

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 27 February 2023

Title: Review of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 (Part B)

Report of: Joe Powell – Head of Housing and Community

Cabinet Member: Councillor Byrne

Ward(s): All

Purpose of Report: To consider the recommendations arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23 January 2023, regarding the Review of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 (Part B). The report and recommendations arising are reproduced below and the Minutes of that meeting (Appendix A) should be read in conjunction with this report.

(The Appendices to the original report have not been reproduced here and can be accessed on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda).

Decision Type: Key

Overview and Scrutiny

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the 'targets achieved' as listed in Appendix B to the report be removed from the Improvement Delivery Plan and replaced with the amended targets proposed at Appendix A to the report; and
- 2) the progress made against the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy included in the Improvement Delivery Plan (Appendix A to the report) be noted.

Introduction

1. A request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to separate the Housing element of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (The Strategy) from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping element has been noted and this report will update Members on progress made towards achieving the Strategy's Priority 2 only: Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Meeting Housing Aspirations. Priority 1 of the Strategy: Increasing the development of housing and Priority 3: Improving the quality and suitability of existing housing and new build housing will be reported separately.

2. The Strategy and its action plan were developed in 2019 following an extensive research and consultation exercise, with key stakeholders and the public. Recommendations from a Member 'Task and Finish Group' were also used to shape three key priorities of the final Strategy, including the need to increase housing supply while improving measures to address homelessness and the quality of accommodation. The Council will continue to monitor the progress of the Strategy's action plan through annual consultation with its strategic partners from across Housing, Health, Social Care and voluntary sectors.
3. The aims and objectives of the Strategy are complemented by the stated aims of the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group. The Anti-Poverty Strategy was adopted by Council in July 2022 (Minute CB22/18 refers).
4. An annual review of the Strategy's action plan is completed by officers and reported to Members annually, so that progress against the Strategy objectives can be monitored and key actions reviewed and updated for the year ahead. The outcome of the full review of Priority 2: Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Housing Aspiration of the Strategy can be found in the updated Improvement Delivery Plan (Appendix A). A summary of all actions achieved since the Strategy's inception in 2019 is included in Appendix B below. The remainder of this report will summarise key highlights from the Improvement Delivery Plan achieved since the last report to this committee in November 2021.

PRIORITY 2: Rough Sleeping, Homelessness and Meeting Housing Aspirations Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) Visit

5. In Spring 2022, we requested a review of the performance of the housing department through our Homeless Advice and Support Team (HAST) a department of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). In June, the HAST team attended the Council's offices and were impressed with a number of our initiatives that we have been working on. They had particular praise for the success of our Rother Tenant Finder Scheme as well as the purchases for Temporary Accommodation (TA) properties. The visit also identified areas for improvement including the need for a review of the Allocations Policy as well as noting the significant increase in demand experienced by the service since the COVID-19 pandemic. A report was taken to the Council's Senior Leadership Team and the recommendations fed into the Housing and Community Service Plan.

Accommodation initiatives

6. We have purchased four more units of Housing First accommodation in 2022, providing accommodation to rough sleepers, supported by the four units of accommodation in February 2021. Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) and the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP). Housing First is recognised as best practice in settled accommodation for individuals with high level multiple and complex needs. The support is commissioned through the new RSI contract. We have also been successful in our bid for funding a further four units and purchases are underway for this, bringing our total to 12 units of Housing First accommodation in 2023. The additional grant allocation is £391,050.

7. We have identified through the RSI a gap in provision for vulnerable females, particularly in respect of female-only accommodation. This includes the findings of an earlier Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) which noted a lack of accommodation options for women with multiple and complex needs. The proposal made by the new East Sussex Housing Partnership (formerly the East Sussex Housing Officer Group - ESHOG) will deliver 12 respite rooms across East Sussex and this funding has been extended until March 2023. Accommodation is being provided by established emergency accommodation providers, who are experienced in supporting homelessness services, with additional wrap-around support from the RSI.

