

TITLE OF REPORT - The Hackney Homeless Strategy 2020-22

Key Decision No - FCR Q 59

**CABINET MEETING DATE
(2019/20)**

16 March 2020

CLASSIFICATION:

Open

**If exempt, the reason will be listed in the
main body of this report.**

WARD(S) AFFECTED

All Wards Affected

CABINET MEMBER

Councillor Rebecca Rennison

**Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs, and
Supply**

KEY DECISION

Yes

REASON

Affects two or more wards

GROUP DIRECTOR

Ian Williams - Group Director of Finance and Resources.

1. CABINET MEMBER'S INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Work to implement the previous Homelessness Strategy included initiatives like embedding No First Night Out, launching the No Second Night Out Hub, expanding our rough sleeper outreach team, the discharge project with Homerton Hospital, Housing First, and investment in temporary accommodation for homeless households.
- 1.2. This new strategy looks at how we can further build on this, in particular increasing our partnership working and focusing on certain key groups where need is greatest and our impact can be most felt.
- 1.3. The housing crisis is showing no sign of easing and Hackney households are left struggling with ever increasing rents. At the same time the Government has shown no sign of reviewing levels of Local Housing Allowance (LHA); a benefit intended to help people renting in the private sector but in reality of little or no benefit to households in Hackney.
- 1.4. We now have over 13,000 households on the housing waiting list in Hackney and over 3,000 households who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation. With fewer options for people to move on to, we are seeing the number of social lets each year decline rapidly.
- 1.5. We continue to build new social housing for Hackney residents, but we cannot hope to keep up with the scale of demand as the number of households presenting to the Council as homeless continues to rise. Therefore, while we will remain ambitious in our plans to build, we will also continue to campaign against and challenge the injustice of LHA cuts.
- 1.6. This strategy brings together our work to provide support, guidance and advice to residents facing homelessness. While the drivers of the housing crisis are out of our control, we will continue to do all we can to support Hackney residents.

2. GROUP DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. Hackney Council remains committed to preventing and reducing homelessness, tackling the causes of homelessness and supporting those in need.
- 2.2. Homelessness in the borough is rising, and this Strategy is a response to a period of unprecedented change, including rapidly rising property values and rents, managing an increased demand for social housing across the board, and supporting residents through significant welfare reform. It builds on the achievements of the previous Homelessness Strategy, whilst responding and adapting to the changing environment in which homelessness and support services are delivered.
- 2.3. The primary strategic focus remains on finding sustainable housing solutions for homeless households and those threatened with homelessness; offering high quality and innovative services to those

seeking advice and support; and working with homeless households to explore the full range of housing options available to them.

3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1. That Cabinet approves the new Homeless Strategy 2019-22.

4. REASONS FOR DECISION

- 4.1. The Homelessness Act 2002 places an overriding statutory duty on all housing authorities to review homelessness trends in their area on a 5 yearly basis, and produce an overriding strategic homelessness strategy which reflects the results of that review.
- 4.2. Statutory guidance issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) requires Housing Authorities to ensure that strategies are compliant with and take into account the duties introduced by Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018.
- 4.3. Additionally, In 2018 Central Government published it's Rough Sleeping Strategy, which requires Councils to update their Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategies to include a focus on Rough Sleeping.
- 4.4. The Council's current homelessness strategy is now out of date. Given significant changes in the local housing market, and the introduction of new legislation and duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act it is necessary for the Council to produce a new Homelessness Strategy. This strategy reflects the latest trends in homelessness, follows best practice and is compliant with current legislation.

5. DETAILS OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 5.1. The publication of a homelessness strategy is a statutory requirement as set out by the Homelessness Act 2002 which has been subsequently reinforced by government guidance. All Housing authorities are required under Section 1(4) of the Homelessness Act to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a further homelessness review, within the period of 5 years beginning with the day on which their last homelessness strategy was published.
- 5.2. Not having an up to date strategy will make the Council non-compliant with legislation and would place the authority at risk of government action, which will have an adverse impact on any future funding.
- 5.3. Given the current pressures placed on Council services as a consequence of the level of homelessness in the borough, an up to date homelessness strategy that includes a strategic framework that reflects

the current market and operating climate is essential if the Council is to respond effectively.

- 5.4. A basic refresh of the existing strategy was considered, but given the significant changes in the housing landscape and extra duties introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act a new strategy is more appropriate.
- 5.5. By not introducing a new Homelessness Strategy the Council is in danger of being less effective in both tackling the current levels of homelessness and rough sleeping and in preventing homelessness in the future.

