

Cabinet
Council

12th March 2019
19th March 2019

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities - Councillor Ruane

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Deputy Chief Executive, People

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Adoption of Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2019-24

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

The Council is required to have an up to date Strategy to prevent homelessness. This report presents a new Housing and Homelessness Strategy for adoption covering the period 2019-2024. This will replace the Council's previous strategy which operated between 2013 and 2018.

The Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy have been combined into one document, which reflects the fact that activities to prevent homelessness are dependent on the availability of additional housing, an improvement in the management and quality of existing housing, and the advice and support available to people who need it to successfully maintain their home. This ensures the Council takes a comprehensive and joined up approach to all matters relating to housing and homelessness.

The final Strategy has been updated to reflect a period of consultation in November and December 2018. The results of this consultation are summarised in section 3 of this report and Appendix 3.

The Strategy does however continue to focus on four main themes: Preventing homelessness and supporting homeless households; Support for people and communities; Improving the use of existing homes; and New housing development.

The Strategy will also be supported by an Action Plan that will remain a live document and be monitored and delivered by the City Council and its relevant partners.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is requested to:

1. Note the consultation responses received to the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy and the summary report provided at Appendix 3.
2. Recommend that council adopt the new Housing and Homelessness Strategy (Appendix 1) and supporting Action Plan (Appendix 2) with effect from 20th March 2019.

The Council is recommended to:

1. Adopt the new Housing and Homelessness Strategy (Appendix 1) and supporting Action Plan (Appendix 2) with effect from 20th March 2019.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1: Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2019-24

Appendix 2: Draft Action Plan

Appendix 3: Consultation Statement

Background papers:

Coventry Homelessness Review 2018

Other useful documents

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (2018) Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

Yes, the draft Strategy was considered by Scrutiny Coordination Board at its meeting on the 12th December 2018. Comments from the meeting have fed into the final version of the Strategy and are summarised as part of Appendix 3 to this report.

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

Yes – 19th March 2019

Report title: Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2019-24

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The Council is required to develop and publish a Strategy to prevent homelessness in the district every five years, under Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002. A Housing & Homelessness Strategy for 2019-24 has been developed (and is attached as Appendix 1).
- 1.2 The Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy have been combined into one document. Activities to prevent homelessness are dependent on the availability of additional housing, an improvement in the management and quality of existing housing, and the advice and support available to people who need it to successfully maintain their home. This approach means that the Homelessness Strategy can be read as 'part of the bigger picture' within Coventry's wider Housing Strategy and is not seen in isolation from the range of other housing factors that influence homelessness.
- 1.3 The Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2019-24 focusses on four main themes: Preventing homelessness and supporting homeless households; Support for people and communities; Improving the use of existing homes; and New housing development.
- 1.4 *Preventing homelessness and supporting homeless households* - This theme will be the Homelessness Strategy for the city and will embed the principles of preventing homelessness and providing effective support if people do become homeless, through adoption of the pathways model. To achieve this, actions will be put in place to increase effective partnership working both within the Council and with relevant partners, improve the information and advice available, and include support for people to sustain tenancies and build resilience to avoid the future risk of homelessness. This will include a review of the Coventry Homefinder policy and the re-commissioning of homeless and ex-offender accommodation and floating support services.
- 1.5 *Support for people and communities* – this theme will focus on ensuring that the city's housing is suitable for people with specific requirements as a result of age or disability or other protected characteristics, and support for communities to influence housing in their area through Neighbourhood Plans and regeneration. To achieve this, actions will be put in place to complete a needs assessment for older people housing, develop specialist housing where required, and support communities that want to prepare a neighbourhood plan.
- 1.6 *Improving the use of existing homes* – this theme will focus on the city's existing housing and ensure it is used in the most effective and efficient way to meet the needs of local people. To achieve this, actions will be put in place to reduce the number of empty homes, improve the standard and management of rented housing, including exploring options for discretionary licensing, and improve the quality of existing homes through energy efficiency measures etc.
- 1.7 *New Housing Development* – this theme will focus on ensuring that the growth needs of the city are met with an appropriate mix of housing types and tenures. To achieve this, actions will be put in place to develop the relevant supplementary planning documents (SPDs), to work collaboratively with developers, Registered Providers (housing associations) and Homes England to ensure that affordable housing needs are met, and improve the design and diversity of new housing development.
- 1.8 The Action Plan is published alongside the Housing & Homelessness Strategy at Appendix 2 to this report. Upon adoption the Action Plan will remain a live document and will be

regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that actions are being progressed and respond to any changes in trends or issues that emerge during the lifetime of the Strategy.

