



Draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Dean Carroll, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets		

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 Approval is sought for an eight-week public and stakeholder consultation on the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy which sets out how Shropshire Council will prioritise the prevention of homelessness and ending of rough sleeping, covering the period 2024 to 2029.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The homelessness strategy is a strategy for:

- preventing homelessness
- securing that sufficient accommodation (of a range of types) is available for people who are or may become homeless
- providing satisfactory support for people who are or may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

- 2.2 The draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy emphasises the importance of early intervention and prevention measures to address homelessness and rough sleeping effectively. It proposes a policy framework that encompasses

various initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness, providing support to at-risk individuals, and ensuring access to suitable accommodation options. In so doing, it will draw upon and build from existing housing policy endeavours.

- 2.3 It aligns with the Shropshire Plan 2022-20251 “Healthy People”, which centres on priorities promoting healthy living, a robust economy, a sustainable environment, and an efficient organisation, all of which are connected to the Strategy.

Healthy People: We will tackle inequalities, including rural inequalities, and poverty in all its forms; providing early support and interventions that reduce risk and enable children, young people, adults and families to achieve their full potential and enjoy life.

- 2.4 The strategy also recognises that homelessness and rough sleeping cannot be tackled by the Council alone. The success of delivering our priorities relies on strong and effective partnership working with other organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. This is essentially the ‘golden thread’ that runs throughout the strategy.

- 2.5 The draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy has four strategic priorities:

A. Develop a community and partnership approach to homeless prevention and early intervention.

The strategy focuses on embedding upstream prevention measures within the Housing Options Service. This includes implementing early intervention programmes, alongside collaborating with housing associations and community partners. We aim to establish new approaches aimed at reducing evictions from both social housing and supported accommodation and ensure adequate access to services.

B. Meet the complex and unique needs of our customers to prevent rough sleeping and repeat homelessness.

We aim to minimise the duration and recurrence of rough sleeping, to ensure that where rough sleeping cannot be prevented, it should be brief, rare, and non-recurring. To achieve this, we will enhance our data collection methods to better understand our customers, adopt a housing first approach, explore the feasibility of an assessment centre and develop strategies to support individuals with complex and multiple needs, ultimately breaking the cycle of repeat homelessness.

C. Develop and improve access to a suitable range of settled, supported and temporary accommodation solutions.

The strategy focuses on minimising and, in the longer term, ending the use of unsuitable B&B accommodation by exploring alternative options. Through collaborative working efforts we want to develop and strengthen relationships and expand and consider the availability of accommodation options and develop a coordinated approach.

D. Deliver an effective and efficient and accessible Housing Options service tailored to meet the diverse needs of our customers.

The strategy will prioritise resources effectively within approved budgets to deliver an efficient housing options service, designed to meet the needs of our customers.

- 2.6 Following an approved consultation period, the updated strategy will be presented to the full council for consideration. This recommendation aligns with Articles of the Constitution, article 4.1 (a) of the full council policy framework, which mandates the review and approval of strategies required by law, ensuring compliance and comprehensive governance.
- 2.7 **Strategy action plan**
The draft Strategy includes an action plan to tackle key issues identified in the review and the objectives contain “Priorities for action” sit together to form the action plan, attached at Appendix II.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 To approve the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, outlined in Appendix I for an 8-week public and stakeholder consultation period.

Report

Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1 While it is a statutory duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to develop and publish a Homelessness Review and Strategy at least every five years, it should be noted that the previous Homelessness Strategy lapsed in 2017. Despite this gap Shropshire Council has remained focussed with various implemented measures and interventions to support individuals experiencing homelessness.

Although these efforts may not have been formally articulated within a strategy document during this period, it's essential to recognise the proactive steps taken by our teams and partners to mitigate the negative impacts of homelessness on individuals, their families, and the wider community.

Moving forward, we are dedicated to ensuring that our approach to homelessness is both robust and formally documented through the development and publication of the upcoming Homelessness Review and Strategy, as mandated by legislation.

- 4.2 The draft “Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping Strategy” serves as a comprehensive policy framework, outlining strategies and initiatives aimed at addressing homelessness and rough sleeping within Shropshire. It enables the council to demonstrate its commitment to addressing these pressing issues and establishes a clear process and policy framework for delivery.
- 4.3 By outlining the advice and assistance that can be provided, the strategy seeks to mitigate risks to the council whilst ensuring effective support for individuals experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping.

