



Report to Council

Date:	27 April 2022
Title:	Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy
Cabinet Member(s):	Councillor Nick Naylor Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services
Contact officer:	Nigel Dicker (Service Director – Housing and Regulatory Services) / Michael Veryard (Head of Housing)
Ward(s) affected:	None specific
Recommendations:	1. That the Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy 2022-2025 be adopted
Reason for decision:	The recommended option will ensure that the Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy is in place in accordance with the statutory requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Transitional Arrangements No.2 Regulations 2008.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires the Council to publish a Homelessness Strategy. As part of the creation of the Unitary authority, the Transitional Arrangements No.2 Regulations 2008 required a new Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy to be in place by 1/4/2022. Following delays arising from the pandemic and service restructure, work has now been undertaken to develop a new Homelessness Strategy for adoption by the Council. Following a draft strategy being reported to Cabinet on 15th February 2022 and a subsequent public consultation exercise, a final version of the Homelessness Strategy has now been agreed by the Council Leader in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services. This Strategy is now being brought forward to Council for adoption. The

Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has been updated and notified of the timetable for adopting the Strategy by the end of April 2022.

2. Content of report

2.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires the Council to publish a Homelessness Strategy document every five years. The overarching purpose of this document is to set down the Council's strategy for preventing homelessness wherever possible and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support is available for people who are (or may become) homeless.

2.2 On vesting day (1/4/2020), the three existing Homelessness Strategies in Buckinghamshire were carried forward from the former District Councils to the new authority:

- Aylesbury Vale Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2019-2022
- Chiltern and South Bucks Joint Housing Strategy 2018-2021 (Affordable Housing and Homelessness)
- Wycombe Area Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2014-19

These three strategies have remained in place to date underpinned by Action Plans and quarterly Homelessness forum meetings involving key internal and external stakeholders.

2.3 The Transitional Arrangements No.2 Regulations 2008 required that Buckinghamshire Council had a new single Homelessness Strategy in place by 1/4/2022 (two years after vesting day).

2.4 The impacts of both the Covid pandemic and the subsequent restructuring of the Housing Service during 2021 resulted in a delay in undertaking the review and development of the Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy. In October 2021, the Council appointed an external specialist housing consultant, Housing Quality Network, to support the development of the new strategy including:

- Reviewing the existing Homelessness Strategies carried forward from the District Councils
- Reviewing levels of homelessness in Buckinghamshire and current and future trends
- Undertaking consultation workshops with Members and key internal and external stakeholders (including Council Homelessness Officers)
- Drafting a Strategy document for consideration



2.5 As part of the above a series of stakeholder events were held during November and December 2021 comprising:

- Two sessions with external stakeholders, agencies and partners in the north and south of Buckinghamshire
- One session with internal Council stakeholders and services outside of the housing service (e.g. social care)
- One session with Council Homelessness Officers
- One session with Members

2.6 A draft Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy document was drafted for consideration and reported to Cabinet on 15th February 2022 ahead of a public consultation exercise. Cabinet resolved:

- (1) That the draft Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy be noted.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Leader of the Council to make any final amendments to the draft Strategy (following feedback from Members and the completion of the public consultation exercise), and to agree the final version of the Strategy in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services.
- (3) That the final version of the Homelessness Strategy, as agreed by the Leader of the Council, be submitted to full Council for consideration and adoption.

Although this meant that adoption of the Homelessness Strategy would be after 1st April 2022, the Council has updated the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on the progress of the new Homelessness Strategy and the timetable for adoption by the end of April 2022.

2.7 Following the Cabinet resolution on 15th February 2022, a public consultation took place between 21st February 2022 to 21st March 2022. Consultees had the opportunity to view the draft Strategy document and Evidence Base and to answer a series of questions to obtain their views and feedback. Consultees could respond via the Council's on-line portal or via other means including e-mail and telephone. The consultation generated a total of 28 responses. Those who responded showed a very high and consistent level of support for the draft strategy and the priorities within it. For each of the priorities set down in the draft strategy, the level of responses which either strongly agreed or agreed with the priority were as follows:



Priority	Number (and %) of respondents who strongly agreed	Number (and %) of respondents who agreed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide advice, information and support on housing and related issues to enable those at risk of becoming homeless to take steps to remain in their accommodation where feasible and appropriate, or to undertake a planned move if required 	24 (85.71%)	3 (10.71%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify those at risk of becoming homeless at the earliest possible stage, and to intervene proactively to prevent them becoming homeless 	24 (85.71%)	4 (14.29%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where a household does become homeless, to support them to find appropriate alternative accommodation as quickly as possible 	25 (89.29%)	3 (10.71%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To prevent anyone having to sleep rough 	24 (85.71%)	1 (3.57%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To maximise the supply of affordable rented accommodation 	21 (75%)	5 (17.86%)

2.8 Following the completion of the public consultation exercise, the Council has reviewed the draft Strategy document that was reported to Cabinet and made a small number of amendments and additions to the draft Strategy document. No changes have been made to the key themes and priorities. A small number of areas have been expanded to provide clarification in response to feedback and a small number of additional actions have been included in the Action Plan to provide more details and reflect comments made by those who responded to the consultation. This final version of the Buckinghamshire Homelessness Strategy has been agreed by the Council Leader in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services.

