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# **Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy Update**

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Elly Cutkelvin

Lead Director: Chris Burgin

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## Useful information

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- Report version number: 1

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report provides a further update to Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on progress in implementing Leicester's Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023<sup>1</sup>, since the last update to Scrutiny in October 2021.

### 2. Summary

- 2.1. Part 3 of this report gives important background information for the period.
- 2.2. Part 4 of this report shows the latest progress made since the last update across the key strategic aims:
  1. Anyone at risk of homelessness is aware of and has access to the services they may need to prevent it.
  2. Provide suitable accommodation and support options for people who are, or who may become homeless.
  3. Reduce rates of repeat homelessness amongst single people.
  4. Provide the right support and services so that no person needs to sleep rough in Leicester.
- 2.3. In summary good progress has been made on all points, although some objectives have had to be changed in order to respond to the recovery plan following the national COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3. Background

#### **Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy**

- 3.1. All housing authorities are required to complete a homelessness review for their district and formulate and publish a 5-year homelessness strategy based on the results of the review.

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<sup>1</sup> [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023 \(leicester.gov.uk\)](https://www.leicester.gov.uk/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-strategy-2018-2023/)

- 3.2. Leicester City Council's fourth Homelessness Strategy was formally agreed May 2018 and coincided closely with the commencement of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which came into force on 3rd April 2018.
- 3.3. The Strategy factored in new pressures, and an updated landscape, and makes it clear that this is not a council endeavour alone, as tackling homelessness requires significant partnership working to address the root causes of homelessness and provide the level of support and advice needed to those affected.
- 3.4. As such, Leicester City Council, and key partners commit to undertake an ambitious programme of work to tackle homelessness locally. Work has been ongoing to implement the agreed actions / proposals and build on the extensive work already in place.

### **Homelessness Reduction Act**

- 3.5. The Homelessness Reduction Act<sup>2</sup> significantly increased the depth and breadth of local authorities' statutory homeless duties. Most notably it added two new duties: the 'Prevention Duty' and 'Relief (recovery from homelessness) Duty'.
- 3.6. As a result, the workload of our front-line officers and the Service increased significantly, and the government have provided temporary funding to acknowledge these increased burdens upon local authorities. It is important that this funding continues to be made available by central government if they expect local authorities to continue to achieve the level of prevention and support currently being delivered.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic – Recovery**

- 3.7. In addition to existing pressures, Leicester's 'Everyone In' directive, which began at the end of March 2020 continued through to April 2021. The directive ensured that people who were rough sleeping or in shared sleeping arrangements (for example, night-shelters) at the time of the first lockdown were provided with self-contained temporary accommodation (TA) reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection and transmission. This was necessary to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on people sleeping rough and at risk of rough sleeping and ultimately to prevent deaths during this public health emergency.
- 3.8. This was largely due to the humanitarian approach taken by LCC, opting to continue with the principles of 'Everyone In' to continue to protect individuals from COVID-19 for longer than the majority of other local authorities. The service is still in recovery from the pandemic with an additional 68 units of TA still being in place specifically for singles and recovery is likely to take this rest of this financial year (22/23).

### **Family homelessness**

- 3.9. Post covid, the Service has seen a significant increase in the number of family households presenting as homeless. This is in part due to the lifting of the moratorium on evictions from the private rented sector and the court backlogs and family exclusions breaking down.
- 3.10. The upsurge in threats of homelessness for families is not just a local issue but one that is being seen nationally and we are currently seeing a higher-than-normal number of cases in temporary accommodation.

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<sup>2</sup> [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities)

## **4. Progress on the Homelessness Strategy**

### **4.1. Strategic Aim 1: Anyone at risk of homelessness is aware of and has access to the services they may need to prevent it**

4.1.1. Homelessness Prevention is part of the statutory duty. The duty requires an authority to provide help and advice to prevent homelessness for households in their district. Case officers work together with applicants to create and carry out a personalised housing plan. Applicants have a responsibility to carry out any reasonable action identified in the plan, and housing authorities can cease duties in cases where Applicants are non-cooperative.

#### **Prevention solutions**

4.1.2. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and additional service pressures, prevention solutions have fallen on the pre-covid levels, however we are still achieving prevention of homelessness in 61% of cases.<sup>3</sup> This is in the main due to cases presenting with less time for us to achieve a prevention outcome due to the eviction moratorium.

