CABINET
TUESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2026

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: Adoption of Homelessness Action Plan and grant allocations

REPORT OF: Director - Regulatory

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Regulatory

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Accessible Services;

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The Council is required to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan to meet new conditions for receipt of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government homelessness grant. This report contains a proposed Action Plan together with an updated temporary accommodation policy, also required.

1.2. This report also details proposals for an allocation of the recently announced Rough Sleeping Programme funding for the establishment of a new Rapid Prevention, Assessment and Resettlement service in the district which will provide on-the-day emergency accommodation and intensive support for people who are rough sleeping or at imminent risk of rough sleeping.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet approves the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan at Appendix 1.

2.2 That Cabinet approves the updated Temporary Accommodation Policy at Appendix 2.

2.3 That Cabinet approves the funding proposal of £238k for a new Rapid Prevention, Assessment and Resettlement service in the district (outlined in paragraphs 8.4-8.7).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The Council is required to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan as a condition of MHCLG grant funding by the 1st December 2026.

3.2. This also includes the obligation to update Temporary Accommodation Policies to ensure they reflect current requirements.

3.3. The proposed funding for a new Rapid Prevention, Assessment and Resettlement service in the district will improve provision of on-the-day emergency accommodation, which is currently lacking, strengthening the local single homeless pathway and offering improved opportunities for engagement with those sleeping rough.

3.4. The recommendation within this report are consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029), the proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan and the Council Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. Cabinet could decide against approving funding for the proposed new service, however this would reduce options for accommodating and engaging effectively with people facing rough sleeping in the district as well as resulting in ongoing reliance on hotel placements for on-the-day accommodation.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 Consultation on the draft Action Plan was undertaken with local partners including the North Herts Homelessness Forum and was advertised via the Council's website and e-newsletter to residents. A very low level of response was received.

5.2 The Executive Member for Regulatory, Cllr Mick Debenham has been consulted and is supportive of the proposals contained in this report.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 23rd October 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The government has prioritised ending homelessness and rough sleeping. As part of this drive, statutory guidance has been updated to require all local housing authorities to have an Action Plan in place that underpins the delivery of local homelessness strategies by 1st December 2026. This is now a grant funding requirement for all in receipt of Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant (HRSDAG).

7.2. Additional funding, via a new Rough Sleeping Programme, was also announced in August this year, providing funding for immediate provisions for a 'route off the streets' by Christmas this year and longer-term accommodation and intensive support for people who have experienced long-term rough sleeping. The Council has been awarded a total of £213,643 over three years 2026/27 to 2028/29.

7.3. Homelessness remains an ongoing challenge in the district due to continuing cost of living pressures, the affordability of local accommodation and increasing support needs. The Council receives around 1,000 enquiries around homelessness and housing issues each year. In 2025/26, 370 of these households were assessed as being owed a homelessness duty by the Council, meaning that we worked with these households for at least 56 days to prevent or relieve homelessness. Around two-thirds of households have a support need, most commonly poor mental health (25% of those owed a duty in the past two years) and physical ill health (19%), but also risk of abuse (12%), learning disability (9%) and substance dependency (8%). In the first half of 2026/27, the Council has owed a duty to 181 households.

7.4. The Council also has legal duties to accommodate families with dependent children and vulnerable individuals temporarily whilst we conduct inquiries, and also until settled accommodation is secured. In 2025/26, we made 268 placements into temporary accommodation, half of which were hotel placements due to lack of capacity in purpose-built temporary accommodation (which mainly caters for families) or this accommodation not being suitable for individuals' support needs. Increased capacity on the single homeless pathway, primarily at Anderson House in Hitchin, has helped to ensure that stays in hotels are typically short however, lasting up to a few weeks.

7.5. There are very few people sleeping rough in North Hertfordshire, on average three over the course of any one month. However, those who do sleep rough are typically entrenched with complex support needs and require accommodation solutions that reflect this.

