

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26

Portfolio Holder:

Cllr Hannah Roberts, Cabinet Member for Housing

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21 September 2021

Reason for Decision

All Local Authorities are required to publish a new Homelessness Strategy as a minimum of every five years based on a review of homelessness in the district. Our current Strategy covers the period 2016-21. This report asks Overview and Scrutiny Committee to recommend the proposal to Cabinet to approve the contents of the Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26 and its associated Delivery Plan.

Executive Summary

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory requirement on local authorities to publish a Homelessness Strategy based on a Review of homelessness in their district. These strategies must be published at least every 5 years, with Oldham's most recent Strategy running from 2016-2021.

Oldham's new Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26 has been developed in consultation with residents, stakeholders and Elected Members, and informed by a comprehensive Review of homelessness between 2016-2020. The Review particularly focuses on the period since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act between 2018-2020, including an in-depth analysis of customer groups presenting to the Housing Options service, their support needs and the reasons why they came to be homeless.

The Strategy Delivery Plan takes a pragmatic approach to tackling homelessness in Oldham, acknowledging that resources are finite, and the effects of austerity and the Covid-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on communities. Its focus is on making best use of what we have, demonstrating an effective business case for further investment and working in partnership to deliver the following priorities:

- Advice and information
- Early identification
- Pre-crisis intervention
- Prevent recurring homelessness
- Partnership arrangements

Recommendations

1. To note the contents of the Oldham Homelessness Review 2016-20
2. To recommend the proposal to Cabinet to approve the contents of the Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26 and its associated Delivery Plan.

Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26

1 Background

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on local authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their district and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review. A further review, and new strategy, must be published within a period of 5 years.
- 1.2 Oldham's first Strategy was published in 2003. This is Oldham's sixth Strategy, and like its predecessor it once again focuses on homelessness prevention – but also reduction.
- 1.3 Homelessness reduction is cited in the title of this Strategy because it is acknowledged that due to a combination of factors such as ongoing austerity, economic downturn and more recently the Covid-19 pandemic homelessness applications have risen in Oldham in the past two years. Oldham Council wants its new strategy to acknowledge the visibility of homelessness and focus on both those in crisis / stuck in a 'revolving door' as well as looking to prevent homelessness in the future.
- 1.4 As with our wider Corporate Plan, the Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26 will be delivered by working together in partnership. The Strategy Delivery Plan will be reviewed annually and monitored via the Oldham Homelessness Forum, a long-established multi-agency group, as well as the Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 The Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26 has been developed in consultation with residents, stakeholders and Elected Members, and informed by a comprehensive Review of homelessness between 2016-2020. The Review particularly focuses on the period since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act between 2018-2020, including in-depth analysis of support needs and customer groups presenting to the Housing Options service.
- 2.2 Applications for assistance from people who stated to be homeless or threatened or homelessness increased by 38% between April 2018 and April 2020. By April 2020, more households were approaching the Housing Options service at the point they had already become homeless (52%) than when it could still be prevented (48%).
- 2.3 What is known about homeless households has grown with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. One fifth of homeless households in Oldham state to have mental health issues, and almost 15% have physical health issues. 24% of homeless households stated to have no support needs at all in the data analysed in the Review, but in contrast 27% had three or more suggesting large numbers of increasingly complex households. This may go some way to explaining why these households are presenting at crisis point, rather than at an earlier stage where homelessness may be prevented.

