

Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee

15 July 2025

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Cabinet - Non-key Decision



Cabinet Member	Councillor Robin Betts, Cabinet Member for Housing, Environment and Economy
Responsible Officer	Eleanor Hoyle, Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health
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Development of a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The last 5 years has seen unprecedented demand on the Council's Homelessness Service. Covid 19, the resulting Everyone In initiative, the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and a recent and ongoing cost of living crisis have all contributed to this rise in need, with more households finding themselves either homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 1.2 Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all Local Authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a full review of all forms of homelessness in the district, which should be reviewed and updated every 4 years. This was further extended in 2018 to include rough sleeping which must be considered as part of the overall strategic objectives.
- 1.3 The Homeless Code of Guidance, provides further direction and context on developing and publishing a homelessness strategy
[Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Chapter 2: Homelessness strategies and reviews - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)
- 1.4 To date we have had actions for the delivery of the Council's homelessness service incorporated within the adopted Housing Strategy, however the ambition is to now review and produce a standalone document, within the context of a UK wide housing crisis as set out above. The review and the subsequent strategy produced will set out how the Council will continue to tackle this increase in demand and will aim to ensure that we prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity we can, and where we are unable to that we ensure we have a range of housing options available for those who have lost their homes.

- 1.5 Therefore, the purpose of this report is to inform Members of the ambition to develop a new standalone Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for the Council and seek endorsement of the approach that will be taken to achieve this.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

- 2.1 Once produced and agreed the strategy will directly meet the corporate priority of improving housing options for local people whilst protecting our outdoor areas of importance.
- 2.2 The review will be a comprehensive evidence base, which will set out the challenges faced at a national, regional and local level by the district, and what the key drivers for homelessness are locally. Once developed the evidence base will then inform the draft strategy and key priorities will be identified. A full action plan will also be developed, which will set out clearly the actions we and our partners will take to address the issues raised in the review which will in turn contribute to the achieving the aims of both the strategy and corporate priorities.

3 Recommendations

That Members recommend to Cabinet to:

- 3.1 **ENDORSE** the approach to the development of a draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for consultation.
- 3.2 **AGREE** that key stakeholders including Members and key partners will be engaged to assist and inform the development of the draft strategy.
- 3.3 **AGREE** the proposed timetable which aims to present a draft strategy to Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee on 02 December 2025 with a final draft following consultation to be presented to Cabinet on 03 March 2026.

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 Not having a home can impact in all areas of a person's life. It can affect mental and physical health and wellbeing, children's development, and places households under immense pressure.
- 4.2 The Councils ambition is to tackle and address homelessness across the district of Tonbridge and Malling and ensure that we continually improve housing options for local people and further build on already numerous successes within the homelessness service.
- 4.3 To achieve this the Council will:
- Complete a comprehensive desktop review of national, local and regional strategies, policies and procedures which will impact on the service.

- Complete a full analysis of the data held at a national, regional and local level to understand where the challenges are for the council.
- Undertake a full analysis of the issues, challenges and barriers to accessing the homelessness service, to draw out the key issues faced by residents of the district when accessing the service.
- Fully engage key stakeholders including members and key partners to assist and inform the development of the draft strategy.
- Produce an evidence base, draft strategy and associated action plan, which sets out the key priorities for the Council and how it will deliver against these.

4.4 Once this work has been completed the draft strategy will then be presented back to Members for agreement and once agreed, will then go forward for public consultation. Once consultation has concluded, then the amended strategy will be brought back to Members ahead of launch and implementation.

5 Proposal

5.1 A draft strategy will be developed by officers following this initial discussion with Members.

5.2 Although formal consultation will take place at a later stage (see section 10 of this report), there will also be initial discussions with key stakeholders including MHCLG, our largest Registered Providers and third sector partners to share initial thoughts and ideas.

5.3 A draft strategy will then be presented to Members, requesting approval for a period of consultation to be undertaken before formal adoption.

6 Other Options

6.1 No other options were considered as it is a legal requirement to carry out a review of homelessness in the district and to have in place a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. To take a “do nothing” approach would place the Council at risk of challenge and a breach of statutory requirements for not developing this document.

7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

7.1 In a climate where the cost of homelessness services is rising, failure to effectively review, forecast demand and plan homelessness services or meet statutory requirements through the production of a strategy may lead to reputational damage, late approaches to the service which limits our opportunities to prevent the loss of homes, and potential rises in the numbers in temporary accommodation.

- 7.2 Any action plan would contain cost implications but the majority of these would likely be met by using existing resources and grants.
- 7.3 The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 Not having a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy places the council at risk of legal challenge as a strategy is a statutory requirement.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local Authorities to review homelessness in their district and formulate and publish a strategy based on the results. Whilst the Council considered previously that it had met this requirement through having a specific homelessness section and action plan within our main Housing Strategy, having reviewed the legislative requirements it is considered that this approach may not meet them and therefore a standalone strategy is now being prepared.

10 Consultation and Communications

- 10.1 A range of key partners and stakeholders will be consulted once the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is produced and agreed by Members. It is intended to present Members with a draft strategy at the meeting of the Housing & Planning Scrutiny Select Committee on 02 December 2025. A period of consultation is then proposed for December 2025/January 2026.

11 Implementation

- 11.1 The aim is to have a final draft strategy presented to Cabinet on 03 March 2026.

12 Cross Cutting Issues

12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

- 12.1.1 Limited or low impact on emissions and environment.

- 12.1.2 Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

12.2 Equalities and Diversity

- 12.2.1 Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different

groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impact has not yet been analysed, but a full impact assessment will be completed whilst developing the evidence base, and will be concluded after consultation has taken place, and will be presented alongside the Strategy.

Background Papers	Housing Act 1996 Part VII Homelessness Act 2002 Equalities Act 2010 The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Homelessness Code of Guidance
Annexes	