7.6. The Council has also received a three-year settlement of HRSDAG totalling £2.9 million over 2026/27 to 2028/29. The Grant is ringfenced for initiatives to tackle homelessness in line with local authorities' legal duties and the government's policy aims. Cabinet has approved allocations for the majority of this settlement at meetings on 16 June 2026 and 22 September 2026, for specialist prevention services, to secure capacity on the single homeless pathway and for work with private sector landlords.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The Council's current Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is incorporated within the North Herts Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029. This sets out the challenges the district faces and our strategic approach to prevention, accommodation and support. The Council's proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan is attached at Appendix 1. It sets out how we will deliver the key priorities identified within our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy with a strong continued focus on prevention work.

8.2 Local authorities are required to set targets against specified homelessness and rough sleeping metrics in their action plans in order that performance can be monitored and measured. Our Action Plan contains the following targets (with a number of interim 'checkpoints' not reproduced here for brevity):

Table 1. Action Plan targets

		Baseline Autumn 2025	Target 31/03/29
Households with children in temporary accommodation	Rate per 1,000 households (Sept 25), snapshot	1.01 (59 households)	0.85 (50 households)
Families in B&B over 6 weeks	No. of households (Sept 25), snapshot	0	0
Success at preventing and relieving homelessness	Successful outcomes / duties owed (Q2 25/26), measured over each quarter	57%	66%
Success at preventing and relieving homelessness for those experiencing multiple disadvantage	Successful outcomes / duties owed (Oct-Dec 25), measured over each quarter	57%	60%
People sleeping rough on a single night	No. of households* (Autumn 25), snapshot	1	0
People sleeping rough long-term	No. of households* (Nov 25), monthly	1	0

*The households concerned normally comprise single people, however, occasionally include couples too

8.3 The Action Plan identifies a number of key risks to achieving our targets, foremost of which is the Council's reliance, as a non-stock holding authority, on housing providers to bring forward housing to meet local needs. To mitigate this risk, the Council works proactively with local providers and partners, including YMCA Chiltern Group, Keystage Housing, Lifestone Homes (formerly settle) and Hertfordshire County

Council to leverage funding from central government, Homes England and other sources and to identify potential sites for development.

8.4 The Council has most recently been working with YMCA Chiltern on plans for specialist on-the-day emergency accommodation in the district, to deliver the aims of the government's Rough Sleeping Programme. It is proposed to use our Rough Sleeping Programme allocation of funding to support the establishment of a new, small Rapid Prevention, Assessment and Resettlement Service, to be managed by YMCA Chiltern. This would be located at the existing Sanctuary site in Hitchin; this is owned by a charity called Helping Herts Homeless and the current service is managed by YMCA as part of our single homeless pathway. Should the recommendations in this report be agreed, we will work with YMCA to ensure the existing residents are supported into alternative accommodation at the right time.

8.5 The proposed new service will offer on-the-day emergency accommodation for up to five individuals plus an additional emergency 'sit up space' which would provide an immediate safe space overnight. Placements would be for up to eight weeks, aiming not just to provide an emergency bed, but also active intervention by creating a period of stability during which an individual's support needs can be meaningfully assessed and an appropriate housing pathway progressed. The target cohort would be people who are currently rough sleeping in the district and those at imminent risk of rough sleeping, with referrals managed in partnership between YMCA and the Council. The service would consider individuals with dogs on a case-by-case basis.

8.6 The proposed cost of this service would be a total of £238k, to support the service from 1st December 2026 until the end of March 2029. The majority of the cost is for staffing capacity in order to provide specialist prevention and resettlement interventions, practical support and security, including overnight. Appropriate overnight arrangements are an important part of maintaining a safe service as the service may receive people at a point of housing crisis, including individuals whose needs and risks have not been fully assessed at the time of approach. The service would also provide food and essentials as well as flexible personalisation funding to help individuals overcome small practical barriers such as travel costs and replacement identification.