6. BACKGROUND

- 6.1. Hackney Council's corporate plan states that *"Keeping Hackney as a place for everyone is our shared vision for the Council. Over the next 4 years we will be approaching this work with a renewed energy and focus. We will tackle inequality and poverty, maintain and celebrate the borough's rich diversity and maximise affordable homes"*. But this is only possible if all residents are able to retain suitable housing. A safe secure home should be an essential requirement for all Hackney residents.
- 6.2. Unfortunately, Hackney is in the midst of a severe housing crisis and for some residents this is not the case. They are living in insecure, unaffordable and/or overcrowded housing. Living in unsuitable accommodation has a detrimental effect on a household's health and wellbeing as well as impacting negatively on future life chances leading to poverty, inequality and hardship.
- 6.3. Since the previous Homelessness Strategy was published, Hackney and London have seen a continued growth in homelessness. This has been a consequence of both a rising property market and ongoing cuts in welfare support.
- 6.4. Hackney's attractiveness as a place to live is driving up house prices and rents in an already overheated housing market. Property values in Hackney are rising faster than anywhere else in the UK.
- 6.5. At the same time continued welfare reform, especially the freezing of Local Housing Allowance rates, has reduced the number of affordable housing options for those on a low income. For many residents it has become extremely difficult to find suitable accommodation in the local area.
- 6.6. As a result there has been a continued and sustained rise in demand for emergency and temporary accommodation. The total number of households in temporary accommodation now substantially exceeds 3000, and acceptances continue to rise. The sparsity of affordable housing options across London has caused a log jam, leaving households stuck in temporary accommodation for an extended period at an increasing cost to the Council.

- 6.7. At the same time the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 has created new statutory duties and responsibilities, fundamentally transforming how housing advice and homelessness services operate.
- 6.8. The overriding aims of the Act have been welcomed, with additional focus on homelessness prevention, higher quality housing advice and the joining up of services. But it has created significant additional demands on the service.
- 6.9. This new strategy therefore focuses on embedding our work around early intervention and on delivering services that are joined up, holistic, high quality and person centric. The strategy is aimed at ensuring that all residents have access to high quality advice and support, and that the service can identify and act to resolve issues before they lead to homelessness.
- 6.10. Following engagement with service users, third sector partners and community and voluntary organisations, the Strategy has identified four general themes as the key work streams:
 - 6.10.1. **Single People - assisting vulnerable individuals and tackling rough sleeping.** We will aim to help some of the most vulnerable and isolated individuals in our community to access, retain and secure housing, including one stop shop access to colocated multi agency services.
 - 6.10.2. **Customer Care – delivering the best possible service.** We will publicise our housing advice services widely, ensuring individuals have an easy single point of access to high quality person centric advice. The service will increase provision and capacity of phone advice, encouraging early engagement from individuals in difficulty, and ensure that our front line staff are highly trained in homelessness awareness, individual vulnerabilities, and trauma informed care.
 - 6.10.3. **Early Intervention and Prevention – reducing the risk of people becoming homeless.** We will develop a service with prevention at its heart, by identifying individuals at risk of homelessness, and intervening early to resolve the root causes of the problems before they become critical. We will engage with people early and help them to navigate to the services and support they need.
 - 6.10.4. **Access for All – removing barriers and reducing disadvantage.** We will ensure that our services are inclusive and available to everyone – treating all individuals as valued members of the Hackney community. We will ensure that services are accessible, personalised, flexible, and focused on individual circumstances.

- 6.11. Each of these themes are accompanied by a number of associated action points and priorities. Above all of the themes is an accompanying and overarching priority of partnership working and an understanding that homelessness cannot be solved by the Council or the Housing Needs Service alone.
- 6.12. The strategy makes clear that preventing homelessness is everyone's priority and therefore efficient and effective partnership working is important across the Council, housing providers, public bodies and third sector and voluntary agencies.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. The actions priorities and activities set out in the strategy are designed to be delivered within existing budgets across the Benefits and Housing Needs Service.
- 7.2. However this strategy is based on known funding streams, which could reduce, change or cease over time. Much of the key work is underpinned by our Flexible Support Grant which has been confirmed as £3,636,756 for 2020/21 and Homelessness Reduction Act Funding of £1,251,960 for 20/21. At the moment there is no confirmation of these funding sources for the duration of the strategy.
- 7.3. In the event of a reduction in funding the strategy would have to be reviewed and updated accordingly.
- 7.4. It is hoped that the actions in the strategy will reduce the number of homeless presentations. It is anticipated that the early intervention and preventive approach to homelessness will be a spend to save mechanism with a reduction in costs associated with Temporary Accommodation. However the number of homeless approaches is driven by external factors outside the Council's control.
- 7.5. If the Council fails to prevent homelessness there is a risk of further costs to Temporary Accommodation budgets.

