

## Cabinet – 22 March 2023

### Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 to 2028

**Portfolio:** Councillor Ali – Customer

**Related portfolios:** Councillor Elson – Children’s Services  
Councillor Flint – Health and Well-being  
Councillor Pedley – Adult Social Care

**Service:** Children’s and Customer

**Wards:** All

**Key decision:** Yes

**Forward plan:** Yes

#### 1. Aim

1.1 To ensure that the Council meets its statutory requirement to have in place a strategy (reviewed on a maximum five-year cycle) setting out the authority’s plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support is available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

#### 2. Summary

2.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires that all local authorities review and publish

a revised Homelessness Strategy every five years. The last Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 21 March 2018. This report provides a revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (“the Strategy”) for the period 2023 to 2028 at **Appendix A**. This is a key decision as the Strategy has a significant impact on homelessness service provision across all wards of the borough.

2.2 Endorsed by the Walsall Homelessness Steering Group, the Strategy enables the Council and its partners to deliver a coordinated approach to tackling homelessness in the borough for the next five years and sets out the strategic objectives and actions to be delivered to prevent homelessness and support those who are homeless. The Strategy has been produced, following the development of a Needs Review (**Appendix B**) together with substantial consultation with Council staff, local third sector partners and providers and service users. Underpinned by the action plan the five strategic drivers of the Strategy are;

1. Preventing homelessness

2. Meeting the needs of young people
3. Securing accommodation for people who are homeless
4. Supporting people who are, or have been, homeless
5. Ending rough sleeping

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 That the Walsall Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 to 2028 (**Appendix A**) be approved.
- 3.2 That Cabinet delegates authority to make any future amendments to the Walsall Homelessness Strategy 2023 to 2028 to the Director of Customer Engagement in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer.

### **4. Report detail - know**

#### ***Context***

- 4.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy, which must then be reviewed and republished every five years. Walsall's strategy is now due for renewal. The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2018 placed a requirement on local authorities to retitle their strategies as a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and include relevant actions. The development of the Strategy must be underpinned by a comprehensive Homelessness Review (**Appendix B**) which must clearly identify current services, gaps in provision, and provide clear recommendations about any changes required to help reduce homelessness in the future. These recommendations must then be translated into a new strategy and associated action plan.
- 4.2 The Walsall Homelessness Review (**Appendix B**) covers a three-year data period from April 2019 to March 2022 and considers:
  - a. the levels and likely future levels of homelessness in the borough;
  - b. the activities which are carried out for the prevention of homelessness or securing accommodation for people who are homeless
  - c. the resources available to the housing authority
  - d. recommendations for future service provision
- 4.3 The headline findings from the Review were as follows:
  - Between April 2019 and March 2022, the Council assessed and accepted a statutory duty to assist 2,738 households. In the latter two years 827 and 824 applicants were supported by way of an accepted duty which for each year accounted for around half of those who approached the local authority where homelessness, or threat of, were the causal factor behind their approach. The vast majority found not to be owed a duty received advice;

- The main causes of homelessness in Walsall are broadly similar as a percentage share to both the regional and national picture, with '*Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate*' and the *ending of a private rented tenancy* combining to take half the share at 29% and 20% respectively;
- Applicants aged 18 to 34 years (head of household) represent nearly 60% of households owed a duty. In line with national trends the most common age group in households owed a duty are also aged 25 to 34, however Walsall has an over representation of persons aged 18 to 24;
- Households from Black African/Caribbean/Black British households are overrepresented in homeless presentations at 9% of households compared to Census 2021 representation at 5%. However, comparing 2019/20 to 2021/22 the share of households from Black African/Caribbean/Black British households reduced by 2% (from 11% to 9%). Using the same comparison dates Asian/Asian British households increased in presentations by 4% (from 10% to 14%);
- Single person households make up around 55% of presentations in Walsall that are subsequently assessed as owed a duty, which is slightly above the regional share of 53%. Women are more likely to experience homelessness than men, largely because of their high prevalence of being the head of household as a single parent with dependent children;
- Comparing 2016 and 2017 when rough sleeper numbers identified in the annual count peaked in Walsall at 26 and 20 respectively, the Council has made significant and demonstrable impacts in tackling rough sleeping, although the latest 2022 annual rough sleeper count of 8 offers a degree of caution against counts of 4 for both 2020 and 2021;
- The number of households identified with support needs has increased over the last three years rising to 53% in the last financial year. Around two-thirds of the support needs were centred on the needs of mental health, support for young people and persons at risk or experiencing domestic abuse;
- From the focus groups held, overall service users were complimentary about the homelessness services provided by both the Council and its partners.