4.1.3. The Service looks to achieve high prevention rates by offering a multitude of interventions and putting the focus initially into exhausting every possibility of sustaining the current accommodation. If that fails, we work with the customer to identify a new accommodation solution before homelessness occurs. Interventions include:

- Negotiation with family and friends, lenders, and landlords.
- Affordability assessments, and maximising income.
- Referrals and signposting to partner agencies and specialist advice.
- Private Rented Sector solutions through financial help and incentive schemes.
- Housing Register priority; and,
- Advice about other housing solutions such as Shared Ownership, where appropriate.

### **4.2. Strategic Aim 2: Provide suitable accommodation and support options for people who are, or who may become homeless**

#### **Relief / Recovery support**

4.2.1. If prevention does not work, or if applicants seek help when they are already homeless, there is a range of support available to work with the customer to help them recover as quickly as possible.

4.2.2. The success levels for applicants can depend on the applicant's flexibility in terms of willingness to explore all elements set out in the personalised plan. Applicants who explore all elements in full, rather than limiting themselves to preferences, have a high chance of getting a successful outcome.

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<sup>3</sup> Data based on Quarter 3 2021/22.

4.2.3. The Service offers a variety of housing options to applicants, including the housing register, signposting to separate RP housing lists, Private Rented Sector solutions through financial help and incentive schemes, advice about other housing solutions such as Shared Ownership, where appropriate, and ensuring any support required to sustain solutions is made available. The applicant must then undertake the actions in their personalised housing plan in order to ensure that they make full advantage of the options and schemes available.

4.2.4. LCC achieved successful relief of homelessness in 67% of cases.<sup>4</sup> This is a 14% improvement compared to the last update report, and compares very well to the national average.

### **Increasing supply - stock**

4.2.5 In addition to advice and support, the city council is working hard to deliver the manifesto commitment of 1,500 new affordable homes by May 2023, including developing sites to provide the estimated 640 additional Extra Care supported living spaces needed over the next 10 years. So far 843 new affordable housing units have been delivered, we have another 95 single property acquisition planned. We are due to start on site with phase 2 and 2b of our new build housing programme that will add a further 75 homes and we are currently carrying out a due diligence exercise on a proposed purchase of new build block of flats that that will increase the numbers by an additional 69 homes.. All units are going in to the HRA as Council properties.

### **Increasing supply - Private Rented Sector**

4.2.6. With regard to the private rented sector solutions, we have now formally launched some recently piloted changes to landlord incentive schemes. The changes have resulted in a significant increase in PRS tenancies available for let to homeless households, now averaging around 200 new tenancies per annum.

4.2.7. Due to the lack of social housing, it is now even more important to ensure customers are fully aware that in resolving their homelessness we need to look for solutions beyond the Housing Register and PRS is considered a suitable alternative to resolve homelessness.

4.2.8. LCC also plans to roll out licensing schemes across Leicester's private rented sector, as part of an overall Private Sector Strategy that is being developed. The strategy aims at improving the overall quality of accommodation. Options are currently being consulted on.

### **Temporary Accommodation (TA)**

4.2.9. Importantly, the Council's duties at this stage also includes providing TA to families and vulnerable single-person households.

4.2.10. On average, each quarter there are 51 new families requiring TA<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Data based on Quarter 3 2021/22.

<sup>5</sup> Figure based on the quarterly average over the 2021/22 annum.

- 4.2.11. Despite pressures we have, so far been able to maintain a 100% record of ensuring all families placed in B&B do not exceed 6-weeks' occupancy, which is a legal requirement upon LAs.
- 4.2.12. During the period, we have continued to progress the model of family TA to support the "Homes not Hostels" vision. All the families that need to enter TA are now offered self-contained accommodation. This allows families to live as normal a family life as possible, whilst they work with us to find suitable settled accommodation for their family.

### **Temporary accommodation for singles**

- 4.2.13. On average, each quarter there are 144 single persons requiring TA<sup>6</sup>.
- 4.2.14. As highlighted in previous updates, we have now embarked on an exciting piece of work to improve and reconfigure the Dawn Centre to increase the number of rooms that we have available. We are looking to increase capacity by creating an additional 8 rooms giving us a potential uplift from 44 to 52 bedspaces. These beds will support the multi-agency assessment approach with swift move-on within the single homeless pathway to support the strategy objective that no one needs to sleep rough in our city. There will be a number of these rooms that will also be classed as medium-long-term for the most entrenched and complex cases that require intensive support. We are also looking, as part of our provisional 'Ending Rough Sleeping Plan' and our current bid to the Rough Sleepers Initiative Fund 22/25 to develop a multi-agency Hub at the Dawn Centre where anyone who is at risk of rough sleeping can access advice and support to prevent 'a first night out'.

