

Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Engagement and Consultation Plan

1st Version

9th February 2024

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1. Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on housing authorities to conduct a review of homelessness in their area every five years and develop a homelessness strategy based on the findings of that review.

Southwark Council's homelessness statutory duties are primarily set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended.) Part 7 of the Housing Act (1996) sets out the definition of homelessness, and the duties that local authorities owe to applicants who are accepted as being homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The Council has a duty to provide accommodation if there is reason to believe that an applicant may be eligible, homeless and in priority need. If these criteria are met, interim accommodation is arranged for the applicant until a decision has been reached on their application.

If the Council decides that it owes the 'main homelessness duty' to an applicant, they will be offered temporary accommodation until they find their own accommodation or are made a final offer of accommodation, or the duty ends in another way.

Southwark's existing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy of 2018-2022 set out an overall aim to deliver an innovative, leading and accessible service to prevent homelessness and assist homeless households in finding long term, affordable and sustainable housing.

Southwark has achieved a number of key objectives to fulfil its strategic aims through the course of the subsequent years, as it most notably implemented changes to its form and function in meeting the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Since the implementation of our last Strategy, there has been significant change brought about from the pandemic to the way in which our services are provided. The needs of our residents have also been adversely impacted by seismic effects of the UK's departure from the European Union and inflationary pressures caused by global events, the energy and housing crises and global uncertainty from the war in Ukraine.

Through the course of 2022 and so far this year, Housing Solutions has gathered a wide range of data to help understand the changing needs of our residents, our performance to meet these needs effectively between 2018-2022 and to highlight the legal and policy changes that have affected both.

From our data review, we formed 5 draft priorities to address the existing and emerging needs within the borough. These have been presented and reviewed throughout a period of informal consultation with over 30 partners spanning the Council, statutory and voluntary partners and service users. From this, we are grateful for receiving a wealth of insight and feedback that we have collected and grouped thematically to arrive us at a point of our draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy 2023 – 2028 (the draft strategy).

1.1 What is the Aim of this engagement?

As a borough wide strategy that works across Council and community partners, the relevance and success of this strategy affects myriad stakeholders within and beyond the borough. A

comprehensive engagement plan is therefore required to ensure our aims, priorities and actions are fit for purposes and meet the needs of our residents and partners.

The aims of the engagement are set out below:

- To examine stakeholder's views on the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the alignment with Southwark's Fairer futures commitments and connected, interdependent strategies.
- To receive guidance on the support needed in our communities and how best to deliver this.
- To empower groups so they are able to buy into the strategy through its development and into implementation.
- Ensure our partners are fully aware of the aims set out so they can be supported and enhanced through clear and effective partnerships.

1.2 What is the draft strategy about?

Southwark's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 sets out our plan to prevent and relieve homelessness. It will build on our last strategy and from our analyses and reviews, we will set out our objectives, priorities and actions to meet current and emerging needs in our Borough. It is a strategy that will focus efforts to prevent homelessness wherever possible through existing and new partnerships, relieve homelessness with accommodation that meets residents' needs and will aim to address inequality and insecurity in the Borough for our residents.

1.3 What do we want to improve?

Southwark has introduced and developed a number of improvements to better meet the needs of our residents through its previous strategy. This has included an expansion of prevention activity and support for those renting privately, stronger relationships with our key partners and tackling rough sleeping and its causes. However, in view of global and national events in recent years that have made already challenging circumstances more acute, we must ensure our next Strategy provides for a renewed focus to deliver for our residents.

Southwark has continually reviewed the circumstances and needs of our residents through a significant review of data in the Borough to help form our draft strategic aim, objectives and priorities. We have also now taken this forward and completed an informal consultation exercise within the organisation and with our partners and service users to produce our draft strategy.

The 5 draft priorities we have set to consult upon, are:

1. **Prioritise Homelessness Prevention** – *Using a data led and joined up approach to prevent homelessness and sustain existing accommodation arrangements where possible.*
2. **Deliver High Quality Advice & Support** – *Ensuring high quality, tailored, trauma-informed, effective advice and support is delivered promptly to address the diverse needs of our residents.*
3. **Work to End Rough Sleeping** – *Expanding Southwark's off the street provision for rough sleepers and those with complex needs, prioritising Housing First, and working with partners to address the causes of rough sleeping.*

4. **Quality Outcomes Through Housing Provision** – *Making best use of accommodation available that meet the needs of our residents, supports their health and wellbeing, and continue to drive up standards.*
5. **Tackling Systemic Housing Insecurity** - *Working with partners to address the wider determinants of housing insecurity including through advocacy, and empowering residents to make informed decisions in resolving their housing issues.*

In addition to the draft strategic objectives and actions, we will also aim to complete the following:

- Ensure the strategy complies with public sector equality duties.
- Develop a strategy that enables advice and support that is accessible to all residents.
- Comply with our legal duties and support all of Southwark’s connected strategies and policies.

1.4 How do we plan to achieve our objectives?

The activity plan on page 11 sets out the actions required to meet the objectives of this engagement plan.

Hear from as many stakeholders as possible during our consultation period so we can learn and challenge our understanding.