Temporary Accommodation Purchases

8. We completed a 6-month pilot to deliver support to clients in Rother-owned TA, with an emphasis on accessing the private rented sector. We will be taking the lessons learnt from this pilot to develop a commissioned service to provide housing management and support for our Temporary Accommodation Support Scheme (TASS); currently the TASS is being delivered by our in-house Housing Management Officer. To date the Housing Solutions team has secured 22 houses and flats (units of accommodation) with 16 occupied and seven under refurbishment, within one block of flats. There are a further nine units under offer at various stages of purchase. Inclusive of the 22 units of accommodation are eight units of accommodation that are used for Housing First, supporting former rough sleepers, and for which external grant has been secured from Homes England.

New support services

9. We were successful in securing further funding from DLUHC for the RSI until 2025, as part of this tender the RSI has a new countywide provider for Outreach, Temporary Accommodation Move On and Housing First Support for the five authorities to deliver "The RSI & Complex Needs Homeless Service." The countywide approach will deliver a seamless support service across the breadth of our rough sleeper accommodation pathways.
10. BEAM, a crowdfunding platform that supports homeless people to access training and get into work, has been commissioned until Summer 2023. The aim of the service is to help people who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, to find stable employment, accommodation and financial security. This programme was launched in August and in the first three months, 32 customers were referred to this service. Using BEAM's online platform, members of the public can read the customer's story and donate funds to help pay for transport costs and training to provide them with a better chance of finding employment to maximise their future housing options. In the first active month, two customers accessed employment and have gone on to secure accommodation so far.
11. We have commissioned BHT Sussex to provide access to specialist housing advice to the residents of the Rother District in order to assist residents to retain their current home or, if this is not possible, to provide advice and information on how to access suitable alternative housing. The service will provide specialist housing advice, including representation at court to at least 100 people per annum and will pay for 11 hours a week of a specialist housing adviser. The target client audience are those Rother residents who

are not eligible to receive this advice under the Legal Aid Agency (LAA), for example, because their income is too high or they are at risk of homelessness but their housing issues are outside of the LAA funding remit.

Multi-Agency work

12. The East Sussex Housing Partnership has been restructured. The aim of the restructure was to develop a number of specialist sub-groups that facilitate greater partnership working across housing development and homelessness support services. The sub-groups are governed by the Partnership's Executive Group which will continue to lead in the strategic coordination of housing and homelessness services between wider sectors, with Rother being represented by the Head of Housing and Community. To complement the restructure, a new Housing Partnership Lead has been recruited which is funded by the Local Housing Authorities and East Sussex Public Health. Rother's Head of Service, Housing and Community, will jointly line-manage the post with Public Health.
13. In March 2022, the Homes for Ukraine (HfU) scheme was set up which matched Ukrainian guests with hosts who could accommodate them in their homes. We have worked with a number of organisations, including East Sussex County Council, Rother Voluntary Action, BHT Sussex, Mediation Plus and Sussex Community Development Agency – to ensure there is support available to those within the HfU scheme. Additional Floating Support Officers have been recruited on the existing support contract to ensure capacity to deal with the additional households, and a migrant employability service has also been rolled out to assist with maximising people's income to enhance housing options.

Conclusion

14. The progress and success of many of the achievements included in this report is testament to the strength of partnership working in Rother and ongoing commitment from all stakeholders to improve the quality of life for our residents, notwithstanding the considerably challenging impact on services due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing rise in the cost of living for households.
15. The Strategy is now in the fourth year since adoption, and a significant amount of progress has been achieved. To support the continued progress and achieve all three priorities included in The Strategy, it is recommended that the updates and changes included in the Implementation and Delivery Plan are agreed, and the annual review and reporting of the Strategy continues.
16. In 2023, we will start to draft The Strategy 2024-2029 and engaging with wider stakeholders.