### **Prison releases, and accommodation for offenders**

- 4.2.15. Contracts remain in place with Adullam Housing Association who are a long-standing provider of accommodation support services for offenders locally. Specialist services help us support criminal justice agencies locally by ensuring the safety of the public and reduce reoffending rates.
- 4.2.16. The number of specialist accommodation units available for offenders is 30 units. This accommodation includes a range of support levels and licence agreement terms, including 'step down' accommodation to assist Offenders to move on into independent accommodation.
- 4.2.17. We have recently launched a Prison Pathway Protocol with the surrounding Districts to work more closely with Probation Services and prisons to have a seamless pathway to ensure the ex-offenders do not go onto rough sleep upon release, as well as securing additional funding through the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders programme which involves getting recent ex-offenders into private sector accommodation with appropriate support.

### **Hospital Discharges**

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<sup>6</sup> Figure based on the quarterly average over the 2021/22 annum.

4.2.18. The referral and pathway set up with the NHS's Housing Enablement Team is continuously reviewed in partnership, and further improvements have been made to ensure LCC are alerted earlier and can act more swiftly.

### **Accommodation for young people**

4.2.19. Since the last update the joint commissioning exercise with Children's Services has been completed and has resulted in more accommodation providers being commissioned to manage the supported accommodation needs of 16-25-year-olds in the city. The driver behind the joint commissioning exercise was to allow LCC to provide a better range of options for young people from April 2022.

4.2.20. Strategy actions relating to younger persons are aligned with the ongoing placement sufficiency work.

4.2.21. Pathways in place are now regularly monitored to ensure they continue to provide successful routes and also include a robust process for care leavers.

### **Asylum & Immigration**

4.2.22. As a national dispersal area, for Asylum seekers, since the Pandemic we are seeing additional pressures in the number of cases being referred to the Authority to manage Home Office backlogs. These cases can be single or family households who have received their refugee status and want to remain in Leicester. However, at the present moment in time there is no additional pressures on homelessness services due to the Afghan Schemes or the Ukrainian emergency situation. We will continue to monitor this closely. In relation to the European Union (EU) the application deadline for applications for settled status has passed and we are seeing more EU Nationals rough sleeping. We can offer to sign post to Migrant Help and if they have pre-settled status try and engage them with our employment, education, and training initiatives.

### **Housing-related Floating support**

4.2.23. A range of support is available that can be used flexibly and effectively by the service to ensure that accommodation is sustained, whether that is existing accommodation or new accommodation arranged as a solution out of homelessness.

4.2.24. The majority of homeless applicants can move on into tenancies with no support requirement, but a minority have a much better chance of sustainment with pre-planning, and post-sign-up support. We currently commission P3 to provide ongoing support for private tenants that may be at risk of losing their homes and also support the transition if another housing option is required.

4.2.25. In terms of pre-planning, Leicester City Council have a sensitive lettings policy that is invoked where special consideration needs to be given to placing an individual within a community, in order to both ensure that the arrangement is sustainable. We have seen huge successes with this approach, which is completed in partnership with Housing Management. We have also recently introduced an Enhanced Lettings As a result of matters raised via HSC we have also introduced an offer to provide additional help and

support to the most vulnerable move out of homelessness which includes decorating and soft furnishings, to include carpeting.