We’ll also devise an equalities and health analysis to ensure all groups are reached.

1.5 What are the key milestones of the engagement plan?

Appropriate engagement is identified to ensure feedback is received from all relevant stakeholders.

Engagement is fully recorded and there is a clear timeline for the receipt of the feedback.

Clear feedback is received from our stakeholders and is easily linked to the aims of the engagement.

Ability to feedback to the stakeholders on the analysis of the feedback.

2. What do we already know?

2.1 Evidence

Our full data review can be found in appendix (n). However, key trends that have guided our current draft strategy include:

- A continued prominence of single applicants approaching for assistance since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.
- A continued overrepresentation of those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups approaching for assistance against the ethnic makeup of the Borough.

- A continued prominence of those approaching as a result of being asked to leave a living arrangement with family or friends and leading cause of housing insecurity in the Borough with limited prevention activity being undertaken in this area.
- A static but high level of approaches from those renting privately and continued increase in those fleeing domestic abuse between 2018-2022.
- A continued prominence of those already homeless at time of assessment.
- A reduction of those found rough sleeping between 2019-2020 and 2021-2022, but an increase in new flow to the streets as a proportion of rough sleepers in 2022-2023.

3. What we do not know and need to find out in more detail?

We are conscious that our data review and stakeholder engagement exercises can only inform our work to a certain extent. We are aware that further learning is required in the following areas:

- The barriers or issues residents and communities face with accessing early Council advice and support.
- The areas of policy and practice in Southwark that can give rise to housing insecurity for our residents.
- Identifying and building on best practice within and beyond the borough to prevent homelessness and sustain accommodation.
- Learning where wider partnerships to help deliver a holistic package of support can be formed.
- Learning how data and technology is being used to improve services.

More generally, we are keen to learn more of the varied existing and emerging needs in our communities and with our residents at the centre of our strategy development, we want to improve the delivery and effectiveness of our advice and support directly and with our partners. We must be mindful that there is much yet to learn in our development work and in keeping an open mind and actively listening to our stakeholders a reflective strategy that is fit for purpose can be implemented.

4. What can be influenced by the public and what is fixed?

The following areas within the development of the draft strategy can be influenced:

- Improvements in service delivery, ensuring the systems are fit for purpose and residents are able to receive advice and assistance based on individual circumstances.

Ensure compliance with public sector equality duty, to ensure the vulnerable groups have their voice heard and are able to fully access the services.

5. Context of statutory and legal obligations and Council policy

Part 7 of the Housing Act (1996) sets out the definition of homelessness, and the duties that local authorities owe to applicants who are accepted as being homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Council has a duty to provide accommodation if there is reason to believe that an applicant may be eligible, homeless and in priority need. If these criteria are met, interim accommodation is

arranged for the applicant until a decision has been reached on their application. If the Council decides that it owes the 'main homelessness duty' to an applicant, they will be offered temporary accommodation until they find their own accommodation or are made a final offer of accommodation, or the duty ends in another way.

The Localism Act (2011) also amended the 1996 Housing Act by allowing local authorities to discharge their homelessness duty by arranging a suitable offer of accommodation in the private rented sector.

The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) made significant changes to the Housing Act (1996) and placed a number of new duties upon local authorities. These include:

- To assess the cause of homelessness, circumstances and needs of all household members, including children.
- To develop and agree with applicants a personalised plan of the steps that will be taken to prevent or relieve homelessness.
- Extending the time frame a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that local authorities have a duty to prevent homelessness from an earlier stage.
- New duties to assess all eligible applicants (not just those unintentionally homeless and in priority need), and new duties to take reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- A duty on public authorities to refer service users who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to the housing authority (with the consent of the individual)
- Services must be designed to meet the needs of specific groups including care leavers, people leaving hospital / prison and victims of domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) places a duty on local authorities in England to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children. It makes provision that all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' status for homelessness assistance.

The Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) requires a homelessness strategy for every housing authority district, to be renewed at least every five years and consulted upon by other local or public authorities or voluntary organisations.

The Government Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 delivery plan set out the Government target of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eradicating all street homelessness by 2027. It provided the following updates:

- All local authorities must update their homelessness reviews and strategies and re-badge them as homelessness and rough sleeping strategies. Strategies are made available online and submitted to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- Local authorities report progress in delivering these strategies and publish annual action plans. In September 2022 the Government updated the 2018 Strategy and set out a clear definition of what the Government means by ending rough sleeping, which is that it is prevented wherever possible, and where it does occur it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.
- It grouped activities under four key themes - Prevention, Intervention, Recovery and a Transparent and Joined up System.