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

Chief Executive:	Malcolm Johnston
Report Contact Officer:	Joe Powell
e-mail address:	joe.powell@rother.gov.uk
Appendices:	A - Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, Priority 2: Improvement Delivery Plan B - Summary of Targets Achieved
Relevant previous Minutes:	CB22/18
Background Papers:	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 Housing-Homelessness-and-Rough-Sleeping-Strategy.pdf (rother.gov.uk)
Reference Documents:	-

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting – 23 January 2023**OSC22/48. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019-2024 (PART B)**
(8)

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing and Community which updated Members on progress of the Improvement Delivery Plan of Priority 2 of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 (Part B). An updated Improvement Delivery Plan and a summary of all the actions achieved since the Strategy's inception was attached to the report at Appendices A and B respectively. Members' attention was drawn to some of the key highlights, as follows:

PRIORITY 2: Rough Sleeping, Homelessness and Meeting Housing Aspirations

In June 2022, a review of the Council's housing service was carried out by the Homeless Advice and Support Team (HAST – department of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). They were impressed with several initiatives and particularly praised the Council's Rother Tenant Finder Scheme, as well as the amount of temporary accommodation (TA) properties purchased. Some areas for improvement were identified, namely to review the Council's Allocations Policy, as well as oversee the increased demand for the service since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council purchased four units of accommodation in 2022 for use within the East Sussex-wide Housing First scheme. Funding of £391,050 had been secured and a further four units were scheduled to be purchased, which would total 12 units for 2023.

Through the Rother Sleeper Initiative (RSI), a gap in provision for vulnerable females, particularly in respect of female-only accommodation, had been identified. The proposal made by East Sussex Housing Partnership (ESHP) would deliver 12 respite rooms across East Sussex; funding had been extended to March 2023.

The Council had secured 22 TA units, with 16 occupied and seven under refurbishment, within one block of flats. A further nine units were under offer at various stages of purchase. Inclusive of the 22 units, eight were used to support former rough sleepers.

Up to 2025, Government funding had been secured to deliver the countywide initiative "The RSI & Complex Needs Homeless Service"; a seamless support service across the breadth of the rough sleeper accommodation pathways. A crowdfunding platform, launched in August 2022 and commissioned until summer 2023, supported the homeless. Within the first three months, 32 customers were referred to the service. The Council had commissioned BHT Sussex to provide specialist housing advice to residents across the district who were not eligible to receive legal aid.

The ESHP had been restructured to develop specialist sub-groups that would facilitate greater partnership working across housing

development and homelessness support services. To complement the restructure, a new Housing Partnership Lead had been recruited, funded by the Local Housing Authorities and East Sussex Public Health; the post would be jointly line-managed by the Head of Housing and Community and Public Health.

In March 2022, the Homes for Ukraine scheme was established which matched Ukrainian guests with accommodation hosts. The Council had worked in partnership with several organisations to ensure there was support available. Additional staff resources had been employed to support this work.

During the discussion the following salient points were noted:

- Members were very pleased with the progress that had been made on this side of the Strategy and hoped that the innovation and creativity in the service would not be pruned back as part of the Financial Stability Programme;
- other suggestions for exploration included a buddy scheme for residents living alone in large properties and whether they could move in with neighbours leaving a vacant property for use;
- promoting schemes that allowed for rent payments to be reported on credit ratings allowing tenants to build up a credit history and ultimately improve their credit rating by paying their rent on time each month and increasing chances of mortgages and home ownership; and
- it was noted that the length of time a former rough sleeper could be supported in TA would depend on each case but was typically between one and two years but could be extended if necessary.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homes addressed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and commended the work that the Head of Service and his team were doing to mitigate the problem of homelessness. Lobbying of central Government on housing issues was on-going and the points raised under this and the previous item (CB22/47) were uppermost in the aspirations of the Council's Housing Company to address.

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 amended targets proposed at Appendix A to the report; and
- 2) the progress made against the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy included in the Improvement Delivery Plan (Appendix A to the report) be noted.