

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030



Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	19 March 2025
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor David Carter, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing
Lead Officer:	Cara Stevens, Assistant Director – Housing Operations (People) (01279) 446490
Contributing Officer:	Lisa Whiting, Housing Options and Advice Manager (01279) 446371
Key Decision:	No
Forward Plan:	Forward Plan Number I017424
Call In:	This item is subject to call in procedures
Corporate Missions:	Transform Harlow's housing Protect our communities
Wards Affected:	None specifically

Executive Summary

A Councils are required by law to have an up-to-date Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and Tenancy Strategy. This report provides a final version of the Harlow Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2030. This final version takes on board feedback from Scrutiny Committee on the 15 October 2024 and 4 February 2025, along with workshops with both internal and external services and the results of the public consultation.

Recommended that:

A Cabinet approves the final version of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy as shown in Appendix A, to take effect from the 1 April 2025, along with the Tenancy Strategy and note the summary of the completed public consultation.

- B** Delegation is given to the Assistant Director – Housing Operations (People), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to make minor amendments to the strategy as required.

Reason for decision

- A** It is a statutory requirement that the Council publishes a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The existing publication expires at the end of March 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 is a central part of the council's missions to 'transform Harlow's housing' and 'protect our communities'.
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 Allocations Scheme (Allocations Policy) to focus on local homes for local people. In addition, it helped the council to secure the delivery of Bromley Cottages and the ongoing support for Streets2Homes in the council's aim to reduce the numbers of those people sleeping rough with the aim to eliminate rough sleeping in Harlow.
6. In line with the Localism Act 2011, Local Authorities are required to publish a tenancy strategy which sets out the matters that registered providers of social housing within its district are to have regard in formulating policies in relation to:
 - (i) the kind of tenancies they grant
 - (ii) the circumstances in which they will grant a tenancy of a particular kind
 - (iii) where they grant tenancies for a term, the length of term that will be offered
 - (iv) the circumstances in which they will grant a further tenancy at the end of an existing tenancy.

7. Following a review of the Tenancy Strategy with Registered Providers in Harlow, no fundamental changes have been made to the existing strategy, with Harlow Council continuing to offer lifetime tenancies. A copy of the Tenancy Strategy is set out in Appendix C.

New Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

8. Whilst the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy looks to build on these areas of success, we have identified the following overarching key priorities:
 - Increase homelessness prevention work;
 - Eliminate rough sleeping completely;
 - Improve access to suitable accommodation and support, including temporary accommodation, accessing the private sector, supported housing and home ownership.

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

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

Consultation

9. 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.
10. A team workshop was held with officers during September 2024, to review internal challenges and seek input from those closest to delivering our services.
11. 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.

12. An all-member workshop took place on the 24 September 2024 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.
13. 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 B. 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.
14. This feedback from public consultation has been used to shape the final version of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy.

Taking the strategy forward

15. Once the updated strategy is approved, an annual delivery action plan will be established, which will list a number of actions which will aim to ensure we deliver the vision, priorities and objectives within the Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy, this will include improved data recording to ensure all interventions and preventions are recorded. The delivery action plan will be discussed and monitored through the Harlow Homeless Partnership, with the key themes identified for joint working being prevention, intervention, recovery and partnerships. Engagement of all stakeholders will be key to the success of the new strategy with effective delivery being essential for the targeting of resources and grant funding.

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

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report and in the council's 2025/26 Budget, increased investment has been made available to support the relevant council teams as well as the direct costs of temporary accommodation.

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Governance

The production of this strategy complies with section 1(3), (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002, once approved the council will have reviewed and published a homelessness and rough sleeper prevention strategy against the required 5-yearly basis. The strategy will need to be kept under review.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Harlow Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 2030.

Appendix B – Public Consultation Survey Response Summary

Appendix C – Tenancy Strategy

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.