

COUNCIL

27 JANUARY 2021

ITEM NO: 12

TITLE: “Housing and Homelessness”

PROPOSING COUNCILLORS: Spencer Drury, Nigel Fletcher, Matt Hartley, John Hills, Roger Tester, Geoffrey Brighty, Charlie Davis, Pat Greenwell, Matt Clare

Council believes that tackling homelessness should be an urgent priority for local and national government, and that a properly co-ordinated local approach is essential to ensure that this problem is adequately addressed.

Council is therefore deeply concerned to note the failure of the Cabinet to agree and publish a strategy, commencing in 2020, to deal with homelessness and rough sleeping in the Royal Borough of Greenwich.

Council notes that the Homelessness Act (2002) requires that “all housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their district. The strategy must be renewed at least every 5 years.” At the end of 2020, the Royal Borough of Greenwich had only published a Homelessness Review and Strategy for 2014 to 2019 on its website and, at the time of writing, there was no indication that any update has been agreed by the Cabinet during the course of 2020. Similarly, there is no mention of an intention to introduce a Homelessness Strategy in the Forward Plan published at the start of December, which stretches to March 2021.

Council also notes that the housing strategy, entitled “Homes for All: Royal Borough of Greenwich Housing Strategy 2018 – 2023” in the consultation agreed by Cabinet in March 2018 (“The Royal Borough of Greenwich Housing Strategy 2018-2023”) does not appear to have been published. The Forward Plan states that the Council is: “gathering intelligence to produce an evidence base to inform our Housing Strategy which is currently in consultation” suggesting that the strategy still has not been produced and may not be agreed until more than two years after it was supposed to commence. Council believes that the failure to publish a clear,

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well-reasoned Housing Strategy will make it harder to develop a cohesive, efficient, well-targeted strategy to deal with homelessness.

Council requests that the Cabinet agree a “Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026” before the end of March 2021. Furthermore, Council requests that the Cabinet Member for Housing bring the agreed strategy to a meeting of Full Council before the end of July 2021 in order for it to be debated, and to explain how this important statutory deadline was missed.

To help improve the problem of homelessness within the Royal Borough of Greenwich, Council suggests that Cabinet specifically consider including the following issues and initiatives in the Strategy:

1. A full review of the policy of purchasing private sector properties as a way of providing temporary housing (Housing Temporary Accommodation Programme) which should include, but not be limited to, reference to the tenure of residents allocated to these properties, and the length of time residents remain in these properties.
2. Consideration of alternative methods for providing temporary accommodation, to include creation of time-limited developments on brownfield sites and conversion of existing buildings for this purpose.
3. Development of a better process for medium-term (3 to 5 year) contracts with private sector landlords to facilitate greater capacity to address homelessness within the Borough. This means moving to a more proactive support for landlords than the current Greenwich model, such as that provided by ‘Enfield Let’ in the London Borough of Enfield.
4. A firm plan to reduce long-term rough sleeping in the Royal Borough of Greenwich to meet the Government targets of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminating it altogether by 2024.
5. A review of the contribution of Meridian Home Start to tackling homelessness, and consideration of whether an alternative company might provide a better method for achieving the Council’s aims in this policy area.
6. Consider whether the Opening Doors social impact bond (SIB) service piloted locally by Bexley Council might be worth developing the Royal Borough of Greenwich.
7. Evaluate whether belatedly joining the Capital Letters programme set up, on a cross-party basis, by London Councils would improve the situation for homeless households in Greenwich.