

Southwark Homelessness Strategy 2018-22

Summary

November 2018

Southwark Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022 Summary

Overall summary:

Southwark Council's main goal is to provide a *fairer future for all*. We remain committed to preventing and reducing homelessness, tackling the main causes of homelessness and supporting those in need.

The new Homelessness Strategy is a response to a period of unprecedented change, including the Homelessness Reduction Act, public services facing significant financial challenges and social housing and welfare reforms. It builds on the recent achievements, whilst responding and adapting to the changing environment in which homelessness and support services are delivered.

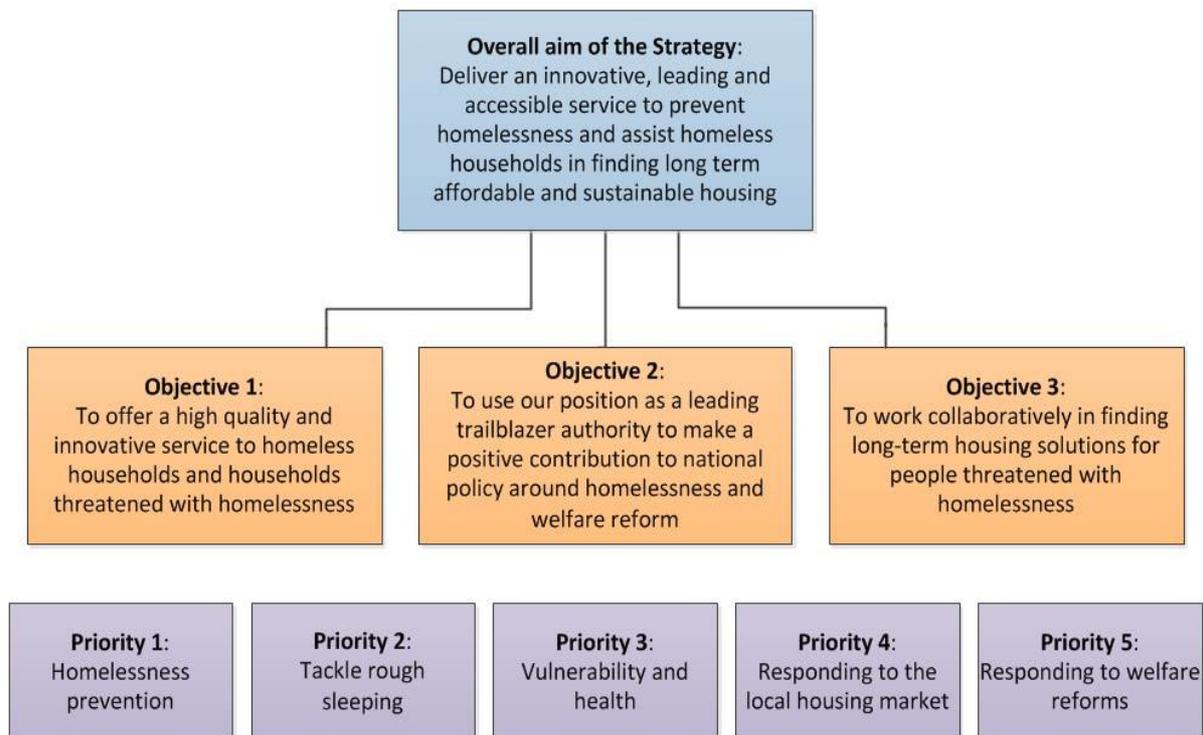
The strategy was based on evidence and data which highlighted the main causes of homelessness and the impact this has on different cohorts of people. This led to a series of workshops with partner agencies and representatives of residents in our borough to develop

strategic priorities. A six-week public engagement was carried out between June and August 2018. The feedback was integrated into the main body of the strategy report and the action plan. Overall, feedback strongly supported the main objectives.

The primary strategic focus is on finding long term sustainable housing solutions for people threatened with homelessness; offering high quality and innovative services to homeless households; and working with homeless households to explore the full range of housing options available to them.

The pressures on local authority budgets and the financial challenges facing the public sector in general means the design of our services and the solutions available needs to be efficient and with the aim of maximising positive outcomes affordably. At the same time, we know that we deal with some of the most vulnerable households and we will provide a full range of access to our services in consideration of their needs.

