

Rother District Council

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	11 January 2021
Title:	Review of The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-2024)
Report of:	Heads of Service – Housing and Community & Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Byrne
Ward(s):	All (Bexhill)
Purpose of Report:	To consider the recommendations arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23 November 2020, regarding the Review of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The recommendations and Minute arising are reproduced below.
Decision Type:	Key
Officer	
Recommendation(s):	Recommendation to COUNCIL: That the ‘targets achieved’ as listed in Appendix B to the report be removed from the Improvement Delivery Plan and replaced with the proposed new/amended targets at Appendix C to the report, with revised Outcomes included.
Reasons for Recommendations:	To replace the targets achieved in the Improvement Delivery Plan of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-20214) with new/amended targets.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) Cabinet be requested to agree that the ‘targets achieved’ as listed in Appendix B to the report be removed from the Improvement Delivery Plan and replaced with the proposed new/amended targets at Appendix C to the report, with revised Outcomes included;
- 2) the progress made against the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy included in the Improvement Delivery Plan (Appendix A) be noted;
- 3) investigations be undertaken to identify sites on which pre-fabricated buildings could be installed to be used for Temporary Accommodation; and
- 4) a review of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy be undertaken annually.

OSC20/33. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY (2019-2024)

Members received the report of the Heads of Service which provided an update on the progress of the Improvement Delivery Plan of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-2014), in particular the three strategic priorities: Increasing the Supply of Housing; Rough Sleeping, Homelessness and Meeting Housing Aspirations; and Improving the quality and suitability of existing housing and new build housing. The outcome of the full review was in the Improvement Delivery Plan at Appendix A to the report and a summary of all actions achieved so far at Appendix B.

Key highlights from the Improvement Delivery Plan were outlined to Members:

PRIORITY 1: Increasing the Supply of Housing

- In December 2019, the Council had approved setting up a local authority owned housing company, Alliance Homes (Rother) Ltd, which had been legally incorporated and the Business Plan approved;
- the main priority of the company was to accelerate delivery of all forms of housing in Rother, with an ambitious target of delivering 1,000 new homes over the following 15 years. The Business Plan set out an initial 3-year delivery plan focused on developing sites already in Council ownership with planning permission/planning potential or that had been acquired as part of other Council-led projects. The delivery of the site at Blackfriars, Battle was of significant importance;
- the Company would seek opportunities to acquire sites allocated for housing in the Rother District Local Plan and associated Neighbourhood Plans;
- the Company had pledged to deliver all new homes to high environmental standards where feasible, taking a fabric first approach to design and maximising thermal efficiency; and
- the Strategy had identified empty homes as a wasted resource in view of the chronic shortage of housing to meet need, to include affordable housing; a draft Empty Homes Action Plan had been developed to bring back empty properties into use.

PRIORITY 2: Rough Sleeping, Homelessness and Meeting Housing Aspirations

- Rother Tenant Finder was launched in October 2019 to improve access to accommodation in the private sector to reduce homelessness, by incentivising landlords to consider homeless households and supporting tenants to access and sustain private sector tenancies;
- up until March 2020, 55 households had been helped through the service, resulting in private sector tenancies being agreed. However, the COVID-19 pandemic had reduced the numbers of tenancies secured in recent months; and

- the Council commissioned the Homelessness Unity Group (HUG) to deliver a new 'Safe Space' service from March 2020. Safe Space, delivered from St Barnabas Church in Bexhill, was designed to support the reduction of rough sleeping through the provision of a community meeting space available twice weekly. The service was designed to improve access to a range of vital services including housing, health and social care via its own outreach support worker who operated alongside various multiagency initiatives.

PRIORITY 3: Improving the quality and suitability of existing housing and new build housing

- Services provided by Environmental Health had already exceeded targets in 2020 to improve the condition of five dwellings in the private sector, as a result of licensing or statutory notices being served;
- the Council had undertaken a number of inspections of new properties falling into the Housing in Multiple Occupation category since mandatory licensing had been extended to cover properties less than three storeys high; and
- a further 21 assessments of private sector dwellings had been carried out since the beginning of April 2020, with improvements made to property conditions required to meet appropriate standards. (A number of these inspections had been a direct consequence of the increased number of temporary accommodation units secured by the Council during the previous couple of years and, in particular, during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the homes were safe for occupants, demonstrating the importance of the relationship between the supply and quality of all housing.)

Members congratulated officers on the work that had been done to purchase an additional five properties in order to house people in temporary accommodation (TA) within the district. The additional properties also helped to ensure families with children in particular, were in self-contained units. Members recommended and agreed that sites on which pre-fabricated buildings could be installed be investigated in order to provide further TA.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were noted:

- the Community Led housing scheme at Cemetery Lodge, Bexhill was making progress, with a planning application expected the following year;
- the Floating Housing Support Service was a county commissioned service of approximately 90 support workers visiting clients across the county dedicated to delivering housing support needs;
- concealed homelessness was a further problem to address, with many properties housing multigenerational households given away by the number of vehicles outside the house;
- the Local Plan Housing Target had not been met and Members felt that a more realistic target should be set; and

- Members suggested consideration be given to marketing the establishment of Community Land Trusts and exceptions sites to Parish Councils.

(Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda Item 6).

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	No	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	No		

Chief Executive:	Malcolm Johnston
Report Contact Officer:	Ben Hook – Head of Service ATR
e-mail address:	Ben.hook@rother.gov.uk
Appendices:	N/A
Relevant Previous Minutes:	None.
Background Papers:	Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Reference Documents:	None.