4.4 The findings and conclusions from the Review have fed directly into the revised Strategy and the Action Plan. Most notably two of the current strategic objectives have been replaced with two new objectives:

1. Meeting the needs of young people, and;
2. Ending rough sleeping

The five objectives are outlined below together with key actions underpinning the objectives as detailed in the Action Plan:

Objective One: *Preventing Homelessness.*

- Continue to improve joint working with other public bodies, for example promoting the use of Duty to Refer and developing specific client focussed protocols
- Build better relationships with PRS landlords to prevent homelessness prior to the point of crisis
- Continue to enhance housing and homelessness related information, for example supporting the development of the information hubs

Objective Two: *Meeting the needs of young people*

- Deliver upstream housing information targeted at young people.
- Enhance affordable housing options and housing access for young people
- Ensure care leavers have access to accommodation that meets their needs

Objective Three: *Securing accommodation for people who are homeless*

- Increase the housing offer for people who are homeless, for example by developing incentives to encourage private landlords to house people who are homeless and further developing incentives for tenants to downsize their home where they are severely under-occupying their current home
- Enhance temporary accommodation provision tailored to meet need, for example by expanding the dispersed temporary accommodation portfolio
- Ensure the Housing Nominations Agreement and Housing Allocations Policy are updated and fit for purpose

Objective Four: *Supporting people who are, or have been homeless*

- Ensure wherever possible people are supported to remain in their home, for example by reviewing tenancy support schemes and the impact of personal housing plans
- Make best use of national and local funding for tackling homelessness for example by expanding the local Change Into Action scheme
- Deliver Walsall's safe accommodation offer
- Deliver resettlement support services for refugee communities

Objective Five: *Ending rough sleeping*

- Maintain the impact legacy of Housing First and continue to deliver a like service going forward
- Embrace and utilise the opportunities outlined in the Government's *Ending Rough Sleeping for Good Strategy*

## ***Homelessness Governance***

- 4.5 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Steering Group ("the Group") will oversee the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. The Group is responsible for annually monitoring and suggesting changes to the Action Plan, to ensure it remains relevant and fit for purpose. The Group will be chaired

by a senior representative either from a partner organisation or the Council. Membership will consist of senior council officers responsible for adult social care, Children's services, Public Health, Housing, representatives from the voluntary sector, and from the four largest housing associations operating within Walsall (WHG, GreensquareAccord, Watmos, and Longhurst). Additional members/organisations will be added at the Group's discretion.

- 4.6 In addition to the Group meetings, the Homelessness Forum will also provide an overview of progress made to the delivery of the Action Plan. The Forum meets every year to comment on the levels of homelessness, to promote activities being carried out to prevent homelessness, to secure accommodation and provide support, and to explain how resources are being used to tackle homelessness. The Forum will also be a vehicle for inviting interested parties to participate in Strategy delivery. Membership of the Forum will include all agencies represented at the Group, plus any other public authority, voluntary organisations and any other interested persons (including those with lived experience).

### ***Council Plan priorities***

- 4.7 The broad range of health, well-being and broader socio-economic inequalities brought about by people effected by homelessness are well documented. If the strategy is delivered successfully then in particular positive determinants will be achieved with regard to the following Council Priorities:
- *Economic - enable greater local opportunities for all people, communities and businesses.* Homelessness remains a key barrier to accessing employment, and so the proposed actions for prevention and relief of homelessness can help increase employment prospects
  - *People - encourage our residents to lead more active, fulfilling and independent lives to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing.* Preventing homelessness and providing advice and support in maintaining a tenancy can promote independence and can improve mental and physical health and wellbeing
  - *Children - have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.* Preventing homelessness for families with children and enabling those who are homeless to secure appropriate accommodation will provide a secure environment from which to grow up and build a stable life
  - *Communities - Empower our communities so that they feel they are connected and belong in Walsall, creating safe and healthy places whilst building a strong sense of community.* Ensuring that households have secure and affordable housing that meets their needs will empower and enable them to invest in their community and build a sense of community.