6. Engagement and Consultation Plan

6.1 Who are we engaging?

- Southwark residents
- Centre for Homelessness Impact
- Members
- Change Please
- Citizens Advice Southwark
- DWP
- Guys and St Thomas Hospital NHS
- Homeless link
- Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth
- Homeless Outreach Team (START)
- Housing Association partners
- Kineara
- Robes Society
- Registered Providers of accommodation
- SLAM
- Shelter
- Single Homeless Project
- Social Prescribers Southwark
- Solace women's aid
- Southwark day centre for asylum seekers
- Southwark Law centre
- Southwark Carers
- Southwark Council Public Health
- Southwark Wellbeing Hub
- St Giles Trust
- St Mungos
- Surrey Square Primary School
- Thamesreach
- Community Southwark
- TRA
- Southwark staff
- The Manna Society

6.2 What are the key messages?

- Prevention of homelessness.
- Improving access and effectiveness of advice and support.
- Preventing street homelessness and rapid intervention to resettle wherever possible.
- Improving access to accommodation of all types and driving up standards and support.
- Helping residents to build resilience with realistic and timely advice.

6.3 When and how are we engaging?

We intend to consult with Cabinet authorisation on our draft strategy. With this process engaged, we will fully record all feedback receiving feedback on any proposals that are planned to be implemented.

Internal engagement

- Attend service meetings
- Distribution of internal surveys
- Individual briefing sessions

External engagement

- Public workshops
- Questionnaires
- Attending Tenants Forums
- Attending landlord/agent Forums
- Homelessness forum

6.4 What are the questions we will ask?

Questions will be tailored to individual groups whom we are engaging. As demonstrated above within section 5, there are statutory requirements which must be fulfilled and therefore this must be highlighted within any consultation material.

Essentially, we want to get the overarching idea of impacts on residents, communities and partners through the draft strategy.

6.5 What are the materials we will use?

- Webpage consultation
- Leaflets/posters
- Local community groups
- Social media
- Letter notification
- Southwark mail
- Website
- Southwark life

6.6 How will we promote the engagement opportunity?

- Press release
- Website information
- Email signatures
- Bespoke letters to particular groups

6.7 What is our plan for letting people know the outcome of the consultation?

- Website publication

- Bespoke reports.

7. Activity plan

| NO. | WHAT | WHO | PURPOSE | WHERE & HOW | WHEN | LEAD |
|-----|--|-----|---|--|--------------------------|------|
| 1. | Contact the Cabinet member for Housing and Modernisation | | Receive feedback on Council Engagement plan as part of draft strategy review and authority to consult. Ensuring plan is fit for purpose and will achieve objectives set out on page 4 | Initial email and Cabinet member report. | November 2023 | |
| 2. | Provide Copy of engagement plan to all members | | Notification to all members of the engagement plan and timeline of the implementation of a new Strategy scheme. | Email | November 2023 | |
| 3. | Round table discussions with Housing Solutions managers | | Ensure all Housing Solutions officers are able to provide input in the engagement process. determine contact avenues with the relevant stakeholders | Internal series of meetings for all | November – December 2023 | |
| 4. | Draw up full schedule of stakeholder consultation | | Document will include clear dates and deadlines of whom will be contacted. The appropriate method of communication will be identified. | | November 2023 | |
| 5. | Complete consultation with internal stakeholders. | | Receive detailed updates on the objectives of the scheme and how this can be achieved. | | July – August 2023 | |
| 6. | Complete consultation with external stakeholders | | Receive detailed feedback on the objectives of the draft strategy and desired outcomes. | | July – August 2023 | |
| 7. | Complete Equalities assessment | | Ensure all groups are considered and there will be no group significantly disadvantaged as a result of any possible draft strategy amendments. | | October 2023 | |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|--|--|---|---|--|
| 8. | Present feedback on consultation | | Full analysis of feedback in relation to the objectives of the draft strategy. Recommendations provided in relation to the | Report produced on findings and proposals of draft strategy | October 2023 | |
| 9. | Refer draft policy to legal department | | Ensure draft strategy meets the requirements. | | October 2023 | |
| 10. | Formal consultation | | To seek Cabinet consent to launch formal consultation for 12 weeks. | | March 2024 | |
| 11. | | | | | | |
| | Present consultation outcome and findings to Cabinet | | To seek guidance on consultation findings to refine or amend the draft strategy for final version. | | TBC given PURDAH due to Mayoral elections | |
| 12. | Prepare final version of strategy and seek Cabinet approval. | | To incorporate guidance from Cabinet scrutiny of consultation outcome into final version for consent. | | TBC | |
| 13. | Prepare comms on promotion of new strategy. | | To ensure final strategy is published and accessible to all stakeholders. | | TBC | |
| | | | | | | |

8. List of stakeholders & consultation area

Stakeholder engagement activities are listed in the activities plan above.

| Type | Level of engagement | Stakeholder |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Briefing sessions | | Elected members |
| Tenants Forum | | Southwark Residents |
| Tenants council | | |
| SOUHAG meeting | | Housing associations |
| Email | | Legal services |
| Email | | Charity/supporting organisations |
| Online survey | | |
| Email | | Children and adult services |
| Online survey | | |
| Email | | Carers Forum |

Proposed consultation area (include map)

9. Monitoring plan

- The number of responses will be reviewed on a monthly basis to see if there are gaps we need to address.
- This will consider equalities to ensure that all members of society are included in decision making
- Where necessary we will target groups that are under-represented in responses

10. Contact information

Stakeholders are able to contact officers if they would like to know more about the engagement plan or activities:

NewHomelessStrategy@southwark.gov.uk

Telephone: TBC

In writing to: