

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 7th February 2023

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 21st February 2023

Report of: Director of City Development

Title: Exeter Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy 2023 - 2027

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Full Council

1. What is the report about?

The report is to brief the Executive and Members on the new homelessness and rough sleeping prevention strategy 2023-2027 (copy attached inc. Exec summary) and to request its approval.

The report asks the Executive to note:

- The achievements of the previous homelessness strategy 2016-2021 and
- The findings of the 2022 homelessness needs assessment

And for Full Council to approve the new strategy including its key priorities and the proposed governance arrangements. Subject to approval action planning will then be undertaken with stakeholders for a 1st April 2023 “go live” date.

2. Recommendations:

The Executive recommends to the Council that the strategic priorities for the new homelessness strategy and the proposed governance arrangements are approved.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

The new strategy requires formal approval by Executive and Full Council prior to the formulation and implementation of action plans around each strategic priority.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources

The strategy sets out priority development areas at high level in acknowledgement of the current economic climate and the financial constraints upon the Council and partners. Approval of the strategy and its progression into action presents no immediate specific financial resource requirement to the Council.

The extent and scope of the actions to be planned will be initially tailored to current budgets and resources both internally and to those of relevant external stakeholders. The extent to which the Council can agree and commit to delivery plans will inevitably need to

align with the available future budgets and resources within the Housing Needs and wider Council departments. The future of government homelessness grants and fundraising bid opportunities will also determine future annual budgets set to the priority work.

Any future budget reductions beyond those already proposed under the service review exercise are likely to have a detrimental impact on achieving key priorities and objectives. In particular this would likely compromise the work delivering reductions in rough sleeping especially as a result of the ongoing development of additional bespoke housing options.

A degree of optimising and pooling of resources currently in the local commissioned homelessness system is also anticipated. This will also need to include new funds from future fundraising and bidding exercises by current partners including registered providers and social landlords as well as the local business community.

Other resource implications include management time for planning, monitoring and reviewing the strategy commitments. Delivery plans will be reviewed annually in order to maximise flexibility and fit to available resources in order to avoid risking unachievable / over-commitment at any stage.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no specific requests for additional funding in the paper, although the proposals for future fundraising are noted. Where there are successful bids for funds these will be added to the budget subject to the appropriate member approval.

6. What are the legal aspects?

There are no specific legal aspects of note.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

The strategy incorporates an overview of the outcomes from the previous homelessness strategy (Exeter City Council - 2016-2021) plus a review of current homelessness need in Exeter.

Based on the learning and progress from the above the new strategy sets out key priority areas for further development and growth of the resources needed to reduce current and future homelessness in Exeter. A number of working principles and a proposed governance structure are included with a view to improve strategic alignment, stakeholder engagement and consolidation of current and future service planning and delivery.

Set within the context of current economic and policy challenges the strategy fundamentally proposes the following five high level key priority work areas with the following key objectives:

1 Ending Rough Sleeping – by end 2024

- through further tackling “flow” onto the streets with closer working protocols and prevention activities with landlords, prisons, hospitals etc

- by increasing bespoke supported housing option e.g. housing first, themed peer supported shared housing, crash-pads / respite, host schemes, private rented and social housing
- by increasing health and treatment interventions and support aiding recovery from mental ill-health and / or harmful substance use
- Increasing opportunities for positive life changes in education, training and employment

2 Increasing Homelessness Prevention

- Increasing engagement with community services / partners especially in areas of high deprivation and homelessness risk
- Pro-active working with partners in early identification of homelessness risk
- Increased community in-reach including schools, children and family services

3 Progressing Health, Wellbeing & Recovery

- Increase levels of support to people needing health treatment interventions e.g. substance use, mental and physical ill-health, social care needs
- Maximising household income, money management and self-sustainability including opportunities in training and employment
- Building more trauma-sensitive service delivery across all partners

4 Growing Inclusion and Enablement

- Increasing opportunity for engagement and input from people with lived experience of homelessness in service design and delivery, policy leadership and progressive employment
- Increasing outreach services to specific vulnerable groups e.g. domestic violence victims and perpetrators, persons with complex and / or multiple need, young persons
- Widening accessibility for housing advice and homelessness support through diversifying engagement options e.g. in person, online information, digital access and self-assessment and increasing contact / service opening hours