- 4.2.26. In terms of post-sign-up support, housing related floating support is commissioned by LCC. P3 is the provider to assist with sustainment of accommodation in the private rented sector, both existing and new. Where individuals enter into LCC tenancies, the STAR Team will complete the same support. Referrals are made by case workers where it is deemed appropriate and needed.
- 4.2.27. In addition to this, Changing Futures initiative is being mobilised to drive lasting change and long-term intensive support with regard to the most vulnerable people in our society. The Housing Division are not leading on the Changing Futures programme but are playing a key part in its development. Successful delivery will be dependent on strong governance and partnership working.
- 4.3. Strategic Aims 3 and 4: Reduce rates of repeat homelessness amongst single people & provide the right support and services so that no person needs to sleep rough in Leicester**
- 4.3.1 During the period, work has continued with local partners and charities, and we Continue to fund and support various initiatives in the community, including day centres and specialist case workers (navigators).
- 4.3.2 Donation points across the city continue to raise money for voluntary sector partners, to support their work with homeless persons and rough sleepers.
- 4.3.3 The official launch of the St Mungo's Recovery college providing Employment, Education and Training opportunities took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2022 with a range of initiatives with specialist employment support workers helping people to access training and employment opportunities. We are also working with BEAM, as a pilot project for 12 months, which is a crowd funding initiative to help secure accommodation and employment.
- 4.3.4 Together, this is an important part of recovery and ending homeless due to the intrinsic links between unemployment and homelessness.
- 4.3.5 We have also developed an ambitious 'Ending Rough Sleeping Plan' in coproduction with the Department for Levelling Up for Communities and Housing. This plan has informed and directed a further bid for the additional funding opportunities through the Rough Sleeping Initiative Round 5 for the period 22/25.
- 4.3.6 The number of rough sleepers on the streets remain at an all time low for the city with regular snapshot counts taking place on a monthly basis, as well as the teams being out on a daily basis both early morning and evenings. April' 22 count was a total of 7 which was slightly up on previous months but is in line with seasonal trends and the ending of the Cold Weather period.

## **5 Review and Development of the Leicester's next Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy.**

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## **5.1 Why are we carrying out a review of homelessness?**

- 5.1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on all local housing authorities to carry out a review of homelessness and homelessness service provision for their area and, in consultation with local partners and stakeholders, formulate and publish a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy based on the results of that review, at least every five years. The last full review in Leicester was conducted in 2017 and the current Homelessness Strategy covers the period 2018-23.
- 5.1.2 The review aims to develop a picture of homelessness in Leicester and look at the current provision of services to establish whether the needs of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness are still being met, to identify any gaps in service to inform the new strategy and potential for improvements that will also help to ensure any future commissioning of homelessness services remain fit for purpose.
- 5.1.3 The last few years have seen significant changes which have impacted on homelessness:
- The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, in 2018, which extended statutory responsibilities for local authorities to provide meaningful support to single people as well as extending prevention & relief duties for all eligible households.
  - Economic growth has been slow over the period of the strategy and economic forecasts suggest uncertainty in the coming years particularly affected by the decision to leave the European Union. The impact of the UK's decision to leave the European Union, presenting challenges for EEA nationals with uncertain statuses with regard to employment, benefits, and housing rights.
  - The overall rate of new housing provision is not keeping pace with household growth and is failing to reduce housing market pressures.
  - Affordable' rental products are now beyond the reach of those on the lowest incomes and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates remain lower than market rents.
  - Welfare reform continues to have an impact on those receiving benefits (lower benefit caps, roll-out of Universal Credit, freezing of LHA rates).
  - Cuts to local government funding.
  - The diminishing stock of social housing due to the RTB and the lack of affordable homes.
  - Impact upon homelessness of the Covid pandemic.
- 5.1.4 A draft high level and detailed plan has been developed to manage both the review of the current strategy and the compiling of the new strategy for 2023-2028. The plan is attached at App.1.
- 5.1.5 The views of both the public and partners is key and an essential part of formulating the new strategy and as in previous exercises meaningful consultation, both of the review and new strategy needs to be undertaken.
- 5.1.6 This important work has now started, and the review document will be presented to CMB and HSC in due course to agree and move to consult on the findings.

5.1.7 Both the review of the current strategy and formulation of the new strategy are and have been in the past high profile and both documents will be presented to CMB for approval, in order to comply with the duty to have the new strategy in place during 2023.

5.1.8 Additional resources have been deployed as we need to demonstrate a level of impartiality, as well as self-assessment in conducting this exercise.

5.1.9 Positively, Leicester has excellent working relationships with partners, which are much improved since the previous review, and over the life of the current strategy we have placed a strong emphasis in developing relationships and working together to provide strong homelessness services for the city, as well as working alongside statutory partners such as Health, Probation and DV Services to ensure the homelessness offer remains fit for purpose for specific groups.

## **7. Summary of appendices:**

App 1 – Timeline for the Homelessness Strategy Review.

**8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?** No

**9. Is this a “key decision”?** If so, why? No – update only.