

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Monday, 23 December 2019
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Director of Locality and Customer Services - Sarah Hollamby and Director of Corporate Services – Graham Ebers.
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser.

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

To obtain Executive approval for the adoption of Wokingham Borough Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024.

The impacts of homelessness can be devastating for individuals and families. Homelessness can affect everything - health, education and employment. Homelessness can have long term consequences for those affected. Tackling homelessness and reducing rough sleeping are a key priority for the Council.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive approve Wokingham Borough Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024 sits under the framework Housing Strategy 2019-2024, which centres on four key themes: meeting need, supporting residents, improving quality and enhancing lives.

In light of the duties placed upon local authorities to prepare and adopt a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and associated Action Plan, which takes into account local conditions, Government impetus and key legislation (including the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017), the Council has prepared a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024 and Action Plan (included as Enclosure 1). An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is included as Enclosure 2.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024 has four key priorities:

1. Early intervention and prevention.
2. Working towards ending rough sleeping and tackling hidden homelessness.
3. Building more affordable homes.
4. Supporting our vulnerable residents.

Members, Officers, stakeholders and the public have had the opportunity to respond to our consultation on the draft strategy. The consultation was sent out across the Council,

to all Members, the Parish and Town Councils, the RP Partnership, TLIP, MHCLG, Homes England, partners and agencies and local charities. It was also publicised via a press release and our social media, and briefly picked up by BBC Radio Berkshire.

We received 69 responses in total, of which 66 were from residents. 96% agreed or partially agreed with the four priorities selected for the strategy. 94% agreed or partially agreed that the strategy addresses the key issues they identify as a priority, including prevention, working with vulnerable residents and engaging with rough sleepers. A separate consultation response was also received from Wokingham in Need.

The strategy aims to deliver on a variety of different actions and approaches to address the four key priorities, including supporting the development of a night shelter in the borough, working with long-term rough sleepers, looking closely at the hidden homeless in the borough and reducing our use of emergency and temporary accommodation for the homeless.

The table below shows homelessness presentations and acceptances from 2011/12 to 2018/19.

<b>Year</b>	<b>11/12</b>	<b>12/13</b>	<b>13/14</b>	<b>14/15</b>	<b>15/16</b>	<b>16/17</b>	<b>17/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>
<b>Presented</b>	50	81	81	141	236	196	180	248
<b>Accepted</b>	13	20	28	70	102	111	87	91

The percentage increase in presentations from 2011/12 to 2018/19 is 396%. The percentage increase in acceptances from 2011/12 to 2018/19 is 600%.

Between April 2018 and March 2019, Wokingham Borough Council saw a total of 248 homelessness presentations (148 families and 100 singles). This is a significant increase from 180 (129 families and 51 singles) homeless presentations in 2017/18 prior to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. This is an increase of 37.7% in overall homelessness presentations; a 14.7% increase in presentations from families and a 96% increase in presentations from singles.

From January 2019 to June 2019, the Council received 62 homelessness applications from singles and 22 of these applications were accepted. During this same period, 17 singles were offered B&B accommodation (10 accepted, 7 refused).

The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, including the Duty to Refer, has had a significant impact on the numbers of households presenting to the Council as homeless. The Council has seen a particular increase in single household presentations, linked to the numbers of referrals received under the Duty to Refer from other public sector organisations.

The main reasons why households declared themselves as homeless in the first two quarters of 2018/19 are recorded as 1) end of assured shorthold tenancy, 2) family eviction, 3) domestic abuse and 4) relationship breakdown.

Our annual rough sleeper count (a single night snapshot taken each November) for 2019 was 10. The figure from our 2018 count was 7, and in 2015 the figure was 14. Of the 7 individuals recorded in 2018, 6 were male, and 1 was female. 5 were UK nationals and 2 were EU non-UK nationals. All 7 were aged 26 and over. The borough rough

sleeping rate (per 10,000 households) in 2018 was 1.1. Of the 7 recorded rough sleepers in the Council's 2018 count, 2 were undergoing relationship breakdown, 1 had lost employment leading to eviction from an AST and 1 had been asked to leave by their family (3 are not recorded).

In 2018/19, we recorded 30 households without dependents who approached the Council for assistance as having no fixed abode. 5 of these households were verified rough sleepers. So far in 2019/20, we have recorded 18 households without dependents who approached the Council for assistance as having no fixed abode. 2 of these households were verified as rough sleepers.

Between April 2018 and March 2019, the Council spent £255,359 on emergency accommodation. Between January 2019 and June 2019, B&B accommodation was offered to 35 households (18 families and 17 single households). The Council is working towards reducing the use of emergency accommodation and the associated costs.