5 Optimising Systems and Partnerships

- Forming and maintaining multi-agency homelessness partnerships including a strategic homelessness reduction board and management partnerships for ending rough sleeping and integrating treatment and recovery services
- Aligning strategy and commissioning agendas to increase co-commissioning / multi-disciplinary funding opportunities and aligned business planning
- Increasing shared and flexible resources across services including policies, staff and budgets, training etc
- Increase workforce support and development resources to retain knowledge and skills and improve sector stability and resilience

Stakeholder involvement & Consultation

The proposed working principles and strategic priorities have been met with high levels of agreement and support from stakeholders informing the new strategy through extended consultations including:

- targeted provider and partner meetings over the last twelve months
- co-design of the rough sleeping initiative including revised need analysis
- co-design of the rough sleeper drug and alcohol treatment service

- direct feedback from people with lived experience of homelessness
- leading local stakeholder reports and narratives regarding the primary homelessness challenges and existing intervention and prevention work.
- An online strategy consultation exercise from November to December 2022.

Consultation findings

The above consultation survey returned the following feedback and findings:

- **91% of respondents agreed with the strategy vision set out to end homelessness in Exeter:**
“Every resident will have a home that is secure affordable and healthy in a balanced and connected neighbourhood that supports wellbeing and reduces social isolation. For Exeter to be a place where no one has to spend a night without shelter. Where homelessness in the city is permanently ended, enabling everyone to have a place to live that is safe and that they can call their home.”
- **98% of respondents agreed with the immediate strategy aim:** *For the short term wherever possible homelessness should be prevented, and if it cannot be prevented it should be rare, brief and non-recurring*

Comments included the need to put words into action in order to achieve the strategy in practice; and that people at risk of homelessness need much higher resources and support than is currently perceived to be on offer. Also references were made to the perceived value of housing first model and the need for multi-disciplinary interventions especially to help those people with mental health, disability, and age-related (youth) needs.

- **There was broad support for the working principles that will guide the delivery of the Strategy (ranging between 91% highest and 70% lowest; average = 83%):**
 - **Person centred and Holistic** – Taking a bespoke individual-led approach to resolving homelessness and its underlying causes. This includes recovery-planning accounting for individual needs and the cycle of change.
 - **Trauma-informed** – Seeking awareness and responding with understanding and focus on strength-based solutions
 - **Expert led** - Involving people with lived experience of homelessness as equals and optimising engagement and self-enablement
 - **Early Intervention and Prevention** – Optimising intervention at the earliest identifiable stage, alongside reducing crisis-focused responses
 - **Evidence based** – Using clear data to identify and understand current need and trends and projections of future need
 - **Partnership and Collaboration** - A commitment to joint-working and co-production given no one service can single-handedly address and resolve homelessness
 - **Challenge** - A need for, and a willingness to participate in challenging conversations whilst minimising assumptions
 - **Value For Money** – Ensuring that available resources are optimised towards achieving the most cost effective sustainable solutions and outcomes

Feedback noted again the need for action to follow the rhetoric and also noted the importance of collaboration and partnership working especially in meeting the need for well-informed wraparound support services for homeless people.

- **The top priorities (with 95%, 95% and 93% support respectively) were:**
 - ✓ Ending Rough Sleeping

- ✓ Increasing Homelessness Prevention
- ✓ Progressing Health, Wellbeing and Recovery

“Growing Inclusion & Enablement” and “Optimising Systems & Partnership” were also highly supported (86% and 89% respectively)

Comments included the need to plan resources effectively, position inclusion and enablement as a given necessity for all service users, and to consider work to change attitudes of statutory services and legislation to enable easier access (to services).

All comments will be taken into account at the action planning stages in order to incorporate into the delivery plan where appropriate.

Next Steps for the Strategy

Subject to internal (Council) approval these five key strategic priorities and their respective objectives will inform the delivery planning to be undertaken over the next 2 months to the end of March 2023. Action plans under each priority will be co-produced with partners and designed to maximise engagement and shared ownership of the work and co-responsibility for reducing and minimising homelessness over the next 5 years.

