

Housing Health and Community Committee	
Meeting Date	3 rd July 2025
Report Title	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 2027 Annual Update
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities
Lead Officer	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<p>The committee is recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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, Health, and Community 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 4th 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 now halfway through 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, during 2024/25 there has continued to be a large focus on the homelessness service as this continues to be a large financial risk and to ensure implementation of the actions identified. This year has also seen a greater focus on the remit of private sector housing and enforcement, with the newly named team Housing Standards and Assistance to reflect the functions of the team and that many services are also open to the social housing sector. The new manager has been in place for just over a year

and has laid the foundations for improvement which should come to fruition this financial year. The biggest focus for the service this year will be the implementation of the Renters Rights Bill, which is expected to become law between July 2024 and January 2026, this will have wide ranging impacts on all the housing teams.

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
Corporate Plan	Health & Housing - To aspire to be a borough where everyone has access to a decent home and improved health and wellbeing.
Financial, Resource and Property	The budgets within the Housing Service are in place to support the delivery of the Strategy.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must conduct 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.
Crime and Disorder	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.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	Grants promoted by Housing Standards and Assistance Team can assist with improvements to homes to be more energy efficient.
Health and Wellbeing	Housing is a wider determinant of health and having secure and decent homes significantly improves the health and wellbeing on residents.
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 2025

Priority One – Delivering Affordable Homes

Objective	Update
Deliver affordable homes through Swale Rainbow Homes.	Swale Rainbow Homes secured Planning permission at Cockleshell Walk for 51 homes, procurement of the build contract has taken place and evaluation of the tender is currently taking place to finalise construction costs and complete application to Homes England's Affordable Homes Programme.
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 remains very challenging for RPs to take on s106 schemes and small sites due to ongoing financial pressures relating to investment in the condition of their existing stock due to new regulations. The Accommodation and Resettlement Manager continues to work closely with RPs to enable the on-site delivery of as many affordable homes as possible.
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 a couple of large sites secured that will be delivering affordable rent tenure, social rented and shared ownership homes.
Support Community Led Housing schemes and other initiatives for residents to secure housing in the borough.	The Kent wide Rural & Community Housing Enabling Service (RACE) has been extended for one further year to enable continued work with the Council and Local Community Groups to bring forward small local needs led affordable housing schemes. Future funding for this scheme is not clear at this stage and there is the possibility that the RACE service will cease after March 2026.

Priority Two – Preventing Homelessness

Objective	Update
Develop an enhanced triage service.	Following the restructure of the Housing Options team, the enhanced triage role has now evolved into the Housing Advice team, which now consists of 4 Housing Advisors, who are able to give detailed advice at that first point of contact. Housing Advisors successfully dealt with 80% of all cases (Jan-Dec 2024) where an applicant was homeless to avoid escalation to Assessment Officers.
Promote the prevention services to residents.	The Prevention team is now fully staffed with a new team leader in place, and work is starting to promote the service to partner agencies.
Develop a PRS offer for landlords and tenant support.	Offers to landlords are in place providing landlords and tenants ongoing tenancy support to maintain new and existing tenancies, and the Landlord Introduction scheme remains a positive tool for supporting landlords with new tenants. The team have expanded in the last year, adding two more Landlord Liaison Officer's and a dedicated Tenancy Support Office for those households placed in the PRS by the teams. The team also continue to provide 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 are also using 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 Housing team deal with high numbers of potential family and friend evictions. Home visits to families are being increased to find solutions to avoid eviction and allow the person to remain.
Deliver focused prevention work in relation to s.21 notices.	The Renters Rights Bill is expected to be law soon and this will end Section 21 – no fault evictions. All private rented tenancies will become assured tenancies. This should provide greater security for tenants, although we are aware that some landlords are leaving the market, and we are monitoring the impact of this on the service.