This report seeks agreement for the adoption of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024 and the associated Action Plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Council's current Homelessness Strategy covers the period 2014-19. In 2014, we set out four key priorities:

1. To help people keep a roof over their heads
2. To help people to find a settled home
3. The housing crisis – our statutory duty
4. To create opportunities for vulnerable residents

Since 2014, we have used creative solutions, innovative thinking and partnership working to support people facing homelessness, focusing particularly on families and cyclical homelessness. We have continued to offer a range of support to vulnerable residents, using early intervention and prevention methodologies wherever practical. The Housing Needs Service, Benefits & Welfare Team and Tenant Services at the Council have continued to work provide advice and assistance to our residents to sustain tenancies and support those with housing issues.

The Council has a duty to carry out a review of homelessness and homelessness service provision for their area and, in consultation with local partners and stakeholders, formulate and publish a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy based on the results of that review, at least every five years. The Council carried out a Homelessness Review in 2018 and has prepared the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024 based on those findings.

MHCLG requires local authorities to adopt updated Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies by winter 2019. MHCLG has agreed to an extension of this deadline to January 2020 for Wokingham Borough Council.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024 sits under the framework Housing Strategy 2019-2024, which centres on four key themes: meeting need, supporting residents, improving quality and enhancing lives.

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The Homelessness Reduction Act, which came into force on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018, amended the Housing Act 1996 and placed new duties on local authorities.

The key new provisions are:

- An extension of the 'threatened with homelessness' period from 28 days to 56 days.
- A duty to prevent homelessness for up to 56 days for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need.
- A duty to relieve homelessness for up to 56 days for all eligible homeless applicants, regardless of priority need.

- A duty to consider all applicants and to agree a personalised housing plan (PHP) which will be reviewed on a regular basis.
- A duty on public services to refer to the local authority.
- A duty for local authorities to provide free advice on homelessness, preventing homelessness and people's rights.

The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy launched in August 2018 and committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminating it altogether by 2027. Other national key drivers of change include Licensing of Homes in Multiple Occupation 2018, Social Housing Green Paper 2018 and Tenant Fees Act 2019.

### **BUSINESS CASE (Including Options and Evidence of Need)**

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From January 2019 to June 2019, the Council received 62 homelessness applications from singles and 22 of these applications were accepted. During this same period, 17 singles were offered B&B accommodation (10 accepted, 7 refused).

The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, including the Duty to Refer, has had a significant impact on the numbers of households presenting to the Council as homeless. The Council has seen a particular increase in single household presentations, linked to the numbers of referrals received under the Duty to Refer from other public sector organisations.

The main reasons why households declared themselves as homeless in the first two quarters of 2018/19 are recorded as 1) end of assured shorthold tenancy, 2) family eviction, 3) domestic abuse and 4) relationship breakdown.

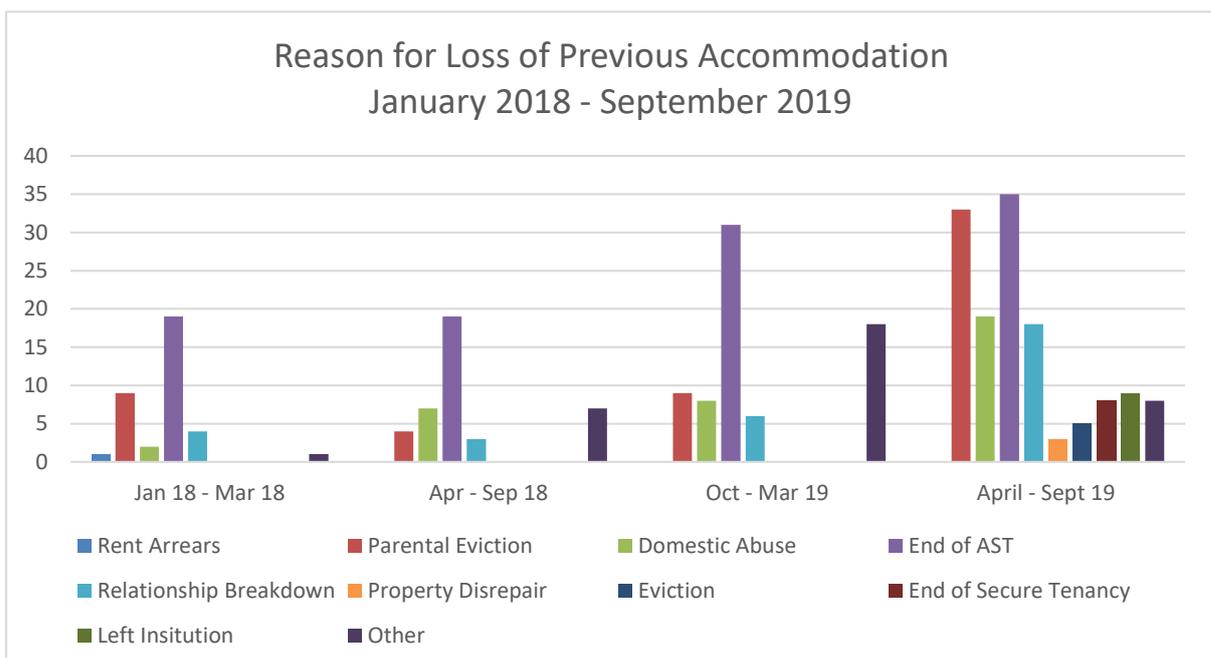
Our annual rough sleeper count (a single night snapshot taken each November) for 2019 was 10. The figure from our 2018 count was 7, and in 2015 the figure was 14. Of the 7 individuals recorded in 2018, 6 were male, and 1 was female. 5 were UK nationals and 2 were EU non-UK nationals. All 7 were aged 26 and over. The borough rough sleeping rate (per 10,000 households) in 2018 was 1.1. Of the 7 recorded rough sleepers in the Council's 2018 count, 2 were undergoing relationship breakdown, 1 had lost employment leading to eviction from an AST and 1 had been asked to leave by their family (3 are not recorded).

