

| <b>Housing and Health Committee</b> |   |
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| <b>Meeting Date</b>                 | 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2024   |
| <b>Report Title</b>                 | Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 2027 Annual Update   |
| <b>EMT Lead</b>                     | Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods   |
| <b>Head of Service</b>              | Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities   |
| <b>Lead Officer</b>                 | Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities   |
| <b>Classification</b>               | <b>Open</b>   |
| <b>Recommendations</b>              | The committee is recommended to:<br>1. To note progress on the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 27. |

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides the Housing and Health Committee with an update on the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 27.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 27, was adopted by the Housing and Health Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023. As part of the Strategy governance, it was agreed to bring an annual report to the Committee to ensure the Strategy is progressing and to highlight any risk or issues to delivery.
- 2.2 The priorities within the Strategy are:
- Delivering Affordable Homes;
  - Preventing Homelessness;
  - Developing a more efficient housing options service; and
  - Improve conditions in existing homes.
- 2.3 A progress report on work to date is shown in Appendix I.
- 2.4 We are currently only one year into the Strategy and it is felt that the priorities are still relevant and there is currently no requirement to make any amendments or alterations to the main priorities or objectives. Good progress has been made in all areas of the Strategy, with 2023/24 having had a large focus on the homelessness services as this is where the biggest demand is and challenging financial position. A greater focus will be given to the Private Sector housing team this year to progress these priorities and to respond to the Renters Reform Bill.

### 3 Proposals

3.1 To note progress on the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 27.

### 4 Alternative Options

4.1 None

### 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 This is an update progress report and therefore no consultation has taken place. The Strategy went out to consultation last year before adoption.

### 6 Implications

| Issue  | Implications   |
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| Corporate Plan                               | <p>Health &amp; Housing - To aspire to be a borough where everyone has access to a decent home and improved health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Running the Council - Working within our resources to proactively engage with communities and outside bodies to deliver in a transparent and efficient way</p>  |
| Financial, Resource and Property             | <p>The report seeks the virement of £421k from the Temporary Accommodation Budget to Housing Salary budget.</p> <p>The TA budget is currently £2.1m</p>  |
| Legal, Statutory and Procurement             | <p>Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must carry out a review of homelessness in their area and publish a homelessness strategy which sets out what it plans to do to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.</p> <p>The Renters Reform Bill 2023 has just been introduced in parliament and is likely to have impacts on Council Services.</p> |
| Crime and Disorder                           | <p>The housing service works closely with the Community Safety Partnership in managing clients that have an offending background. Having stable and affordable housing, can assist in breaking the re-offending cycle.</p>   |
| Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency | <p>Grants promoted by the Private Sector Housing Scheme can assist with improvements with EPC ratings.</p>   |
| Health and Wellbeing                         | <p>Housing is a wider determinant of health and having secure and decent homes significantly improves the health and wellbeing on residents.</p>   |

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| Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults | The housing service undertakes the most Safeguarding referrals than any other department in the Council, the nature and circumstances of some of the clients mean they are very vulnerable and therefore support is required from partner agencies. |
| Risk Management and Health and Safety                        | The provision and affordability of Temporary Accommodation continues to be a corporate risk.  |
| Equality and Diversity                                       | This was considered at the time of the adoption of the Strategy. Due consideration to the Equalities Act is embedded in the Housing teams processes.  |
| Privacy and Data Protection                                  | None identified at this stage.  |

## **7 Appendices**

Appendix I - Annual Progress Report

## **8 Background Papers**

8.1 Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping 2023 - 2027

## Appendix I – Annual Progress Report

# Housing, Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 2027

Update July 2024

### Priority One – Delivering Affordable Homes

| Objective  | Update   |
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| Deliver affordable homes through Swale Rainbow Homes.  | Swale Rainbow Homes has secured Planning permission at Cockleshell Walk for 51 homes. The financial viability of the scheme is being addressed by accessing grant. A successful application has been made to the Brown Fields Land Release Fund, on-going talks is taking place with Homes England to secure funding from the Affordable Homes Programme to progress the scheme.   |
| Assist developers in promoting affordable homes to RP's in the borough.  | A long-term and consistent approach to partnership working is ongoing with Registered Providers (Housing Associations) and Developers to enable the delivery of affordable homes across Swale. It is currently very challenging for RPs to take on small sites and the financial pressures on RPs due to investment in the condition of their current stock due to new regulations. The Affordable Housing Manager is working extremely closely with RPs to enable as many affordable homes as possible. There are currently circa. 500 homes that have been secured through planning that have no RP to secure the homes. |
| Work with Homes England, Registered Providers, and institutional investors to secure additional affordable housing in the borough. | Work is ongoing to deliver additional affordable homes with several sites secured that are or will be delivering affordable rent tenure, social rented and shared ownership homes.   |