- 1.9 This report presents the Housing and Homelessness Strategy and its supporting Action Plan for adoption. This follows a period of public consultation that took place between 6th November and 18th December 2018. The results of this consultation are summarised in the Consultation Statement at Appendix 3 and are referenced within section 3 of this report.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 Option 1 reflects the recommendations of this report and is the preferred option. This would see the report adopted by the city council and provide the basis for managing matters of housing and homelessness across Coventry for the next 5 years.
- 2.2 Option 2 is to not publish a new Housing & Homelessness Strategy. This is not recommended, as it is a legislative requirement under Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 for the Local Authority to carry out a review of homelessness and publish a homelessness strategy every five years.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 During the development of the Draft Housing & Homelessness Strategy, discussions were held with a number of relevant stakeholders and partners around formulating the themes, priorities and actions that were identified and included in the Draft. This included relevant internal and external stakeholders and ensured the initial strategy was founded on a cross-directorate basis and with input from the Councils key partners. Discussions were also held at a range of existing forums and workshops including the city's Homelessness Forum.
- 3.2 Following approval by Cabinet in October 2018, a six week period of consultation was held between 6th November to 18th December 2018. During this period further engagement was undertaken through the Homelessness Forum, Front Line Network and Multiple Complex Needs Group. The consultation was also promoted through a range of media including the Councils social media outlets. This included the publication of a survey monkey questionnaire.
- 3.3 The questionnaire attracted approximately 108 responses. A further 16 responses were received from other sources via email and in writing. These later responses included detailed responses from a number of Registered Housing Providers, Coventry Citizens Advice, Coventry Cyrenians and the Coventry Frontline Network. It also incorporated feedback from the Coventry Homelessness Forum.
- 3.4 During the consultation period a report was also presented to Scrutiny Coordination Board. This was coupled with a presentation and commentary from an 'Experts By Experience' Group, who are actively working with homeless households in Coventry.
- 3.5 The key points raised through the consultation process included:
 - 3.5.1 **Theme 1: Preventing Homelessness and Supporting Homeless Households**
 - Registered Providers should stop evicting households.
 - Challenge national LHA rates.
 - Make better use of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP).
 - Importance of successfully delivering the Housing First programme.
 - Do more to combat rough sleeping.

- Prioritise homelessness prevention.
- Create more links between rough sleeping and drug/alcohol addiction, mental health, unemployment and access to jobs and services.
- Ensure wider accessibility to information and support and awareness of how to get it.
- Do more to support those with multiple complex needs.
- Highlight the importance of tenancy support training to ensure tenancy sustainment.
- There are insufficient resources to deliver the aims and objectives of the strategy.
- Need to make sure the duty to refer is functioning effectively.
- Need a single data collection point and a process for sharing information between partner organisations – prevent repeated cases of rough sleepers providing the same info multiple times.
- Target the root cause of homelessness.
- Ensure those with experience of rough sleeping and homelessness are involved in the commissioning of new services and how they are delivered.
- There is a need for a 'wet facility'.
- Would be good for the strategy to be endorsed by more than just the council.
- Strategy overly focused on prevention – not enough on relief.

3.5.2 **Theme 2: Housing Development**

- Need for new genuinely affordable housing targeted at those with low incomes.
- Establish clear empty homes policy.
- Ensure new homes are supported by appropriate infrastructure.
- Prevent development of Green Belt land.
- Prioritise development on brownfield sites.
- Restrict the delivery and concentration of HMOs.
- Promote council investment in housing stock – build or buy.
- Plan/Strategy should go further and build more homes.
- Explore options for the council to invest/support mortgage lending.
- More promotion of self-build/custom build homes.

3.5.3 **Theme 3: Improving the use of existing homes**

- Reduce empty homes.
- Provide more support and advice for private landlords.
- Combat rogue landlords.
- Ensure first priority relates to all homes not just rented homes.
- Combat over/under occupancy.
- Review opportunities for fixed term tenancies.
- Expand landlord licencing.
- Plan more for health communities and combatting deprivation.

3.5.4 **Theme 4: Support for people and communities**

- Provide newly placed households with community info packs.
- Improve links to health and deprivation.
- Ensure access to amenity space as part of new developments and temporary accommodation.
- Need to support and facilitate downsizing where appropriate.
- Need to support people to improve their existing homes and future proof them to help people stay in their homes and local communities longer.
- Promote more variety of house types including bungalows and accessible homes.
- Stronger outreach policy to support Neighbourhood Planning.