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The chart below shows the main reasons why households have declared themselves as homeless in the first two quarters of 2018/19. Assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs) ending is the biggest reason, followed closely by family evictions, then domestic abuse and relationship breakdown.



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Berkshire Women's Aid's helpline received 765 calls from Wokingham residents in 2018/19. In June 2018, St Mungo's reported that 9 in 10 rough sleepers need support for mental health, drug and/or alcohol issues. There are an estimated 6,000 homeless veterans in the UK, according to figures compiled in 2018.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024 has four key priorities:

1. Early intervention and prevention.

This priority focuses on being innovative and creative in stopping residents from experiencing housing crisis. The Action Plan contains targets for the delivery of advice and assistance, for example, that 100% of households presenting as homeless on the day to be offered an initial assessment that same day, or the following working day if presenting outside of office hours, regardless of whether or not the applicant has priority need.

We will be embedding the requirements and principles of the Homelessness Reduction Act, and supporting our private rented sector residents by setting up a Landlord Forum in the Borough. We will continue to offer the Rent in Advance/Deposit Loan Scheme, and look at ways of working with private rented sector landlords to improve standards and tenancy sustainment.

We will also be mapping housing pathways for key vulnerable groups, including care leavers and for specialist housing.

2. Working towards ending rough sleeping and tackling hidden homelessness.

We will support the development of a night shelter in the Borough and continue our outreach work with rough sleepers and transient communities.

We will develop a clearer understanding of the quantity and types of hidden homelessness in the Borough, and gather strong intelligence to evidence the current rough sleeping position in the Borough. We will explore options for the development of a Housing First (or similar) scheme in the Borough, with the aim of enabling entrenched rough sleepers and those with complex circumstances to sustain homes suited to their needs.

### 3. Building more affordable homes.

We want to ensure that the right homes are built in the right locations for those in most housing need. We will be carrying out work to analyse future demand for affordable homes in the Borough and refreshing the Council's Allocations Policy.

We will work towards a target of 1000 homes, over a 4 year period with a 5% return.

### 4. Supporting our vulnerable residents.

We will be continuing to work with statutory agencies to ensure that the Homelessness Reduction Act duty to refer is met, and working with none statutory agencies to adopt a similar process. We will also be enhancing the digital advice and guidance available to residents via the Council's website and other sources.

We want to ensure that vulnerable residents have access to advice and training to maximise tenancy sustainment, employment opportunities, independent living and wellbeing. We also want to make sure that resident and service user feedback is informing service delivery and improvement.

### Next Steps

If the Executive approve Wokingham Borough Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024, the strategy and action plan will be considered at Full Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020. We hope to adopt the new strategy by the end of January 2020.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	-	-	-
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	-	-	-

Following Financial Year (Year 3)	-	-	-
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### **Other Financial Information**

The combined starting budget for homeless families and Housing Needs for 2019/20 was £366,719. It is important to note that these budgets are subject to review and grant funding, and may alter as a result.

Financial approval for individual projects and proposals contained within the strategy and action plan will be sought as needed.

### **Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation**

Members, Officers, stakeholders and the public have had the opportunity to respond to our consultation on the draft strategy. The consultation was made available via the Council's website between 9 September and 27 September, with associated press release, invitations to respond and social media push.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken. An initial equality impact assessment has been carried out and is included as Enclosure 2.

### **Resourcing and Timeline for Next Steps**

If agreed, the strategy and action plan will be considered at Full Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020.

### **Timeline for Review and Evaluation**

Progress against this Strategy and Action Plan is principally overseen by the Council's Place Commissioning Team, Housing Needs Team and Affordable Housing Implementation Group (Member and Officer meeting).

Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be available to view via our website (paper copies available on request), and will be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as required.

The Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan is intended to be a working document, which will be subject to continuous review and updating to ensure it is responsive and current. We will update and publish our Action Plan annually.

### **List of Background Papers**

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024 – Enclosure 1.  
 Equality Impact Assessment – Enclosure 2.  
 Homelessness Review 2018.

<b>Contact</b> Victoria Higgins	<b>Service</b> Place Commissioning
<b>Telephone</b> Tel: 0118 974 6562	<b>Email</b> victoria.higgins@wokingham.gov.uk

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