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| Support Community Led Housing schemes and other initiatives for residents to secure housing in the borough. | The development of the Kent wide Rural & Community Housing Enabling Service (RACE) has been established to enable continued work with the Council and Local Community Groups to bring forward small local needs led affordable housing schemes. |
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## Priority Two – Preventing Homelessness

| Objective   | Update   |
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| Develop an enhanced triage service.   | The enhanced triage process was introduced last year, initially starting with one role but increasing two due to the immediate effectiveness of this function. This has enabled the team to deal with the increased demand in homelessness queries at the first point of contact. Further resource need has been identified and service improvements to this area have been planned  |
| Promote the prevention services to residents.   | The service is currently working at capacity, so promotion has not yet begun. Link with the Community Development team and promotion of the Cost-of-Living work to assist clients who are in financial difficulty. The team are also referring into the BEAM programme, which has enabled a number of clients to either maintain or access PRS properties.   |
| Develop a PRS offer for landlords and tenant support.                                   | Offers to landlords are in place which also offer landlords and tenants ongoing tenancy support to maintain new and existing tenancies. The Landlord Introduction scheme continues to be a positive tool for supporting landlords with new tenants. The team have also had a dedicated work to support the Homes for Ukraine scheme and support those clients where host family support was unable to continue.  |
| Use analytical tools to identify individuals at risk of homelessness and offer support. | We are working with KCC on the Xantura programme which helps identify individuals that may be at risk of homelessness. We have employed a specialist Officer to contact the cohort of people and provide them with support. We are also utilising the LIFT programme which also identified risk factors and again can offer support to clients. This is also being fed into the welfare support project run by the Community Development Team to assist with long-term prevention. |
| Deliver focused prevention work in relation to family evictions                         | The prevention team currently work with families to find solutions to avoid eviction. Work is in progress to provide a specialist Prevention Officer to streamline this work further.  |

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| Deliver focused prevention work in relation to s.21 notices. | S21 notices are checked for validity, challenged where appropriate, negotiations are held with landlords to avoid evictions taking place, and legal rights are explained to both landlords and tenants |
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### Priority Three – Developing a more efficient housing options service

| Objective   | Update   |
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| Carry out a full service review of the relief and main duty process to speed up decision times.             | This strand of work has featured in the Housing Options Improvement Project. The introduction of the enhanced triage role has reduced the number of cases that have progressed to requiring a homeless interview. This has enabled the Officers to have a reduced caseload and focus on these cases to make timely and effective decision. Cases are becoming more complex due to the needs of the clients which can also impact on the speed of decision making while gathering information. Caseloads are reviewed regularly to ensure cases are determined as quickly as they can be.   |
| Review the type and use of temporary accommodation to ensure value for money and effectiveness for clients. | As part of the Housing Options Improvement Programme an Accommodation Strategy has been developed. The main component of this is undertaking a programme to acquire homes to be used as local and cost-effective temporary accommodation for homeless households. The Housing and Health Committee has approved the purchase of 50 homes and 13 homes have been acquired to date with another 30 currently in the legal process. This programme has also been supported by utilising the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF). We are also currently looking to secure further accommodation that has been decommissioned by KCC as supported accommodation to utilise as TA. We are also working with Kent Housing Group to conduct a piece of work on cost and quality of TA. |
| Review and monitor the Housing Allocations Policy to ensure those most in need access Affordable Housing.   | The Allocation policy is monitored and analysed quarterly to ensure Affordable Housing is allocated to those most in need.   |
| Implement a range of projects to support homeless households to enhance employment and housing              | Employment options are discussed with households that are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and customers have had success in securing new job roles. Joint working with Beam has supported households into employment, and this has resulted in wider housing choices.  |

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| options and reduce time spent in TA.                     | A current project supporting rough sleepers into housing and employment has been started and outcomes will be monitored.   |
| Deliver the RSI service in line with the bid submission. | The service is currently delivering year 3 services of the current 3-year Government funded programme. This programme has seen a significant service delivered which includes regular outreach to those on the streets several times a week. Accommodation is also provided to some individuals. Wider programmes have also been funded through this programme, including funding to continue the services at The Quays and a Housing First programme to support the most vulnerable clients. Work to support Drug and Alcohol addiction also forms part of this programme and the team have piloted a successful volunteering scheme with those with lived experience to support clients. |

#### Priority Four – Improve conditions in existing homes

| Objective  | Update  |
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| Target enforcement on the worst private sector properties to improve living conditions.                                      | 11 enforcement notices have been issued to address the conditions of poorly managed properties, including imposition of around £40,000 worth of fixed penalty notices as alternatives to prosecutions. A fund of £130,000 has also been secured from DLUHC to enhance the capacity and capability of the team to enforce robust measures against damp and mould in residential dwellings. |
| Promote the Government energy schemes in Swale.  | In March 2024, the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG Phase 2) was promoted through mailshots and on the Council's website to reach targeted residents in Swale. This new government grant scheme funds energy saving upgrades for residents with off-grid gas heating systems who are most affected by high energy costs.   |
| Carry out a full service review on the Disabled Facilities Grant to ensure it is being delivered as efficiently as possible. | The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) process audit and review has been completed with resulting recommendations to streamline and optimize the existing process. The final report is now being awaited, with plans to implement the recommended actions.   |
| Promote the Housing Improvement Agencies work.   | In addition to web promotion of Home Improvement Agency work on the Swale website, the distribution of promotional leaflets through hospitals such as Medway Hospital is underway.  |

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| <p>Tackle empty properties that impact on local neighbourhoods the most.</p>                   | <p>The service is currently operating below capacity to effectively address problematic empty homes that are affecting neighbours. A previous decision to reduce the resource within this area. A review is taking place to establish how we can effectively tackle Empty Homes and how we can link in with other organisations and services.</p> |
| <p>Review and implement Council responsibilities in relation to Renters Reform Bill / Act.</p> | <p>The Renters (Reform) Bill is currently put on hold due to the General Election. Developments will be monitored closely, and resources allocated to respond accordingly.</p>  |