The action plans will be scheduled to go live from 1st April 2023 with the first bi-annual progress review by the (impending) Homelessness Reduction Board due in October 2023.

It should be noted that following the significant consultation exercise undertaken by the Customer Focus Scrutiny Task and Finish Group reviewing local homelessness need and service delivery, a report with recommended actions has been produced for review by the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee on 2nd February 2023. The draft recommendations present no concerns or conflict with the new strategy. It is anticipated that the majority, if indeed not all, can be accommodated and progressed within the homelessness strategy delivery plans to follow.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council’s Corporate Plan?

Reducing homelessness is central to the key corporate strategic priority of “Housing and Building Great Neighbourhoods and Communities” through the tackling of social inequality and maximising homelessness preventions and reliefs. This is primarily achieved through the provision of housing advice and multi-faceted support and assistance. And through the supply of emergency, first and second stage housing options with suitable personalised support to address single and multiple needs. The priorities of the new homelessness strategy are reflected in the following 2022-26 Corporate Plan commitments:

Housing advice and homelessness support - *We play a leading role in ensuring that the most vulnerable citizens receive the best advice and, where possible, an accommodation offer at the earliest opportunity with ongoing bespoke support.*

We will:

- *Publish and implement a new Homelessness Strategy that supports our ambition to reduce rough sleeper numbers, and end rough sleeping where possible by 2025.*

- *Increase integrated offers of accommodation and treatment to build better recovery from homelessness as well as homelessness prevention in the first place.*
- *Continue co-production and partnership work with the voluntary sector to provide accommodation units with tenancy training and support where needed.*
- *Explore setting up strategic forums for local providers and commissioners to better join up services and deliver improved outcomes around acute homelessness need.*
- *Invest £4M in new “stepping stone” homes for rough sleepers, plus annual £1.5M investment over next 3 years in new accommodation and support interventions.*

The Council’s homelessness and housing needs work is also key to other corporate plan priorities relating to a healthy city and a thriving local economy through supporting households to access key health and advocacy services. For example, primary and secondary healthcare services including mental health assessment and support, physical and social care, and education, training and employment opportunities.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

The key risks are the constraints upon the budget and resources available for deployment to each priority area especially in light of increasing demand for homelessness services and complexity of need. Wherever possible opportunities for maximising grant funding will be pursued (subject to feasibility and sustainability). However maintenance of the present core Housing Needs budget funding, plus access to capital / borrowing for match-funding property development grant applications where required, is imperative. Any further budget reductions in Housing Needs will likely result in the scaling down of Council homelessness delivery plans and the extent of work possible unless alternative resource can be identified and deployed.

A key parallel inherent risk is that any reduction in current and future productivity from the Council’s homelessness services and partners will expose the Council to increased statutory homelessness presentations. This will include households requiring homelessness relief (i.e. already homeless) and requiring emergency accommodation and support plus statutory case management. This will present significant additional cost to the general fund in excess of the current homelessness budget, therefore wielding a greater financial cost to the Council’s overall budget.

Increasing demand for homelessness advice and assessment and temporary housing also presents a key risk to achievement especially in working towards increased early prevention measures and reducing and ending rough sleeping. The ability of services to intervene at earlier stages of homelessness risk is currently constrained by the need to address emergency level need. Similarly any increase in the “flow” of rough sleepers into the area normally compromises the overall reduction of rough sleeping in creating a higher incoming flow over and above numbers of rough sleeping cases being resolved. This risk can be reduced by concurrent development of additional supported and social housing units under the wider housing strategy and developing more effective avenues into private rented sector housing.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equalities Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention (see attached EQIA).

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

There are no direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

13. Are there any other options?

There is not an option to not publish and deliver to a homelessness strategy. Local Authorities with responsibility for Housing and Homelessness have a statutory duty to have a published and active homelessness strategy. Authorities delivering services under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (as Exeter is) are also required to document their respective strategy for preventing and reducing rough sleeping.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Exeter & Teignbridge Joint Homelessness Strategy 2016-2021.

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