

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Executive Director Public Health and Communities

TITLE: Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| REPORT TO: | CABINET |
| Date of Meeting | 20 September 2023 |
| Cabinet Member Portfolio | Public Health and Communities |
| Key Decision | Yes |
| Public or Private | Public |

Purpose of report

This report brings before Cabinet, for approval, the proposed Prevention of Homelessness and Rough-Sleeping Strategy 2023 to 2028. The council are required to produce and publish a strategy to detail how it seeks to respond to the challenges of homelessness faced by our communities and identify priorities to achieve this over a five-year period. The proposed strategy will replace the Prevention of Homelessness Strategy 2018 to 2023 and is reflective of new and emerging conditions impacting customers at risk of facing homelessness and those who are frequently affected by housing crisis. The report proposes the endorsement of our vision for homelessness and thematic priorities as follows:-

Vision – Working in partnership to end homelessness in Barnsley

Priority Themes -

1. Homelessness Prevention and Early Intervention (Including Youth Homelessness)
2. Supporting those with Complex Needs and Reducing the Cycle of Homelessness
3. Improving Access to a range of Housing Options especially the Private Rented Sector and Improve Housing and Support Pathways
4. Reducing the Use and Cost of Temporary Accommodation
5. Develop a Systemwide Approach to Housing and Health (Physical and Mental)

The report also proposes the development and implementation of an approach to utilise more council and private accommodation, to be used as temporary accommodation. This corresponds to theme 4 in the proposed strategy and specifically aims to reduce the current costs of temporary accommodation for the council and improve outcomes for customers.

Council Plan priority

Healthy Barnsley – People are Safe and Feel Safe

Growing Barnsley – People are Supported to Have Safe Warm Sustainable Homes

Recommendations

That Cabinet:-

1. Endorses the Prevention of Homelessness Strategy 2023 to 2028; and
2. Approves the proposal to use more council and privately leased accommodation for use as temporary accommodation.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Strategy (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2)

1.1.1 The 2018 to 2023 Prevention of Homelessness Strategy focused on the delivery of five priorities to combat what were the key homelessness challenges facing Barnsley at the time. These priorities responded to the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Government's pledge to eradicate rough sleeping by 2025. The focus of the strategy was to embed prevention and partnership as keys to reducing the risks and impacts of homelessness and develop and implement more effective responses to the more acute and repeat housing crisis facing some residents.

1.1.2 Notable progress has been made against the priorities set out in the 2018 to 2023 Strategy despite the unprecedented challenges arising from the COVID pandemic and ongoing housing supply and cost of living issues. These include:

- Embedding the prevention approach and duty of care.
- Significantly enhancing options and pathways for clients with more complex needs.
- Strengthening partnerships with other housing providers to build more resilience for homeless clients and development of the Homeless Alliance to bring together statutory and voluntary services.
- Improvements made in partnership with children's services in relation to our approach and pathway for 16-17 year-olds
- Targeted bespoke intervention for specific higher risk (in the context of homelessness) cohorts such as clients being released from prison, discharged from hospital and asylum seekers who have been awarded leave to remain.
- More tailored support for frequent rough sleepers including more tenacious regular outreach engagement and support.

1.1.3 The relative strength of the approach in Barnsley has been recognised by Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities April 2023 who stated that Barnsley are outperforming all our near neighbours and most of our regional neighbours in relation to key government measures for homelessness. This included, but is not restricted to, Barnsley's rough sleeping numbers and

numbers of people being placed in temporary accommodation and the proportion of prevention activity as opposed to reactive relief.