8.7 The proposed new service would complement existing provision at the former Lord Lister hotel and Anderson House (both in Hitchin), which provide longer-term accommodation up to 18 months and therefore require bedspace interviews and risk assessments to be undertaken prior to an individual being accommodated. We would have to continue to use hotel placements where suitable for on-the-day accommodation until the service is up and running and in order to meet the 'route off the street' commitment by Christmas.

8.8 The MHCLG Rough Sleeping Programme (RSP) funding allocation for the Council is outlined below:

Table 1. Proposals for homelessness grant allocations for 2026/27 onwards

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Rough Sleeping Programme funding	**£113,643**	**£50,000**	**£50,000**	**£213,643**

The cost of the proposed service - £238k – exceeds the funding RSP allocation, however an announcement was made by the government prior to the recent budget that these allocations would be doubled. MHCLG colleagues have since advised they are currently working through revised funding allocations and hope to have news

in the coming weeks, adding they expect any uplift will be applied to 2027/28 and 2028/29, rather than the current year.

8.9 As part of the development of the action plan, local authorities have also been required to review their temporary accommodation policies, to ensure they are up-to-date and compliant. The Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy details how the Council ensures that sufficient suitable temporary accommodation is available to meet anticipated demand. Our revised policy is attached at Appendix 2, with tracked changes to highlight the proposed amendments.

8.10 Action plans must be published by 1st December 2026 and reviewed regularly (recommended annually).

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The Housing Act 1985 Section 1 (1) confirms that the District Council is the Local Housing Authority (LHA).

9.2 LHAs' homelessness duties are contained within the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which placed significant new duties on English local housing authorities to prevent homelessness.

9.3 LHAs have a legal duty to provide interim (also known as emergency) accommodation to homeless applicants, if, at any point during their enquiries, there is a reason to believe that an applicant may be:

- homeless
- eligible for assistance, and
- in priority need

9.4 The LHA also holds the 'Relief Duty' which applies when a council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless and eligible for assistance; it requires the Council to take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that suitable accommodation becomes available for the applicant's occupation for at least six months. This therefore requires the Council to work with the applicant to help them find and retain accommodation to meet this legal duty.

9.5 The Cabinet's Terms of Reference provides at paragraph 5.7.15; "To oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council".

9.6 In approving the funding proposals the Cabinet would therefore be acting in accordance with its statutory requirements and in accordance with the Council's constitution.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Council has been notified of a total allocation of £213,643 in Rough Sleeping Programme funding, covering the three-year period 2026/27 – 2028/29. Funding is to meet the Programme objectives, namely, to provide immediate accommodation and support for people sleeping rough or at immediate risk of rough sleeping, and to strengthen local pathways into long-term accommodation.

10.2 It was announced in the October budget that total central government funding committed to Rough Sleeping Grant would be approximately double the amount previously announced in August 2026. North Herts has not yet received communication from Central Government confirming the revised allocation for North Hertfordshire. It has been assumed that North Herts Council's revised Rough

Sleeping grant allocation would be in the region of £400k – which would be sufficient to fully fund the proposed service.

10.3 However, if the revised grant allocation does not increase North Herts allocation from the £213,643 already announced this would leave a shortfall of just over £24k. If this scenario were to materialise, Housing would use unallocated balance in the Homelessness reserve to cover the shortfall.

10.4 The proposals contained in this report are consistent with MHCLG grant requirements.

10.5 A subsidy assessment has been conducted and is being considered by Legal Services.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2 YMCA deliver the majority of the Council's single homeless pathway and without the addition of this extra service there is a risk that some our most vulnerable clients remain on the street for extended periods.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached as Appendix 3. The assessment notes the potential positive impacts this decision will have for some of the most vulnerable members of the community in North Hertfordshire.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report; however, the proposals contribute to social value by providing community benefits that would otherwise not be realised.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the proposals in this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 None.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 – Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan

16.2 Appendix 2 – Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy

16.3 Appendix 3 - Equality Impact Assessment

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 MHCLG's Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant Determination 2026 to 2027

18.2 MHCLG's Rough Sleeping Programme