8. Equality Impact Assessment

- 8.1. The Benefits and Housing Needs service continues to have a strong commitment to improving the quality of life for all residents. It is recognised that homeless households can become trapped in a cycle of related problems such as unemployment, low work skills, low incomes, poverty, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown. The Strategy seeks to promote positive outcomes amongst our homeless population, and sets out how the Council will work with partners from the statutory and voluntary services to support vulnerable homeless households and those at risk of homelessness.

- 8.2. The Strategy includes within its key themes ensuring access for all. This seeks to improve communication for all providers and residents. The strategy in particular acknowledges the increased incidence of mental health issues and those with higher support needs within the homeless cohort and commits the council to taking a more psychologically informed approach to service delivery.
- 8.3. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and the Benefits and Housing Needs Service will regularly assess the ongoing impact of the actions associated with the implementation of the strategy to ensure they do not impact adversely on any particular sectors of the community.

9. Sustainability

- 9.1. The priorities and actions set out in this report have a limited impact on the physical and social environment.

10. Consultations

- 10.1. In developing this Strategy, the service worked in partnership with Homeless Link, a national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England.
- 10.2. Homeless Link were commissioned to undertake an independent refresh and review of the previous strategy. Their input and feedback has been incorporated into the updated strategy. As part of this process, Homeless Link directly engaged with a range of internal and external partners to reflect their views.

11. Risk Assessment

- 11.1. There is a reputation risk to the Council if it is unable to adequately meet the increased service demand following the Homelessness Reduction Act, including increased risk of litigation, and increased complaints including those escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 11.2. The increasing levels of homelessness, and need to provide Temporary Accommodation is a financial risk to the Council. Although this strategy seeks to reduce homelessness through prevention, and therefore mitigates these risks, as a result of Welfare Reform it has become increasingly difficult to sustain accommodation.
- 11.3. There is a risk that some elements of the document will become out of date as national legislation and policy continues to change. Where this happens the Council will include a note on the Council's website explaining any updates.

12. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES

- 12.1. The Homelessness strategy does not have any direct financial implications, however, with the increasing demand for affordable housing in the borough and an increasing number of families finding themselves homeless, the Council has to manage the statutory responsibility to house homeless households.
- 12.2. Equally a failure to have a strategic approach to tackling homelessness will see the Borough viewed as ineffective in understanding the scale of the problem and its ability to resolve it.

13. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & GOVERNANCE SERVICES

- 13.1. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness within their district. Failure to produce an up-to-date strategy will be open to legal challenge
- 13.2. As a public authority, the council must take account of the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and not act in a way which is incompatible with a Convention right
- 13.3. Under Article 8, any interference with the right to respect for a person's private and family life and home must be proportionate and Article 14 requires that there must be no unjustified discrimination within the scope of human rights on any grounds, such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, or other status.
- 13.4. In discharging its functions to homeless persons, the council must also have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty in s149 Equality Act 2010. S149(1) provides that, in exercising its functions, a public authority must have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the 2010 Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 13.5. The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 13.6. S149(3) provides that having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to (a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic; (b) take steps to

meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it; and (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

13.7. S149(4) provides that the steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

13.8. Section 149(6) provides that compliance with the duties in section 149 may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.

APPENDICES

Homelessness Strategy Equality Impact Assessment

EXEMPT

BACKGROUND PAPERS

In accordance with The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) England Regulations 2012 publication of Background Papers used in the preparation of reports is required

None

L

Report Author	Ross Hatfull 020 8356 3945 ian.jones@hackney.gov.uk
Comments for and on behalf of the Group Director of Finance and Resources	Michael Honeysett 020 8356 3332 Financial Management Finance and Resources Directorate
Comments for and on behalf of the Interim Director of Legal & Governance	Chima Obichukwu 020 8356 4538 Senior Lawyer