- 1.1.4 Notwithstanding the improvements delivered over the duration of the previous strategy, the challenge of homelessness has grown significantly both nationally and locally. Central to the increasing challenges have been social and economic factors beyond our control including the COVID 19 Pandemic, Cost of Living Crisis, Affordable Housing Market Stagnation, Price/Rent Inflation, and Immigration including refugees and asylum. The legislative oversight of the agenda has also become more exacting with additional duties and expectations of local authorities to respond to more statutory demand at a time of diminishing resources.
- 1.1.5 There is subsequently a considerable challenge facing Barnsley and many other local councils in relation to demand for appropriate housing to accommodate the needs of homeless clients outstripping availability of suitable options. This position is not always helped by national programmes to prioritise specific cohorts or “at risk” groups, often with one government programme seeming to conflict with others. For example, there are currently government sponsored accelerated resettlement programmes for 5 separate asylum and refuge schemes, prison release resettlement and hospital discharge. This is, in the most part, additional asks of an already limited affordable housing market and can often feel like initiative overload without a unifying thread.
- 1.1.6 Other challenges facing Barnsley include the continued over-reliance on non-commissioned housing providers to provide supported housing for some of our most vulnerable clients. Over time, internal resources to deliver commissioned supported housing have reduced and the market now attracts a broader spectrum of providers. Whilst there have been commitments to better regulate the sector, to some extent regulation remains relatively light-touch and non-commissioned supported housing is often unsustainable for many clients who subsequently frequently become homeless.
- 1.1.7 Poor health outcomes are particularly evident for people who experience homelessness in their lifetime, and as it is widely documented Covid has only served to broaden such inequalities for certain groups. Evidence from the Office for National Statistics shows life expectancy for homeless people is, on average, at least 30 years lower than the average for the wider population. Often those falling into continual housing crisis can have numerous underlying physical and mental health issues.
- 1.1.8 COVID, the more recent cost of living crisis and rent and mortgage inflation, have further exacerbated challenges for homelessness and those officers having to try and manage more complex and growing demand. The pandemic required urgent response measures to ensure everyone had access to their own self-contained accommodation and this was particularly the case for residents who regularly found themselves rough sleeping. During the pandemic the Housing Options Team stood up council managed temporary self-contained accommodation at St Mary’s in response to the government’s “Everybody In” requirements. Learning from our experiences during COVID and as part of the Recovery pathway model implemented during the pandemic, the council

subsequently acquired 13 units of its own accommodation to continue to mitigate the rough sleeping challenges facing the borough.

- 1.1.9 It is in the context of the achievements described, the emerging challenges outlined and the implications of the national policy and legislative framework around homelessness that the proposed strategy for 2023 to 2028 has been developed. The Group Leader of the Housing Options Team has conducted significant consultation with internal and external stakeholders, a stakeholder survey has been carried out and work has been done to ensure the vision and priority themes compliment other key strategies for the borough and contribute towards Barnsley's 2030 objectives.
- 1.1.10 The vision and priority themes as outlined in the proposal above have been designed to galvanise and consolidate progress and respond to emerging challenges. The vision explicitly invokes the need for strong effective partnerships to achieve Barnsley's ambitions for homelessness. The priority themes will be underpinned by a robust individual delivery plan.(see Appendix 1 and 2)
- 1.1.11 It is important that the action plan supporting the strategy is developed to identify clear asks of services and partners to contribute towards the successful delivery of the priority themes. This will be particularly the case when considering how we reduce the use of bed and breakfast for families with children and when establishing key interventions and approaches required to address the health inequalities associated with those facing regular periods of homelessness and housing crisis.
- 1.1.12 The proposed strategy will directly align to the umbrella Housing Strategy and delivery of the Action Plan will be driven by the Housing Board. In addition, the strategy has also been designed to contribute towards and be informed by countywide progress against the agenda which is being led as a priority by the South Yorkshire Mayor.

