

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024

Action Plan: Annual Review 2023

Introduction

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024 was approved by Full Council on 16th December 2019. Accompanying the strategy is an Action Plan outlining how the Council is addressing the five priorities identified within the strategy. Progress against the Action Plan is monitored throughout the year and reviewed annually, with the outcome of that review being published and made accessible to the public. This review summarises what has been achieved in the past year and considers how events have shaped the work of the service and will continue to do so going forward.

Review

This review provides an opportunity to reflect on the events of the past 12 months to help the service prepare for the coming 12 months. A summary of progress against numbered actions within the Action Plan is given below:

Priority One: Preventing and Relieving Homelessness

- Due to escalating levels of demand for temporary accommodation coupled with the impacts of structural issues within the housing market and wider economic pressures, in September 2023 the Head of Strategic Housing in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing approved the enactment of a temporary quota within the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme to increase the allocation of housing to accepted homeless households in temporary accommodation. Continued pressure on the service meant that by the end of December 2023 there were over 240 households in nightly paid temporary accommodation and over 480 households across all forms of temporary accommodation.
- Opportunities for partnership working continue to be maximised through the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) alongside partners Crawley Open House, Change Grow Live and Emerging Futures. Pathways Home continue to work in the borough to provide support where needed. The Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AFEO), Changing Futures and Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Grant programmes reach across West Sussex.
- The housing market has changed considerably since the pandemic began and especially so in the last two years. Further work is being undertaken to ensure we continue to maximise opportunities to access private rented accommodation.
- The contract for supporting households residing in temporary accommodation and Crawley Deposit Service facilitated tenancies commenced on 1st April 2022 for a five-year period.
- Comprehensive measures are in place to monitor demand, performance and outcomes across the service. These are recorded weekly/monthly/quarterly as appropriate. This data feeds into a wider review to ensure that the service is structured to best meet demand.
- The pandemic and closure of the Town Hall to the public during lockdowns highlighted the importance of having the digital infrastructure in place to operate services online. Through the online portal customers can make an application, change their contact details, upload documents to active applications, and manage their personal housing plan, reducing the need to phone or email.
- Referrals from organisations with a 'duty to refer' [under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017] can be made via an online form and the data is recorded monthly. Referrals vary from organisation to organisation, depending on their role and the impact of local/national pressures on their work.
- Resources have been increased to expand service capacity in response to new areas of demand that have emerged during the year.

- Affordability issues caused by the differential between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates and local private rent levels continue to be raised with Government Departments) at every opportunity by the Council, at an operational, strategic and political level.

Priority Two: Tackling Rough Sleeping

- The multi-agency rough sleeper meetings continue to provide an important point of liaison between services that work with and assist rough sleepers in Crawley.
- The work of the RSI5 funded multi-disciplinary team encompasses the provision of an off the street offer to rough sleepers all year round, which incorporates periods of colder weather.
- The move-on units operated by Crawley Open House continue to be occupied.
- The Community Warden team continue to provide a high visibility presence in the town centre, tackling and reducing antisocial behaviour on the streets.
- Outreach Services continue to be provided by Crawley Open House in partnership with the Council, bolstered by the Rough Sleeper Initiative that currently funds a multi-disciplinary outreach team with assertive outreach, housing, drug and alcohol and mental health outreach workers.

Priority Three: Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable People

- The WSCC Mental Health and Housing Plan is monitored and implemented through the West Sussex Mental Health oversight board, the Sussex Mental Health and Housing Working Group, and the West Sussex Strategic Housing Group. Progress is being made to integrate housing specialists into acute NHS services.
- The Housing and Homelessness Forum (organised by Crawley Community Action and attended by representatives of organisations across the statutory, charitable, and voluntary sectors) has not yet reconvened since it was temporarily adjourned during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Council continues to explore all financial and partnership options for expansion of the Council's temporary accommodation portfolio. An additional property was purchased in 2023 and is now being utilised as hostel style temporary accommodation.
- Crawley Borough council continue to be an active member of the countywide steering and project groups that work to improve the delivery of disabled facilities grants (DFGs) and respond to other needs through the use of discretionary powers.

Priority Four: Delivering and Accessing Suitable and Affordable Accommodation

- Government amended the General Permitted Development Order 2015 (GDPO) that requires new development under permitted development rights to meet national space standards.
- The use (and therefore cost) of nightly paid temporary accommodation has remained high due to the ongoing demand into the service. Whilst action continues to be taken to manage the number of households in nightly paid temporary accommodation, numbers remain elevated. The Council continues to explore all financial and partnership opportunities to extend its portfolio of temporary accommodation. An additional property was purchased in 2023 and is now being utilised as hostel style temporary accommodation.
- The housing market has changed considerably since the pandemic began and especially so in the last two years. Further work is being undertaken to ensure we continue to maximise opportunities to access private rented accommodation.
- In 2023 the delivery of new build affordable homes in Crawley (by the Council and registered providers of social housing) was impacted by water neutrality requirements which are continuing to constrain delivery of new affordable housing.
- The Council participated in a one-off study with what was the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government and University College London regarding the quality of homes delivered through permitted development. The findings did not view permitted

development rights favourably in the context of delivering quality homes. Since the publication of the report, the Government amended the General Permitted Development Order 2015 (GDPO) that requires new development under permitted development rights to meet national space standards.

Priority Five: Preventing Repeat Homelessness

- The evaluation of services funded to provide support to households residing in temporary accommodation or Crawley Deposit Service facilitated tenancies was linked to the review of the Crawley Deposit Service that concluded in October 2021. This was to ensure that support is targeted how, where and when it is most needed. The countywide household support fund builds on this work, along with public health funding, the changing futures programme and work of the RSI5 funded multi-disciplinary team.
- Employ Crawley continue to help local residents into employment. Staff are based in the Town Hall and go out to locations across the borough.

Conclusion

The challenges that emerged in 2022 post pandemic continued into 2023. New demands on the service emerged, whilst existing demand continued to increase. Looking forward, our priorities for the coming year include:

- Promoting engagement with those who may be resistant or have issues that restrict their ability to access support services.
- Helping support those we have already assisted into accommodation to sustain their tenancies and break the cycle of repeat homelessness.
- Responding to the continued high levels of demand, whilst renewing our focus on a prevention based service delivery model.

To help achieve, this we will continue to work with our partner organisations and agencies across the Borough, County and beyond and will continue to lobby Government to address the structural and economic issues which continue to impact the local housing market and the Council's financial ability to respond