2.4 There are significant financial, social and emotional costs associated with homelessness – the new Strategy therefore needs to focus on reversing this trend. It needs to do this however in a time of limited resources and continuing austerity, particularly brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.5 The Strategy Delivery Plan takes a pragmatic approach to tackling homelessness in Oldham, acknowledging that resources are finite, and the effects of austerity and the Covid-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on communities. Its focus is on making best use of what we have, making an effective business case for further investment and working in partnership to deliver the following priorities:

- Advice and information
- Early identification
- Pre-crisis intervention
- Prevent recurring homelessness
- Partnership arrangements

3 **Options/Alternatives**

3.1 Approve the contents of the Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26

(Recommended: This will ensure that the Council is legally compliant in terms of the Homelessness Act 2002 and has a Homelessness Strategy that meets current support needs and groups in Oldham)

3.2 Retain the priorities from the previous Homelessness Strategy 2016-21

(Not Recommended: These priorities were last consulted on in 2016 and no longer reflect current trends in homelessness)

4 **Preferred Option**

4.1 Recommend the proposal to Cabinet to approve the contents of the Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26 and its associated Delivery Plan.

4.2 This will ensure that the Council is legally compliant in terms of the Homelessness Act 2002 and has a Homelessness Strategy that meets current support needs and groups in Oldham.

5 **Consultation**

5.1 Consultation has been an integral part of the development of the Homelessness Strategy and a detailed overview of responses can be found within the Homelessness Review document. This includes:

- Residents
- Stakeholders / partner organisations
- Elected Members

5.1 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic consultation was primarily undertaken electronically via web-based surveys, but service users who required additional support to take part were able to access this via the Council's Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) Team.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The decision to formally approve the Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26 will not in itself incur a financial cost. As the practicalities of implementing the strategy become known, additional reports/business cases will be required and at this point any financial implication will be commented on further in-depth.
- 6.2 However it is acknowledged within the report that the Strategy Delivery Plan is taking a pragmatic approach to tackling homelessness in Oldham, acknowledging that resources are finite. The Council has recently had funding confirmation for 2021/22 of £179,000 as part of the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative and also an allocation of £531,774 as part of the Government's Homelessness Prevention Grant. It is hoped that the Council will supplement these existing financial resources by maximizing results through better partnership working and by exploring the potential to increase external funding.

(John Hoskins, Finance Manager – Corporate Control)

7 Legal Services Comments

- 7.1 The recommended Option, (3.1) is supported. As the report has outlined. Under the Homelessness Act 2002 it is a legislative requirement that all LA's must have a homelessness strategy and it must be renewed at least every 5 years i.e. up to date with the latest homelessness / housing requirements in the borough. Simply recycling the same policy every 5 years would likely lead to legal challenge. (Alex Bougatef -Group Lawyer litigation)

8. Co-operative Agenda

- 8.1 Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26 particularly promotes the cooperative value of Working Together throughout its Delivery Plan, seeking to achieve a common goal of preventing and reducing homelessness as a partnership.

9 Human Resources Comments

- 9.1 There are no direct staffing implications at this stage, if however, this changes going forwards, the appropriate policies and procedures will be followed. (Emma Gilmartin, Strategic HR Business Partner)

10 Risk Assessments

- 10.1 The production of the Strategy satisfies a statutory obligation mitigating that risk. In setting a five-year Strategy which commits the Council to support certain standards for five years there is a risk over time as financial pressures increase that the ability to resource is challenged. (Mark Stenson)

11 IT Implications

- 11.1 None

12 Property Implications

- 12.1 None

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- 13 **Procurement Implications**
- 13.1 There are no current procurement implications however if as a result of the Strategy any purchasing requirements arise the Commercial Procurement Unit will support the service area in ensuring the processes adhered to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Cabinet Office guidelines. (Emily Molden, Senior Category Manager)
- 14 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**
- 14.1 None
- 15 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**
- 15.1 This Strategy is intended to support the development of more cohesive communities through a reduction in homelessness and its associated issues such as illegal eviction, harassment, antisocial behaviour and rough sleeping.
- 16 **Implications for Children and Young People**
- 16.1 None
- 17 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**
- 17.1 Yes
- 18 **Key Decision**
- 18.1 Yes
- 19 **Key Decision Reference**
- 19.1 HSG-09-21
- 20 **Background Papers**
- 20.1 None
- 21 **Appendices**
- 21.1 Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26
- 21.2 Oldham Homelessness Review 2016-20