### ***Risk management***

- 4.8 If the strategy is not approved, the Council will not comply with the Homelessness Act 2002. Whilst unlikely, by not approving the Strategy the Council could be open to judicial review in respect of decisions made under 1996 Housing Act (as amended).

### ***Financial implications***

- 4.9 There are no specific financial implications directly associated with the Strategy. The priorities contained within the Strategy will be funded through existing budgets, grant income and future grant bids. It will also be supplemented by partners' resources committed to their own activities that contribute to the achievement of the Strategy objectives. The adoption of the Strategy is likely to maximise the amount of housing related external funding the Council may achieve. Where necessary any projects requiring additional funding will be reported to Cabinet in separate reports in compliance with the Procurement and Contract Regulations.

### ***Legal implications***

- 4.10 The Homelessness Act (2002) requires local authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy and action plan, which then must be reviewed, revised and republished every five years. In full legislative compliance, the revised strategy has been informed by a comprehensive Homelessness Review. The review itself has incorporated the requirements as set out by the current Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.

### ***Procurement /Social Value***

- 4.11 Any actions in the Strategy that may have procurement implications would be the subject of separate reports to Cabinet where necessary. Any future related procurement would look to maximise social value benefits.

### ***Property implications***

- 4.12 Any actions in the Strategy that may have property implications would be the subject of separate reports to Cabinet where necessary.

### ***Health and wellbeing implications***

- 4.13 The broad range of health, well-being and wider socio-economic inequalities brought about by people effected by homelessness are well documented. The prevention of homelessness and support to affected households provided by the strategy helps to ensure the Council meets its objective of a Marmot Council and provides a robust platform to galvanise resources to provide the security of a stable home and healthier environment from which to build a stable, inclusive and active life.

### ***Staffing implications***

4.14 Within the Action Plan there are no direct staffing implications.

### ***Reducing Inequalities***

4.15 The implications for reducing inequalities have been taken into account and assessed as set out in a detailed Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) at **Appendix C**. This shows that there will be no adverse effects imposed by the Strategy on any of the Protected Characteristics. The EQIA records a positive impact on the Protected Characteristics of Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Race and Sex and a neutral impact for the Protected Characteristics of Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Religion or belief and Sexual Orientation.

### ***Climate Change***

4.16 There are no specific climate change implications contained within this report.

### ***Consultation***

4.17 It is fully recognised that the delivery of the strategy requires multi-agency cross working and in response to this the strategy has been formulated in conjunction with an extensive programme of consultation involving both service providers and service users. For the former the consultation has captured the views and input from housing providers, internal homeless services, Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Public Health together with regional providers. Officers have also engaged with an ongoing programme of consultation with a number of internal and external working groups including:

- Self-Neglect Group
- Walsall Insight Group
- Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership
- Walsall Housing Working Group
- Homelessness Steering Group
- Adult Safeguarding Board
- Resilient Communities Group
- A meeting of voluntary sector partners organised by One Walsall

In most cases these working groups contain a cross section of staff and third sector stakeholders including those from different ethnic, age, gender, and disability related groups.

4.18 The consultation has also involved extensive service user consultation through a series of focus groups, one to one interviews and the workshop held at the 2022 Walsall Homelessness Conference. The focus groups targeted young people (including care leavers), women impacted by domestic abuse, a more generic group of people who had experienced homelessness and one group

centred on newcomers. One to one interviews were also undertaken with people who had previously experienced rough sleeping and had benefitted from the Housing First programme. A previous housing survey targeted at young people has also fed into the strategy review.

## **5. Decide**

- 5.1 A 'do nothing' option is not viable as the Homelessness Act 2002 requires that all local authorities review and publish a revised Homelessness Strategy every five years. The last strategy was approved by Cabinet on 21 March 2018.

## **6. Respond**

- 6.1 It is proposed that Cabinet approve the revised strategy (**Appendix A**) and that the strategy take effect from 01 April 2023. The Strategy will be implemented as outlined in sections 4.5 and 4.6.

## **7. Review**

- 7.1 The outputs will be regularly monitored as part of the quarterly statutory returns as well as the governance structures as outlined in sections 4.5 and 4.6.

### **Appendices:**

- A: Revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy**
- B: Homelessness Needs Review**
- C: Equality Impact Assessment**

### **Background papers**

None

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