

Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Housing and Environment

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To: Scrutiny Committee

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Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Recommendation

Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment on the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025.

Purpose of Report

1. To brief scrutiny on the content of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
2. To invite scrutiny to provide any comments on the draft strategy.

Background

3. The 2002 Homelessness Act requires local housing authorities to publish a homelessness strategy at least every five years.
4. Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Councils have a joint homelessness strategy that expires in September 2020.
5. In August 2018 the Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy. The strategy aims to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and to “end it for good” by 2027.
6. The strategy requires all local housing authorities to update their current homelessness strategy and to rebrand it as a “Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy”.
7. The strategy must be submitted to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and published online. The local housing authority are required to report progress in delivering the strategy and to produce an annual action plan.

8. Between 2010 and 2018 the number of households in temporary accommodation in England rose by 65 per cent. Over the same period, the number of rough sleepers increased by 165 per cent.
9. These trends are not reflected in the Vale of White Horse. In 2018/19 the council assisted 420 households at risk of homelessness. Despite the increasing demand on the council's homelessness service, the number of households in temporary accommodation fell by 56 percent over the last five years to only eight households. The number of rough sleepers recorded at the official count in November 2018 was only nine persons.
10. The councils' have a proactive approach to tackling homelessness, with a strong focus upon prevention, early intervention and increasing access to sustainable accommodation. These actions have helped maintain low levels of homelessness and rough sleeping in the district.

Development of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

11. The draft strategy has been developed following a review of homelessness services that included stakeholder engagement exercises with councillors, service users and partner organisations.
12. The review considered the council's achievements during the lifetime of the previous strategy; the demands on the homelessness service; and the ability to meet these demands in the future. The review findings informed the aims and objectives of the new strategy.
13. The draft strategy was subject to a public consultation for a six-week period from 14 October 2019.

The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

14. The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 retains a clear focus upon early intervention to prevent homelessness; or if prevention is not possible, to end homelessness at the earliest opportunity.
15. The strategy has three aims:
 - to prevent homelessness whenever possible
 - to end incidents of homelessness at the earliest opportunity
 - to end the need for rough sleeping
16. In order to achieve these aims the strategy has five objectives:
 1. To improve county-wide partnership working to prevent and reduce homelessness.
 2. To minimise the use of temporary accommodation.
 3. To further develop our housing needs service to prevent and relieve homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

4. To improve access to emergency accommodation and increase support for rough sleepers.
5. To improve access to sustainable accommodation for households who are either at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.
17. The strategy is supported by a detailed action plan designed to achieve the aims and objectives.
18. The success of the strategy will be measured against Key Performance Indicators and targets will be set annually.
19. The strategy will be reviewed annually, and the findings published on the councils' websites.

Financial Implications

20. There are no financial implications associated with producing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Legal Implications

21. The council has a statutory duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to publish a Homelessness Strategy every five years.

Risks

22. The council would be in breach of its statutory duty if it does not publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy every five years.

Other Implications

23. None

Conclusion

24. The Vale of White Horse District Council has a strong track record in the prevention and reduction of homelessness.
25. The draft homelessness and rough sleeping strategy is designed to build upon this success by continuing to drive down homelessness and rough sleeping in the district.
26. The draft strategy and a consultation report will be submitted to Vale cabinet for approval on 31 January 2020 and will include consideration of comments received from South and Vale Scrutiny Committees.
27. Subject to cabinet approval, and the strategy not being called-in, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be published on 10 February 2020.