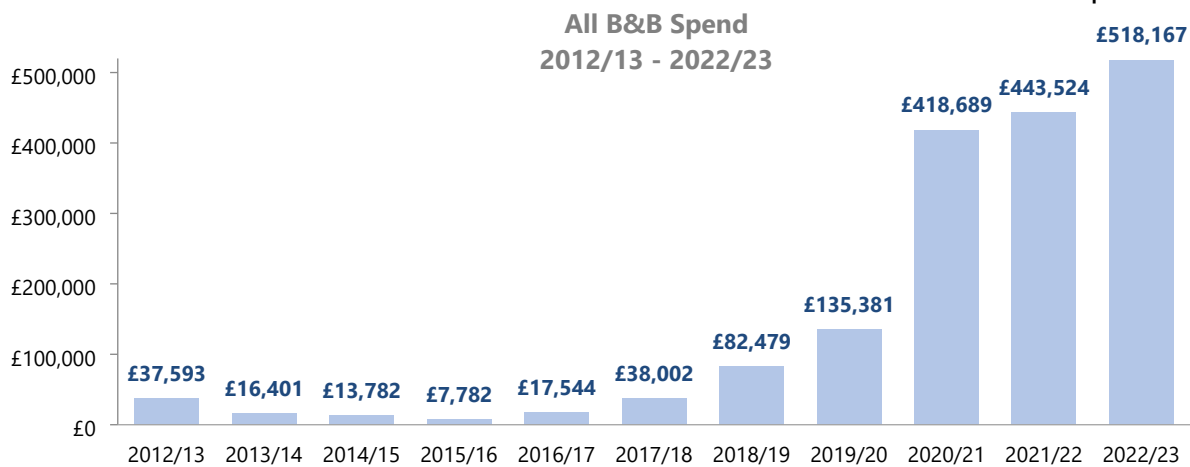
1.2 Temporary Accommodation

- 1.2.1 Local authorities have a duty to prevent and relieve homelessness. As part of this duty in certain circumstances local authorities must provide temporary accommodation to households facing homelessness.
- 1.2.2 In more recent years and due to a combination of factors the use of temporary accommodation nationally has increased significantly. This increase has included both an increase in actual numbers and the average length of stay for households in temporary accommodation.
- 1.2.3 Barnsley uses a mix of temporary accommodation options to meet our duties. These include the use of internally owned (council) accommodation, the use of commissioned and noncommissioned providers and the use of hotels and bed and breakfast.
- 1.2.4 Externally sourced temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfast and hotels are expensive and is sometimes inappropriate for households, particularly families with children. From 2020, the council's reliance on hotels

and bed and breakfast to meet its duties has increased significantly and is something being faced by most councils. This has resulted in a concerning ongoing budget pressures and often inappropriate use of this type of accommodation, particularly for families and children.

1.2.5 Figure 1 below shows that the total spend be the council on Bed and Breakfast and Hotels for use as Temporary Accommodation has increased from £82,479 in 2018/19 to almost £520,000 in 2022/23. With costs spiraling for Temporary Accommodation there are clear risks to the council's future financial position and therefore it has been imperative to look for alternative options to mitigate this.

1.2.6 Following the pandemic, several council owned houses/flats managed by Berneslai Homes were recommissioned to provide



Temporary Accommodation in part to ease the financial pressure of having to use external hotels and bed and breakfast and in part to provide more suitable accommodation for customers. A mix of property types have been used and locations are dispersed across the borough. The use of the council's own stock means that there are no rental or acquisition costs to the council and that rental income can be accrued to the HRA for periods of occupancy. Occupancy rates have been high throughout.

1.2.7 When establishing the Housing Led service team to work with those most at risk of facing homelessness consideration was given as to how we could enhance more tailored support to more susceptible and vulnerable clients. This included sourcing support to work with trauma and the employment of a young persons' social worker to focus specifically on teenagers at risk of becoming homeless. Since the introduction of the Children's Social Worker homeless placements for individual young people have been reduced despite increasing demand pressures.

1.2.8 Figure 2 shows the impact of the pandemic and tightened legislative requirements on the use of Bed and Breakfast. Whilst numbers placed have reduced since the height of the pandemic Barnsley has experienced worrying increases in families with children placed into Bed and Breakfast peaking in 2022/23. It should also be noted that any placement of children into Bed and Breakfast are notifiable to the Department of Levelling Up Housing and

Communities and should numbers exceed certain levels and/or durations of stay councils can face legal sanction.

Figure 2.

B&B Placements by Year

| Period | Singles | Families & Couples | Total | Children (In Families) |
|---------|---------|--------------------|-------|------------------------|
| 2015/16 | 28 | 7 | 35 | |
| 2016/17 | 38 | 9 | 47 | 17 |
| 2017/18 | 47 | 20 | 67 | 22 |
| 2018/19 | 92 | 34 | 126 | 52 |
| 2019/20 | 96 | 59 | 155 | 88 |
| 2020/21 | 337 | 53 | 390 | 66 |
| 2021/22 | 171 | 63 | 234 | 96 |
| 2022/23 | 139 | 102 | 241 | 124 |

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 It is proposed that Cabinet endorse the Prevention of Homelessness Strategy 2023-2028. The Strategy will replace the previous strategy and is reflective of the changing landscape affecting homelessness and the risk of homelessness. The strategy seeks to respond to challenges associated with the impact of the COVID pandemic, the changing housing market, and shortages of and competition for affordable low-cost accommodation and poor health outcomes for those affected by homelessness. The Strategy is underpinned by the aim, wherever possible, to prevent homelessness. The strategy recognises and seeks to exploit the benefits of strong housing pathways and broader health and welfare support for residents facing homelessness or who have fallen into housing crisis. The strategy also seeks to ensure the delivery of sufficient and appropriate relief for those in housing crisis and provide sustainable options to reduce the amount and repetitiveness of housing crisis for some clients
- 2.2 To support the priority themes of the Strategy, specifically theme 4, it is proposed to use additional council and leased accommodation as temporary accommodation, to mitigate customer and cost pressures associated with external Bed and Breakfast and hotel based temporary accommodation. This is in addition to existing properties currently available to the Housing Options Team. It is recognised that this proposal could present a risk given the affordable rented accommodation for general needs/social housing and the current scale of demand reflected by the size of waiting lists. The proposal is to incrementally identify and allocate these properties in conjunction with Strategic Housing and Berneslai Homes over the next 3 years.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

3.1 Financial and Risk

Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Director of Finance (S151 Officer).

