The City of Denver has failed to develop an effective strategy and devote enough resources to address its homelessness crisis, according to a new report from the city’s auditor found. Mayor Michael Hancock says he’s moving quickly to implement the report’s recommendations.

The 30-page report, issued by Denver Auditor Timothy O’Brien on Thursday, April 18, faulted the city for its “fragmented” approach to homelessness services and programs, in which outreach responsibilities are spread across different agencies and departments. It found that the lead agency in the city’s homelessness office, Denver Home, is understaffed and lacks the resources necessary for strategic planning and policy development.

“Homelessness is a high-priority issue for Denver,” the report said. “However, we could see using our resources more effectively with potentially better results if we had a comprehensive citywide strategy, defined leadership and more specific goals to define success.”

The audit found that city officials agreed to implement each of its recommendations, and in a statement on Thursday, Hancock said he would go one step further, announcing plans to establish a new department to lead its homelessness efforts.

“We appreciate the auditor’s common-sense recommendations, which are in line with our plans to focus our collective efforts through the creation of a new department of housing and homelessness,” said Hancock.

The proposed new department has been “in the works for a little more than a year,” said Kai Simkins, communications director for the city’s Department of Human Services. A more detailed announcement of Hancock’s proposal is expected to be made today, April 18, at Denver’s annual Housing Forum.

A 2018 survey, conducted by the Denver Housing Opportunity, found 3,277 people experiencing homelessness in the city-county Denver metro area, and 1,443 million units were lost. That’s down from peak levels recorded during the Great Recession, but it’s a far cry from the city’s official goal of being on track to achieve an 18% rate of residents living in a state of homelessness.

The new department would be the first city office Hancock established in nearly two years — in 2016, to create the Office of Housing and Opportunity for the People (HOOP), which he said was responsible for developing a comprehensive and comprehensive approach to the policies, programs and projects along the full range of homelessness services.

“I’m encouraged by today’s announcement, as it builds on our momentum to address homelessness in Denver, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the council and throughout city government to ensure that we continue moving forward in a coordinated, equitable and effective manner,” said Alderman David Sutphin, who chairs the Homelessness and Transportation Committee.

For more than 20 years, various groups have had less support for strategy and policy planning for the implementation of the city’s approach to addressing homelessness,” the report said, including Food Bank, the Office of WSPU, former mayor John Nicholas’ Commission to End Homelessness and other appointed bodies like Hancock’s Housing Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee for Housing Programs, Planning and Development.

As a brings these efforts under a single city department, Hancock’s administration plans to develop a more “inclusive and comprehensive strategy” to reflect the city’s approach to addressing homelessness.

“Denver is the go-to leader in the country when it comes to addressing homelessness,” Hancock said in a statement. “We are committed to seeing how the mayor plans to make it happen in his new department.”