- 4.4 The consultation will be conducted through various channels to ensure broad engagement and inclusivity. Firstly, the draft strategy will be publicised on the dedicated consultation page within the Council's website, ensuring accessibility to all interested parties. Furthermore, active engagement will be pursued with key stakeholders, to include those who participate in the Shropshire Homelessness Partnership Forum, the Social Housing Operations Forum and other relevant groups to solicit their valuable insights and perspectives. Moreover, the strategy will be cascaded to head of services across the local authority, ensuring it reaches relevant departments and colleagues across services. Additionally, efforts will be made to reach out to parish councils, recognising their integral role in local governance and community representation. By adopting a multi-faceted approach, the consultation strategy aims to ensure transparency, inclusivity and meaningful participation from diverse stakeholders, including hard to reach groups, thereby ensuring a fair and comprehensive consultation process.
- 4.5 An Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) initial screening record has been completed; this is at Appendix IV. Following the end of the public consultation on the draft "Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping" strategy, a second screening ESHIA will be carried out, to take into account of feedback received.
- 4.6 Homelessness and poor or insecure housing have adverse effects on the overall health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Housing inequality will also have an impact on other factors such as income, education, health and wellbeing, life experiences, behaviours and choices, along with relationships with friends and family. There is a likely positive impact accordingly across the nine Protected Characteristic groupings as set out in the Equality Act 2010. This is particularly with regard to Age, Disability and Sex and intersectionality across these groupings.
- 4.7 There will also be anticipated positive impact for women with multiple and complex needs who are struggling to escape domestic abuse situations, and for vulnerable young people, including care leavers, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and may have also suffered trauma and hardship within their lives, potentially leading to an increased use of alcohol and illegal substances and problems with mental ill health. This grouping may be at risk of exploitation, including involvement in county lines.
- 4.8 The initial screening process ahead of the proposed consultation has also indicated likely low to medium positive impacts for those individuals and households who are considered at risk of social exclusion. In Shropshire, this includes those whom we may regard as being vulnerable, either by virtue of their circumstances as individuals or by virtue of their circumstances as households, for example, households living in fuel poverty and refugee households. In our definition of vulnerable individuals, we would also include people who experience rough sleeping, particularly over a long period. The Council will seek to maximise positive equality impacts for others we may consider to be vulnerable, including people fleeing hate crime and people with disabilities including hidden disabilities such as Crohn's disease, and neurodiverse conditions. Social Inclusion is not an Equality Act category, rather representing our efforts as a Council to consider the needs of households in Shropshire and the circumstances in which they may find themselves.

- 4.9 Being able to access an affordable dwelling which meets a household's needs is essential to health and well-being. Providing a house which is affordable, of good quality and has security of tenure to a family threatened with homelessness allows them to create a home for their children and reduces the worry of a 'no fault' eviction or of being unable to afford an increase in rent; and supported accommodation allows individuals to settle and find structure, enabling them to focus on a journey of recovery and integration back into society. In regard to homelessness, people who experience rough sleeping over a long period are more likely to die young than the general population. Rough sleepers also experience some of the most severe health inequalities. Often rough sleepers also have mental ill health, substance misuse, and physical health needs and may have experienced trauma.
- 4.10 There is therefore an anticipated impact of a fundamental improvement in societal issues through: a reduction in presentations at Accident and Emergency departments; a reduction in accessing services for mental health and substance misuse use; and a reduction in crime and ASB related to rough sleeping, homelessness and the lack of suitable supported accommodation for vulnerable young people and for the adults over 25 whom we are seeking to reach.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Approving this draft strategy for an eight-week public and stakeholder consultation has no direct financial implications.
- 5.2 The Council is in receipt of Government funding, including Homelessness Prevention Grant and Rough Sleeper Initiative funding, to support the delivery of services to prevent and relive homelessness.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1 Whilst the draft strategy is not expected to have any direct effect on energy and fuel consumption, renewable energy generation, carbon offsetting or climate change adaptation, a range of indirect effects may require attention, for example:
- More extreme weather events resulting from climate change are likely to generate a surge in numbers of people suffering displacement and homelessness because of rising costs and ill health.
 - Investment in preventative measures which deliver energy and cost savings (such as those already being managed the Council's Affordable Warmth team) may help to mitigate the impact of climate change for vulnerable households.
 - There may be opportunities to develop community funded renewable energy schemes and sustainable transport options to help reduce energy costs of temporary shelters and fuel costs.

7. Background

- 7.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to carry out a review of homelessness every five years and to formulate and publish a strategy based on the results of that review.

7.2 The strategy will involve a targeted consultation approach, identifying key stakeholders, community representations, and experts through open forums, surveys and direct engagements. This inclusive process aims to gather valuable input. Following this, a thorough review will be undertaken, incorporating received feedback to refine the draft strategy, ensuring alignment with community needs. The aim is to present the post-consultation updated strategy to Council for approval in its final draft form.

8. Conclusions

8.1 The draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy demonstrates the critical importance of early intervention and prevention measures in effectively addressing homelessness and rough sleeping. It requires collaborative efforts with key partners, stakeholders and input from the public. Therefore, we are requesting to initiate a period of public consultation to gather diverse perspectives and insights. We firmly believe that addressing homelessness and rough sleeping is a shared responsibility that necessitates collective action and engagement from all stakeholders.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member: All

Appendices

Appendix I: Draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for consultation

Appendix II: Action Plan

Appendix III: Executive Summary Homelessness Review

Appendix IV: Equality, Social, Health Impact Assessment