

# Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy



**Report to:** Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 4 February 2025

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor David Carter, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing

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## Executive Summary

- A** This report provides a final version of the Harlow Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Framework 2025 to 2030. This final version takes on board feedback from Scrutiny Committee on the 15 October 2024 and the public consultation exercise.
- B** Provides a draft copy of the Harlow Homelessness and Rough Sleeping framework 2025 – 2030, along with a summary of the public consultation carried out.

## Recommended that:

- A** Scrutiny acknowledges the final version of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and summary of the completed public consultation (attached as appendices 1 and 2 to the report).

## Reason for decision

- A** It is a statutory requirement that the Council publishes a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The existing publication expires in April 2025.

## Background

1. Under section 1(3), (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities have a duty to review and publish their homelessness strategy on at least a 5-yearly basis.

2. The strategy must be based on an analysis of current and future needs and services, placed in the context of the current housing market, and must look to the potential challenges for the next five years.
3. The strategy has the overarching objective of eliminating rough sleeping and providing a homelessness and housing needs service that focuses on the prevention of homelessness, with early intervention being key to achieving this. It identifies our priorities for tackling homelessness in Harlow over the next 5 years and beyond, with partnership working being at its heart.
4. The strategy sits within the corporate priority of “Transform Harlow’s Housing”.
5. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 to 2024 generated significant levels of success, including the partnerships we have in place to deliver services to homeless people, the ability to access accommodation within the private rented sector, improved services to those surviving domestic abuse, transforming the Housing Allocation Policy to focus on local homes for local people. In addition, it helped us to secure the delivery of Bromley Cottages and the ongoing support for Streets 2 Homes in managing rough sleeping numbers.

## **New Framework**

6. Whilst the new strategy looks to build on these areas of success, we have identified the following overarching key priorities:
  - a) Increase homelessness prevention work.
  - b) Eliminate rough sleeping completely.
  - c) Access to suitable accommodation and support, including temporary accommodation, accessing the private sector, supported housing and homeownership.

There also continues to be several challenges and emerging themes which include:

- a) Affordability issues and cost of living crisis.
- b) The gap between Local Housing Allowance and rent levels.
- c) The increased use of housing stock in Harlow by London Boroughs
- d) Tackling the difficulties faced by those with mental health issues, in accessing and maintaining accommodation.
- e) Tackling difficulties in accessing the private rented sector.
- f) Managing pathways for care leavers and migrants.
- g) Lack of support services to refer into, which would help prevent homelessness and increase sustainability chances.
- h) Lack of specialist supported accommodation, especially for young people and those with complex needs.
- i) International crisis and supporting Afghan and Ukrainian refugees.

- j) Recruitment issues, with difficulties in recruiting staff with the right skill and experience into the sector.

## **Consultation**

7. It is important to involve service users and stakeholders in the development of this strategy, and so a variety of methods have been employed to gauge feedback on proposals.
8. A team workshop was held with officers during September 2024, to review internal challenges and seek input from those closest to delivering our services.
9. A stakeholder consultation event took place on the 9 September 2024, which included a range of partners from both the statutory and voluntary services. This included health partners, drug and alcohol services, rough sleeping services, mental health, housing, support, young people, integration services, probation and the Department for Work and Pensions.
10. A Member workshop took place on the 24 September in advance of the public consultation which provided an overview of the current demand and resources, key emerging issues, challenges that Harlow residents face in relation to homelessness and key priorities for action. This workshop provided members with an opportunity to comment ahead of the planned public consultation.
11. A 6-week public consultation exercise closed on 16 December 2024. The survey covered areas of key challenges and priorities for action. There were 41 responses to this public consultation, 95% of whom were Harlow residents. A summary of the feedback is included as Appendix 2. Overall, respondents were supportive of the three key priorities that are set out in the strategy, with 90% agreeing these were the right priorities to drive the council's work. Respondents identified affordability as the biggest challenge for local people, with concern that local housing was too expensive for those in low income.
12. This feedback from public consultation has been used to shape the final version of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy.
13. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper strategy will be presented to cabinet on the 13 March 2025 and if approved will come into force with effect from the 1 April 2025.

## **Implications**

### **Equalities and Diversity**

An Equality Impact will be completed and provided for the Cabinet meeting of 13 March 2025. There are no adverse impacts on any groups.

**Climate Change**

No climate change implications have been identified

**Finance**

No direct financial implications arising from this report.

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**Governance**

None, this report is for Member acknowledgement and in preparation for a cabinet decision.

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**Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Harlow Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 2030

Appendix 2 – Public Consultation Survey Response Summary

**Background Papers**

None

**Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

None.