

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY - PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESULTS

Introduction:

This consultation was conducted through Herefordshire Council's Consultation web pages. It was well publicised and well responded to with 62 replies.

Two other recent public consultations included questions of relevance to homelessness and housing issues. These were:

- The Drug and Alcohol Service public consultation, which ran from 16th September 2019 TO 14th October 2019.
- The Armed Forces Veterans Survey public consultation, which ran from 10th September to 15th October 2019.

Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Results:

We asked:

In what capacity are you providing your views?

The majority of people responding to the consultation gave their views as a resident of Herefordshire concerned about homelessness, as follows:

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|--|-----------------|
| Herefordshire resident concerned about homelessness | 68% (42 people) |
| Someone who has experienced homelessness or its risk | 11% (7 people) |
| Member of a statutory organisation | 10% (6 people) |
| Member of voluntary, charitable or faith community | 10% (6 people) |
| Member of a business or other interest | 1% (1 person) |

We asked:

Should we continue with the broad themes which we adopted for our previous Homelessness Prevention Strategy, which were to:

- i. 'Minimise rough sleeping and increase tenancy sustainment opportunities for rough sleepers and people with complex needs.'
61 respondents agreed. One respondent did not answer the question as it was considered to be unclear.
- ii. 'Maximise homeless prevention activity for all households at risk of homelessness.'
61 respondents agreed. One respondent did not answer the question as the wording was considered to be unhelpful.
- iii. 'Improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people and those who are at risk of homelessness.'
60 people agreed with this. Two people did not answer the question.
- iv. 'Ensure homeless people and those at risk of homelessness are able to access appropriate affordable housing and that support services are targeted effectively.'
59 people agreed with this. Two people did not answer and one person said that the question did not make sense.

Respondents were asked if there were any other key objectives that should be included. We were pleased that this generated a number of suggestions including the following:

'Investigate the number of empty properties in the County that could possibly be acquired for homeless people through compulsory purchase orders or enforced sales.'

We are in the process of recruiting an Empty Property Officer who will work within the council's Strategic Housing Team to bring back empty properties into use for housing.

'Build more affordable housing association houses to provide sustainable accommodation.'

'More availability of affordable housing and council housing. A big increase in mental health services including a range of counselling More availability of care services.'

We continue to work with housing developers to ensure that affordable housing is included in new housing development schemes in Herefordshire. Under current planning policy, where more than ten properties are proposed, there is an obligation on the developer to provide between 25% - 40% units of affordable housing, depending on where the site is located.

'Listen to homeless people and ask what help they would find most useful. Provide creative, ongoing, long-term support that meets them where they are and empowers them to move forward. Many times vulnerable people find it difficult to access services because the system lacks flexibility.'

We recognise that we have to improve our 'listening' and service provision in this respect. However, as a step forward we were successful in our bid to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for funding to strengthen our Rough Sleeper Outreach and Resettlement Team, which will enable the provision of increased support.

We asked:

What is the nature of your interest in homelessness?

This was a free text response, but by far the majority of respondents, 34 people, gave reasons which can best be described as arising from their compassion for others. For example,

'No one should be living on the streets in 21st century. We all deserve some where to call home, which should not be the streets!'

'I feel homelessness could happen to anyone of us at any time and we should help where we can.'

'Human kindness.'

'Homelessness is something I know little about, but feel it is shameful that there should be homelessness in such a wealthy society.'

'I care.'

Ten respondents had a professional interest in homelessness and homelessness prevention, either in their current role or in a previous capacity. These included a number of medical and housing professionals. One

respondent worked with women survivors of domestic violence/abuse and was clearly extremely passionate about this role.

A number of other different reasons were given including respondents own personal experience of homelessness or its risk themselves or the experiences of other people known to them.

We asked:

What in your view are the biggest issues that need to be tackled in relation to homelessness / homelessness prevention in Herefordshire?

There was a considerable consensus in opinion relating to this, with the majority of respondents identifying one or more of the following issues.

1. The need for more affordable housing provision in the county and more support / supported provision for vulnerable people.