The aim, objectives and priorities of the strategy:



The full list of actions identified over the course of the strategy can be found in *Appendix 4: Southwark Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2018-22* but here is a brief summary of some of the key actions identified:

- **Priority One: Homelessness prevention.**

We will deliver a leading prevention service through the early adopter trailblazer project in preparation of meeting the aims and intentions of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

| Description of issue | Action | Timeframe |
|---|---|---|
| Eliminate usage of shared B&Bs for homeless families and under 18s. | Achieve the NPSS gold challenge | October 2019. |
| Ensuring our service is assessed with transparency, by being reviewed by an independent advocacy body. | Shelter to continue annual review of our homelessness service. | Annual review with quarterly updates published online. |
| Develop improved understanding of why some BME communities are disproportionately represented within homelessness services together with the development of appropriate early intervention and prevention measures to address this over representation. | Improve our customer insight through focus group involvement and improved data collection. Develop appropriate early intervention and prevention measures to address this over representation. | Focus groups held beginning in early 2018 and new prevention measures assessed and implemented by March 2019. |
| Social services and homelessness working together in partnership to provide an increasingly effective service. | Longer term the council is developing plans to co-locate homelessness and social services at a new central site in the borough. These plans will build on the good foundations that the services have developed together and reflect a one-council mind set where all services are working closely together to produce the best outcomes. | Anticipated new site will be occupied by services by late 2019, early 2020. |
| Tackle youth homelessness | Co-ordination of related programmes under the over-arching 16+ project. In particular, the 16+ Programme, the Care Leavers Partnership Programme and the 16+ Housing Strategy. | Ongoing cross-departmental monthly meetings have commenced and are ongoing. |
| Managers to demonstrate leadership and represent the <i>Southwark Ways of Working</i> to provide an excellent customer-centred approach to tackling homelessness. | Aiming for all Housing Solutions management to complete training for a recognised leadership qualification. Officers will also be encouraged to complete the training. The homelessness service will generally encourage staff to take relevant developmental and skills training at every opportunity. | All leaders and managers in Housing Solutions to have commenced a qualification by September 2019. |

- **Priority Two: Tackle rough sleeping.**

We will use the Rough Sleeping Prevention Trailblazer funding to continue to make even more progress at tackling rough sleeping in Southwark.

| Description of issue | Action | Timeframe |
|---|---|----------------|
| Aim to eliminate rough sleeping in the borough in collaboration with partner agencies St Mungo's and No Second Night Out. | Introduce Housing First and No First Night Out models. | By 2020. |
| Aim to eliminate rough sleeping in the borough. | Work with our partner St Mungo's to help those from outside the UK to access available services, accommodation and legal advice or supported reconnection to their country of origin. | Ongoing basis. |
| Improve our signposting, information and advice for rough sleepers. | Invite partner organisations to provide presentations on their work at the Southwark Homelessness Forum and task and finish groups to facilitate signposting. | Ongoing basis. |
| Continue to support the rough sleeping prevention and outreach | Through the commissioning process provide best value to the borough. | Ongoing basis. |

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| work of agencies and partners. | | |
| Act as a leading good practice borough on eliminating rough sleeping. | Monitor progress of the Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel, look for opportunities to contribute to national policy and implement good practice following advice from the panel. | During the duration of the Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel. |
| Improve the knowledge of the latest homelessness legislation for partnership agencies to assist tackling and preventing rough sleeping. | Expand access to the Housing and Social Care Partnership Board to include Public Health. Identify gaps in services that require more training on the new homelessness legislation and deliver the training to key personnel for dissemination. | Achieve by December 2018. Achieve by February 2019. |
| Feedback during the public engagement period from the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) suggested that given the complexity of the issue about people with mental health and substance use issues sleeping rough, it would be beneficial for DAAT to meet with Housing Solutions to explore if there is more that can be done to ensure this cohort are getting their needs met. | Arrange initial meeting with DAAT and Housing Solutions. Identify service and information gaps and develop action plan to deliver possible improvements. | Arrange initial meeting by February 2019. Confirm new arrangements by June 2019. |

- **Priority Three: Vulnerability and Health.**

We will ensure our services remain accessible to the most vulnerable households and can support those who need it most, such as those affected by domestic abuse.

We aim to increase the resilience of households and communities, equip them with the necessary skills to prevent crises, such as homelessness, before they occur.

We will end the use of nightly rate (bed and breakfast style) temporary accommodation with shared facilities for homeless families.

| Description of issue | Action | Timeframe |
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| We aim to improve our digital platforms so that most households choose this out of preference for their convenience which also assists us with managing a growing demand. | Develop digital platforms for housing solutions, improved information on web pages, further integration for homelessness applications, online Personal Housing Plans and exploring other digital possibilities. | March 2020. |
| Ensure digital inclusion requirements of customers continue to be taken into account. | We will continue to provide a full range of ways to approach and access the services. | Ongoing. |
| Target mental health as a priority area for homelessness prevention. | Housing Solutions will work cross-departmentally by formalising and extending multi-agency meetings with increased regularity. Housing Solutions will work with Public Health and Adult Social Services to provide resilience and wellbeing training for staff and partners. We will develop champions to further embed mental health, wellbeing and resilience into the culture of our homelessness services. | By March 2018 and periodically thereafter. |
| Assess the impact of the policies upon people threatened by or actually homeless. | Refresh the housing allocations scheme and review regularly. | Every two years with refreshed scheme published in 2018. |
| Target of zero homeless families in shared nightly rate temporary | Developing other supplies of temporary and permanent accommodation. | From September 2018 onwards. |