2.9 A copy of the Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy 2022-2025 is in the appendices. The document comprises the following sections:

- A strategy document setting out key findings and the high level priorities and action plan going forward (**Appendix 1**)
- An evidence base showing the current position including key information on housing and homelessness in Buckinghamshire and emerging themes and challenges. This document also includes a summary of the stakeholder

consultation exercise that took place to support preparation of the strategy
(Appendix 2)

- 2.10 The Strategy has been assembled to provide an overview of the current and future homelessness situation in Buckinghamshire and high level priorities and actions for the next three years 2022 – 2025. When the strategy is adopted, the Council will move forward in updating and revising its existing Homelessness Service Operational Action Plans which will sit beneath the Strategy and set down the detail of how the Council and its partners will operationally deliver the priorities in the strategy. These existing Action Plans are already used by the Council and its partner agencies (via the quarterly Homelessness Forum meetings) to monitor how the Council is meeting its strategic homelessness commitments and this will continue going forward under the new strategy. The Strategy has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment which can be found in Appendix 3.
- 2.11 The Council and its partners will be able to continue to influence and adapt the overall Strategy going forward. The Council will review the high level priorities and action plan in the Homelessness Strategy on an annual basis in regular consultation with key stakeholders and partner agencies. This will be done via the Council's regular Homelessness Forum meetings and other engagement. This will allow us to regularly re-visit the Strategy document and, where necessary, bring forward any amendments or changes to the document for consideration in response to the wider homelessness situation. This will ensure that the Strategy remains fit for purpose and will give the Council the flexibility to identify any amendments to priorities that may be needed to reflect changes in local and national circumstances over the next few years.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 The Council could have continued with the existing Homelessness Strategies which were carried forward from the former District Councils and then look to adopt a new Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy at a later date. However, as stated in Paragraph 2.3, this would not meet the requirement of the Transitional Arrangements No.2 Regulations 2008 which require that Buckinghamshire Council has a new single Homelessness Strategy in place by 1/4/2022. Therefore, delaying the adoption of a new Homelessness Strategy to a later date could leave the Council open to challenge going forward because it may be deemed not to have a current Homelessness Strategy in place. As well as the potential reputational damage arising from this, there is also the risk of legal challenge as the Council is required (under s1(5) on the Homelessness Act 2002) to have regard to its Homelessness Strategy when exercising its functions.

4. Legal and financial implications

- 4.1 The Legal context implications of the options under consideration are set down within the report (including Paragraph 3.1 above)
- 4.2 There are no specific financial implications linked to this report. The report deals with the adoption of the new Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy and setting high level priorities and actions going forward. The report is not seeking any financial commitments at this stage.
- 4.3 The Financial implications of the Strategy are not yet quantified; the Strategy will set out direction of travel and high level priorities, which will then be later formalised into a more detailed, costed action plans. There are existing, uncommitted Capital budgets in the MTFP, totalling £4.8m, which are earmarked for the delivery of the affordable housing and homelessness strategies. There is no growth (additional funding) set aside in the MTFP for additional activity on homelessness. However, there is flexibility in the use of the annual Homelessness Prevention Grant (currently £1.6m), and opportunity to bid to the Rough Sleepers Grant and other grant opportunities which arise ad hoc, to fund activity which delivers the strategy.

5. Corporate implications

- 5.1 The Buckinghamshire Homelessness Strategy will directly contribute to the delivery of the Corporate Plan priority for “Protecting the Vulnerable”.
- 5.2 The Strategy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

- 6.1 A virtual Member Workshop event on the development of the Homelessness Strategy was held on 16th December 2021 and the contributions to this workshop and been fed into the drafting of the Strategy document. A Member Development Workshop on Housing on 21st March 2022 included a presentation and discussion on the Homelessness Strategy and all Members had the opportunity to make submissions to the public consultation.
- 6.2 The Community Boards were advised of the consultation on the draft Homelessness Strategy document.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 7.1 As stated in the report, the draft Strategy document will be subject to a public consultation exercise.



8. Next steps and review

- 8.1 The Buckinghamshire Council Homelessness Strategy will be formally adopted by the Council.

9. Background papers

- 9.1 None.

10. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

- 10.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team.