- 3.6 A number of technical and typographical comments were also received which have been addressed accordingly. Themes 2 and 4 have also been switched to ensure the strategy is more reflective of the 'pathways' model.
- 3.7 In general the majority of comments reflected issues and actions that are already covered by the Strategy and Action Plan. As such, only minor changes have been made to both documents since it was initially issued in draft form with some other adjustments being made to strengthen certain aspects including most notably matters of joint and partnership working to help combat rough sleeping and improve the process for those presenting as homeless.
- 3.8 In addition to the consultation already undertaken the Strategy will continue to be monitored and updated as appropriate through the necessary processes. The Action Plan in particular will also remain a live document to be progressed by the Council and its partners. This will provide a clear platform from which to monitor and deliver the Strategy. Both the Strategy and Action Plan will also continue to be shared with the Council's key partnership groups including the Adult's and Children's Safeguarding Boards, Health and Wellbeing Board and Police and Crime Board.
- 3.9 A full summary of responses and initial officer responses is included in Appendix 3 of this report.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 If the recommendations of this report are approved, the Housing and Homelessness Strategy would be adopted and come into effect from the 20th March 2019

5. Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Services

5.1 Financial implications

The recommendations in this report will not incur any additional financial implications and will be managed within existing resources.

Elements of the Housing & Homelessness Strategy and the Action Plan may have financial implications. These will be subject to further Cabinet and Council reports as appropriate or subject to individual business case reports as necessary.

5.2 Legal implications

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced the requirement for Local Authorities to carry out a Homelessness Review and develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy. Paragraph 2.24 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (2018) clarifies that this means a strategy for:

- a) Preventing homelessness in the district
- b) Securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless
- c) Securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in the district who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (2018) clarifies that this should now include the additional duties introduced through the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The Code also states that “Housing authorities must consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy. Housing authorities will also wish to consult with service users and specialist agencies that provide support to homeless people in the district.” (Para 2.10)

Coventry City Council has decided to combine the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy into one document, which is permissible under paragraph 2.9 of the Code.

Failure to have an updated Homelessness Strategy may impact the Council’s ability to defend challenges to decision made under the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. In accordance with s1(4) of the 2002 Act the Council must ensure that the new homelessness strategy is published within the period of five years beginning with the day on which the last homelessness strategy was published; failure to do so would mean that the council has not complied with its legal obligation.

6. Other implications

6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)?

The Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2019-24 will contribute to meeting the priorities in the Corporate Plan, specifically:

- Globally Connected – increasing the supply choice and quality of housing
- Globally Connected – reducing the impact of poverty
- Locally Committed – Protecting our most vulnerable people (including preventing homelessness and helping people who do become homeless)
- Locally Connected – Improve health and wellbeing
- Locally Connected – Reducing health inequalities.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There are no specific risks from the decision to adopt the Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2019-24.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

The adoption of the new Housing and Homelessness Strategy will ensure the council meets its statutory housing duties. It will also provide a formal platform to work with partners to help combat matters of housing and homelessness across Coventry.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

In the development of this strategy the Council have had due regard to the public sector equality duty under s149 of the Equality Act 2010. An Equalities and Consultation Analysis (ECA) Part 1 was carried out during the development of the Draft Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2019-24. This has now been updated for the Final Housing & Homelessness Strategy following the public consultation (Part 2).

In 2017/18 there were 557 households accepted as statutorily homeless. The majority (69%) of statutory homeless households had a dependent child or children and 50% were

female lone parents. 63% of statutory homeless households were White, 17% were Black and 7% were Asian. 26% were under 25, 72% were aged between 25 and 64, and only 2% were aged 65 or over.

The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018 means that the Council now has additional duties to prevent homelessness and to help to secure accommodation for all eligible households, regardless of whether they are in a 'priority need' category. This will increase the help given to single people and those without dependent children, especially single men, who have previously not been in a 'priority need' category.

The results of the formal round of consultation did flag a number of key points in relation to equalities, including:

- It will be important to ensure monitoring of key household characteristics to ensure trends and issues can be tracked and monitored through the Homefinder system and housing decisions.
- The strategy will provide more support to vulnerable citizens and help provide better quality accommodation.
- There are national issues that the council cannot influence that may continue to have negative impacts on vulnerable households – e.g. benefit reform and universal credit.
- The need to make information available in other languages.
- Need to do more to help homeless households into work.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

There are no direct impacts on the environment from the adoption of the Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2019-24.

The Strategy document itself does however include priorities to improve the energy efficiency of existing and new dwellings and promotion of sustainable development principles. It also includes support for the delivery of new housing across the city, which in some cases, may have an impact on the environment. This has however already been considered through the adoption of the Local Plan (2016).

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

The importance of collaborative working with relevant partners and key stakeholders is highlighted throughout the Housing and Homelessness Strategy and supporting action plan.

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Appendices