Priority Three – Developing a more efficient housing options service

Objective	Update
Carry out a full-service review of the relief and main duty process to speed up decision times.	<p>The review was completed and fed into the restructure; we currently have a vacancy within the team due to a recent resignation. Caseloads are monitored effectively to ensure decisions are issued within statutory timescales.</p> <p>The complexity of cases continues to be a pattern and the team work with a multi-agency approach to relieve homelessness and to try and ensure support is put in place by appropriate agencies where needed. This can often be extremely challenging with reduced and reducing resources from crucial partner agencies.</p>
Review the type and use of temporary accommodation to ensure value for money and effectiveness for clients.	<p>Phase 1 of the council's TA Purchase Programme is nearing completion with 47 open market homes completed and a further three in the pipeline nearing completion. A cost and quality review will be undertaken to decide on next steps. However, initial views are that this programme is already looking positive with full LHA payments enabled for each home used and positive feedback from customers on the quality and location of the homes purchased. As part of the Housing Options restructure, a dedicated member of staff has now been employed to manage compliance requirements of these homes.</p>
Review and monitor the Housing Allocations Policy to ensure those most in need access Affordable Housing.	<p>The Housing Allocations Policy is monitored and analysed quarterly to ensure Affordable Housing is allocated to those most in need. We are waiting on revised government amendments on domestic abuse, children leaving care and armed forces.</p>
Implement a range of projects to support homeless households to enhance employment and housing options and reduce time spent in TA.	<p>A current project supporting rough sleepers into housing and employment has been started and outcomes will be monitored.</p> <p>The rough sleeper team has had some success in helping to secure both employment and volunteering opportunities and although this is on a small scale, we are hoping to build on the success and develop further opportunities for people across the services.</p>
Deliver the RSI service in line with the bid submission.	<p>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.</p>

	<p>Funding to continue the RSI services has been allocated for a further year for 25/26. We are currently waiting for news regarding future funding, although it has been suggested this may be another 3-year allocation.</p> <p>Since January 2025 we have worked with Southern Housing and are providing an 8-bed hostel for ex-rough sleepers. RSI have staff present at the scheme daily and are helping the residents to gain the skills needed for them to maintain future tenancies. Two residents have now taken up full time employment and two are currently working voluntarily.</p>
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Priority Four – Improve conditions in existing homes.

Objective	Update
Target enforcement on the worst private sector properties to improve living conditions.	6 enforcement notices have been issued to address the conditions of poorly managed properties. As the previous senior officer stepped up to take on the management role, there was a gap in enforcement activities. The team has defended appeals against legal notices including two civil penalties. A fund of £110,000 has also been secured from MHCLG to enhance the capacity and capability of the team to enforce robust measures against damp and mould in residential dwellings. The funding allowed the team to run the Health Homes Project, which is now being extended for a year with pending additional funds of £30,000.
Promote the Government energy schemes in Swale.	The Home Upgrade Grant (HUG Phase 2) has come to an end. Currently there is no new government grant scheme due to lack of financial and human resources. However, the Winter Warmth Grant stays in place that provides up to £5,000 towards the cost of repairing or replacing heating systems or installing insulation.
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 optimise the existing process. A project to transform the DFG process has been implemented with the adoption of Foundation case management to completely digitise and make it paperless by April 2026. A test system has been established and will be finalised by the end of July 2025. Along with this a clearance of backlog cases is underway with external agencies support.
Promote the Housing Improvement Agencies work.	In addition to web promotion of Home Improvement Agency work on the Swale website, we increased HIA profile through the Inside Swale magazine as well as news release of the staying put works.

<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. It was as a result of a previous decision to reduce the resource within this area. As we are recruiting two more apprentices, they will be trained as part of their programme to bring the empty homes back into use through advice, education, and financial incentives to owners.</p>
<p>Review and implement Council responsibilities in relation to Renters Reform Bill* / Act. <i>*Renters Reform Bill is now Renters Rights Bill</i></p>	<p>The Renters Rights Bill is expected to come into law this year placing a duty to enforce the legislation on the Housing Standards and Assistance Team. It will bring challenges and opportunities, so we have begun workforce development in terms of upskilling and recruiting two apprentice roles to get ready for the upcoming legislative change.</p>