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| accommodation. Reduce the usage of self-contained nightly rate accommodation. | Work with a micro focus to avoid nightly rate placements and end them quickly when they occur. | |
| Provide a sensitive and high quality service to domestic abuse survivors. | Review the findings from the domestic abuse mystery shopping exercise from 2017 and produce an action plan to provide the best possible service in one of our most sensitive areas of work. We also plan to conduct a further mystery shopping exercise to reassess our performance. | Review findings and produce an action plan by December 2018. Conduct follow up exercise in late 2018 or early 2019 in conjunction with partner's timetables. |
| Sensitively resolve and assist with domestic abuse cases with specialist knowledge and liaise between council services. | Develop a domestic abuse specialist based in the Integrated Homelessness Team with an understanding of mental health, social services and homelessness. | September 2018. |
| Reducing the impacts on victims of domestic abuse. Increase the numbers of domestic abuse survivors able to stay in their own home, where safe to do so. | Raise awareness and identify training opportunities across the Council, in particular with Housing Case Workers and Resident Services Officers. To identify signs of domestic abuse, carry out risk assessments and available options for potential victims including sanctuary schemes and legal remedies such as how to obtain injunctions and Non Molestation Orders. | Identify appropriate channels to convey options - September 2018. Training or information provided from December 2018. |

- **Priority Four: Responding to the local housing market.**

We will respond to the challenging local housing market conditions by working collaboratively with, and offering

advice and support to, households and landlords to develop suitable private rented sector offers for all client groups.

| Description of issue | Action | Timeframe |
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| Assisting households to secure settled accommodation. | Explore the best options for utilising the Private Rented Sector with the incentives of longer term tenancies. Promote the private rented sector as a viable housing option. | Ongoing. |
| Identify solutions for reducing usage of temporary accommodation, in particular nightly rate and hostel. | Consider adopting powers under the Localism Act for implementing a policy and procedure for discharging duty into the private rented sector where appropriate. Explore the possibility of developing new accommodation supply through investment funding and setting up joint ventures. | November 2018 to develop a report for senior management and political consideration. January 2019 to develop a report and scope out recommendations and next steps. |
| Identify ways of maintaining tenancies. | Begin monitor tenancy sustainment where we have placed households into the private rented sector and use the data to revise our policies accordingly. | September 2018 – conduct research, develop report and identify issues. Follow up plan developed, as required. Repeat annually. |
| Maximise the number of empty homes brought back into usage to provide more accommodation supply in the borough. | Refresh the Empty Homes Policy with the aim of improving the packages on offer to encourage more landlords to bring empty properties back into use. Work to identify and make best use of empty homes where possible, such as using empty homes for temporary accommodation. | Policy to be produced in 2018. Ongoing. |

- **Priority Five: Responding to the Welfare Reforms.**

We will work closely in partnership with support agencies and local services to offer solutions that ensure households are able to maintain tenancies and their homes sustainably.

| Description of issue | Action | Timeframe |
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| Support proposals which could alleviate homelessness and oppose those that may have unintended consequences which may increase the risk of homelessness. | Contribute to consultations on national policy relating to homelessness, including collaborating with partners and regional bodies. Disseminate trailblazer findings. | Ongoing. |
| Assisting households affected by the Welfare Reforms. | Continue to hold Welfare Reform Events. We will identify households who are likely to become affected by, or are already affected by, Welfare Reform and conduct outreach work to find the best solutions for each case. | Bi-annual events. |
| Help tenants cope with housing costs. | Ensure 100% of DHP is spent and managed throughout the year. This is achieved by having a fair and clear policy on how the fund is spent. | Monthly monitoring of spend. |
| Disseminate information from the council to landlords and share good practice. | Continue to hold the Landlords Forum. | Bi-annual events. |
| Identify households affected by welfare reform and provide targeted support and advice. | Work with agencies, such as the Job Centre Plus, to help with budgeting and finding alternative solutions to housing needs (for example, providing a deposit so that households can move into a more affordable property, finding employment, downsizing through Smart Move or Mutual Exchange schemes). | Ongoing. |
| Minimise the number of avoidable rent arrears evictions in the borough. | Manage the Rent Arrears Fund, which provides a maximum payment of £500 to stop landlords evicting tenants because of rent arrears. | Ongoing. |
| Ensure an effective process is in place for the new 'duty to refer' set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act. | Engage with public bodies and local agencies to develop local protocols and referral arrangements. | Review and complete any refinements by October 2018. |

