue to engage with communities and make sure homelessness provisions meet local need. Where possible the Council will aim to involve people with lived homelessness experience to help shape or review services.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 Climate change poses a significant threat to environments, individuals, communities, and economies on a local, national, and international scale. In recognition of this the Council has aimed to be net carbon neutral as an organisation by 2030, and for Rotherham as a whole to achieve the same position by 2040.
- 11.2 Anticipated implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change are detailed in the Carbon Impact Assessment (Appendix 3).

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The aims set out in this Strategy will only be achieved by working in partnership with a range of local and regional stakeholders. The Council works strategically with partners through the Rotherham Homelessness Forum and with Housing Association partners to help meet the wide range of housing and support need across the Borough. The Council is committed to working with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority to help access funding opportunities and develop a regional approach to tackling homelessness issues.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The key risk is failing to deliver the commitments set out in the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy. An action plan will be developed to achieve the objectives set out in the Strategy, supported by appropriate staff resources and processes, and through regular and robust progress monitoring including an annual report to the Improving Places Select Commission. Each leading manager for specific actions will be responsible for performance reporting to the Head of Housing Options.
- 13.2 The risk of the Strategy becoming out of date due to policy and context changes at the national and local level is mitigated by refreshing the Strategy every three years. As well as this, regular training provided to front-line staff ensures that their knowledge is kept up to date in line with changes. The Council reviews ombudsmen decisions and homelessness case law and its senior management attends training on equality law. Management randomly reviews cases to ensure that the support provided is consistent and correct.

14. Accountable Officers

- 4.1 James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing
Sandra Tolley, Head of Housing Options

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	06/03/23
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	02/03/23
Assistant Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phillip Horsfield	20/02/23

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