Increased provision and/or support was specifically mentioned in relation to the needs of young people, survivors of domestic violence/abuse and former military personal. The following views were typical:

'Young People - there is not enough accessible support or accommodation in Herefordshire ...'

'Please consider veterans. They've served the country, so we can live the lives we do today, and yet when it comes to homelessness, we disregard them ...'

In relation to the needs of vulnerable young people, whilst recognising that we need to continue to do more, we have recently refurbished a previously owned council building into three self-contained flats for young people leaving care. Floating support will be provided to ensure successful tenancy sustainment, life skills development and the achievement of personal ambitions.

We are also in the process of remodelling another building, which will provide four self-contained flats and an assessment flat. As the accommodation will be for young people with considerable support needs, 24 hour support will be provided.

Whilst we recognise that we need to continue to do more, we have donated land to enable the development of a self-build community housing project for military veterans.

2. The need for improved mental health support and service access.

'Increase the availability of mental health care in Herefordshire. A large proportion of rough sleepers turn to various forms of addictions and antisocial behaviours as a means of coping with mental health issues. There are excessively long waiting times, 3 4 or even 6 months is too long.'

'I believe services should be provided for rough sleepers to include support for mental health issues. This may include appropriate shelters where health services can deliver outreach, and housing solutions found.'

'Provide appropriate health care for homeless people, particularly mental health.'

'Provide accessible (barrier free) GP and other health professional support in the community which rough sleepers can access without prejudice.'

Whilst we recognise that we need to continue to do more, a multi-agency bid to access Public Health England (PHE) funding to implement a health improvement project for rough sleepers and those at risk was submitted in September 2019. The bid aim focused on proving a service for rough sleepers with co-occurring mental ill-health and substance misuse needs.

Whilst the bid was unsuccessful partner agencies remain committed to moving this forward by seeking alternative funding.

3. The need for improved provision and service access for people with substance addictions.

'Improve support for people with addictions to drugs and alcohol...'

'Providing a safe haven/shelter. Tackling issues such as drugs, alcohol dependency. Jobs.'

'Drugs, Alcohol and mental health needs more provision to prevent before it come to crises.'

'Assist more in weaning abusers/users off drugs / alcohol...'

We recognise that we need to do more in relation to substance dependencies and, as we are looking to redesign and recommission our current treatment system, we have recently undertaken a public Drug and Alcohol Service consultation.

Other concerns related to issues with welfare benefits and particularly Universal Credit.

'Provide more hostel places for rough sleepers. Universal Credit seems to be forcing some into homelessness so provide more support to ensure people are able to access all benefits to which they are entitled.'

'..We [also] are encountering people struggling with universal credit issues: trying to gather paperwork, not having IT skills or easy access to IT.'

We will need to investigate the issues here and how this situation can be improved.

Other concerns related to a lack of support availability in the market towns.

'Ensure there is assistance available in the Market towns as well as Hereford city. Given rural nature of the county travelling for help can be an issue and enquirers feel being given a run around when turned away without supporting evidence which they did not realise would be required.'

'Ideally there would be a hub/shelter in all market towns within Herefordshire to allow for easier access to the above services.'

There are clearly resource issues here and we will need to investigate if there are feasible ways in service access could be improved.

Respondents were asked how they thought the issues that they had identified could best be addressed. The following comments are 'typical' and included some good ideas on early intervention/prevention opportunities, as comments below.

'Awareness and identification. Being able to provide a more joined up approach. EG many schools are running informal food banks, they have identified which families need help Looking at the bigger picture, such

as benefits claimed, budgeting advice, health advice would reduce the number of people needing help further down the line.'

'I have noticed that there are more people on the streets, would these people be there if they had the right support. For the future it would be good for schools to address how easy it is to become homeless, teaching budgeting, alcohol how dangerous it can be so easily become dependent spiralling out of control, drugs, mental health. I don't mean an hour session either.'

'I believe that Hereford is doing well in extremely difficult circumstances, with little money. But using the media to help in a positive way would help.'