
Prevalence of Homelessness in West Berkshire

Committee considering report:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
Date of Committee:	9 October 2018
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Hilary Cole
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Forward Plan Ref:	OSMC

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update of the position with homelessness following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 which came into force in April 2018. In addition, the Homelessness Strategy Group (HSG) has been re-formed with renewed emphasis on a strategic approach to tackling homelessness rather than operational.
- 1.2 In addition, the Council has been awarded grant funding to tackle rough sleeping and details of actions proposed will be presented together with an update of the partnership working which has resulted in a co-ordinated response to homelessness. Included in this will be an explanation of the progress with the Make Every Adult Matter (MEAM) project.
- 1.3 The Government has also released the Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 which has implications for the Council and details will be provided.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the contents of the report are noted and that the outcomes of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and approach to tackling rough sleeping are approved.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Financial:** In February 2018, the Council agreed additional funding towards new posts to support the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act when implemented in April 2018. In addition, Government funding has been awarded to West Berkshire under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) to tackle rough sleeping i.e. £212,000 for 2018/2019 and £264,820 for 2019/2020 for a variety of projects.
- 3.2 **Policy:** The Council has legal obligations to reduce homelessness and has a Housing Strategy, and Homelessness Strategy which includes a Rough Sleeping Strategy as well as a Tenancy Strategy. Policies which come under those strategies include the Allocation Policy. There are additional protocols between the Council housing services and other internal and external services such as the Young Persons

Protocol, Prison Release, Hospital Discharge etc.

- 3.3 **Personnel:** The council approved additional staff for the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, partly funded by grant (new burdens, flexible homelessness reduction grant and homelessness grant). There are additional staff resources to be covered by the RSI grant, mostly employed by external agencies such as Two Saints. The grant covers a Homelessness Reduction Co-ordinator recruited to manage the RSI project and report to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This post will assist to co-ordinate all agencies involved in rough sleeping to meet the Governments ambitions of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminating it by 2027.
- 3.4 **Legal:** There are legal implications of not complying with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 such as legal challenge.
- 3.5 **Risk Management:** The RSI funding will be closely monitored by a Homelessness Reduction Co-ordinator who will report to the MHCLG on a monthly basis. The HSG has worked in partnership to develop a short term strategy for rough sleepers for the winter of 2018/2019.
- 3.6 **Property:** The Council has a programme of purchasing property to be used as temporary accommodation to reduce the need for Bed and Breakfast
- 3.7 **Other:**

4. Other options considered

- 4.1 The report is for information only.

Executive Summary

5. Introduction / Background

- 5.1 The Council has statutory duties to manage a Common Housing Register and to provide housing advice and address homelessness. The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) was implemented in April 2018 as an additional obligation on the Council to prevent and relieve homelessness and the Council provided additional revenue funding to address the new responsibilities as well as new burdens funding provided by the Government.
- 5.2 The Council has also been awarded funding under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) for 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 following the launch of the Governments Rough Sleeping Strategy. This strategy has implications for the Council and these will be outlined in the report.
- 5.3 In 2018, the Homelessness Strategy Group (HSG) was re-formed, involving all providers and stakeholders (including voluntary agencies) to develop a short term winter strategy for 2018/2019 and also looking forward into the future. The HSG has met several times as well as sub-groups to work on various projects and demonstrated successful partnership working to achieve common aims.
- 5.4 The purpose of this report is therefore to provide a summary of the housing services work following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the work involved with the RSI as well as implications of the Government Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018.

6. Proposal

- 6.1 The report will provide detail of the outcomes of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 as well as details of the allocation of grant funding from the RSI from the MHCLG which is £212,000 for 2018/2019 and £262,000 for 2019/2020. There are a number of projects which have to be put in place very quickly in order to be ready for this winter. In addition, an update will be provided of the MEAM project. There are proposals for the Council to develop the Homelessness Strategy and to bid for funding opportunities from the Governments Rough Sleeping Strategy which was launched in August 2018.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 In the past 12 months, there have been a lot of changes in the delivery of housing services, both to households at risk of becoming homeless and rough sleepers. The strategic focus of the HSG has assisted all parties concerned to work together constructively and with positive outcomes. The development of this group, reporting to the Health and Wellbeing Board is in line with Government proposals and will work to develop both the short term and longer term homelessness and rough sleeping strategies.
- 7.2 The HRA has resulted in housing services assisting more people and with new initiatives being explored, will aim to help more households into housing. A research project has recently been completed by Arc4 into the potential of accessing the private rented sector and options are being investigated following the publication of this report.

8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Supporting Information