The current annual cost of bed and breakfast and hotel Temporary Accommodation presents a significant financial risk to the council should costs continue to increase along the current trajectory, last year's cost to the council was in excess of £500,000 compared to £82,479 in 2018/19. The proposal and recommendation to repurpose more accommodation for Temporary accommodation should contribute towards mitigating this risk. The Council helped 57 homeless cases during the financial year 22/23 from using council properties for temporary accommodation. The saving on external accommodation were in the region of £85,000. It is predicted that increasing the number of council properties by 40 could save the council £221,384 each year in external B & B costs. As part of the Service transformation programme a kloe of £170,000 is to be delivered against Temporary accommodation in 24/25 and to achieve this more properties will need to be secured. .

There are however some financial risks to the Housing Revenue Account associated with repurposing in this way associated with potential longer periods of properties being void and additional repairs and maintenance requirements due to quicker turnover.

It should also be noted that given current shortages of affordable social housing there are other competing pressures for council housing in addition to those being felt for general needs social housing as shown by the size of the current "waiting list"...

3.2 Legal

It is a statutory requirement under The Homelessness Act 2002 for councils to adopt a strategic approach to tackling homelessness and to have a published homelessness reduction strategy. The proposed strategy if endorsed will replace the 2018 to 2023 strategy and be in place until 2028.

There is a robust and extensive legislative framework which determines council duties in relation to the prevention and relief of homelessness. These include;

- Housing Act 1996
- Homelessness Reduction Acts 2002 and 2017
- Care Act 2014
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Strategy must be published at least once every 5 years, the Council having done a review of homelessness. The report and Strategy identify the issues and pressures that the Council is facing and how it recommends dealing with the same.

3.3 Equality

Full equality impact assessment complete, available on request.

3.4 Sustainability



3.4.1 Reducing Poverty- Homelessness and poverty are intrinsically linked by preventing and reducing homelessness and supporting those facing housing crisis it is anticipated that poverty can be reduced in Barnsley

3.4.2 Health and Wellbeing – Homelessness is linked to poor health outcomes and those. Sustainable and appropriate accommodation options should contribute towards improved health outcomes for residents.

3.4.3 Peace and Justice – Suitable and secure accommodation is cited as a major contributory factor in reducing offending.

3.5 Employee

A minor reorganisation of resources is proposed in the Safer Communities Service Transformation work

3.6 Communications

The communications and marketing team will collaborate closely with the team to develop effective communication channels for partners and the public, ensuring clear understanding of the new strategy. Together, they will focus on key strategic priorities, ensuring that communication efforts effectively convey important milestones and achievements. A primary objective will be to establish a well-defined communication pathway, enabling

early engagement with the services and providing clear guidance to the public regarding necessary actions and available reporting mechanisms

4. CONSULTATION

Consultation on the strategy has taken place with several key stakeholders through the following means:

- A stakeholder questionnaire – 50 responses were received
- Homeless Alliance members
- Mental Health Delivery Group
- Barnsley Placed Based Committee and partnership Board
- Housing & Energy Board
- Adult Social Care extended management team
- Armed Forces Covenant group

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 It is a requirement for councils to have a published homelessness prevention/reduction strategy. Thematic priorities in the proposed strategy have been established collaboratively. It is not an option not to have a strategy outlining the council's priorities to prevent and reduce homelessness. The Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities have supported the timing for the strategy being slightly delayed into 2023 to allow for thorough year end analysis of trends and pressures.

5.2 Alternative options in relation to Temporary Accommodation include remaining "as is" and continuing to use external bed and breakfast and hotels to meet our Temporary Accommodation. As described this option is cost prohibitive and potentially financially unsustainable should expenditure continue to increase at its current rate. The use of bed and breakfast also correlates to poorer outcomes in reducing repeat homelessness. Despite currently having to use such accommodation for families with children and occasionally for single young people it is acknowledged that such accommodation is unsuitable for these purposes

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Recommendations made seek to ensure that the council is compliant with the legal requirement to produce and publish a strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness in the borough. The recommendations also seek to establish a less costly and more beneficial alternative form of temporary accommodation.

7. GLOSSARY

8. LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Draft strategy

Appendix 2: Prevention of Homelessness and rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Details of background papers **MUST** be included]

If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

10. REPORT SIGN OFF

| | |
|--|---|
| Financial consultation & sign off | <i>Vanessa Hunter – 19th August 2023</i> |
| Legal consultation & sign off | Sajeda Khalifa -Consultation complete 5 th July 2023. Final- Sign Off Sajeda Khalifa 7 September 2023 |

Report Author: Paul Brannan
Post: Head of Service, Safer Communities
Date: 12/07/2023