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# Prevalence of Homelessness in West Berkshire – Supporting Information

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## 1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 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 2018. This strategy has implications for the Council and these will be outlined later in this report.
- 1.3 There is no legal duty to have a Housing Strategy, but there is to have a Homelessness Strategy which would incorporate a Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 The purpose of this report is therefore to provide a summary of the housing services work following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the work involved with the RSI as well as implications of the Government Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018.

## 2. Supporting Information

### The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

- 2.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 received Royal Assent on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017 and introduced new duties for local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness. A new Code of Guidance was published which contains much of the detail of how the new duties are to be delivered. The new duties consist of a new prevention duty and relief duty.

### The Prevention Duty

- 2.2 The Prevention Duty requires that an application is triggered for all households who approach as homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days. The previous timescale was 28 days. The intention is to allow additional time to work with households and prevent them becoming homeless. It also applies to applicants who are non-priority.
- 2.3 Once triggered, the local authority must:
- Complete an assessment of the applicant's situation, including any identified support needs
  - Issue a decision letter to state that a Prevention Duty has been accepted
  - Agree a Personal Housing Plan (PHP) with the applicant, detailing the reasonable steps that both the applicant and the local authority will take to prevent homelessness
  - Refer the applicant to relevant support services, where such services are available
  - Monitor and review the PHP, adjusting it as appropriate
  - Issue a decision letter when the duty is ended

### The new Relief Duty

- 2.4 If the household approach as homeless (rather than threatened with homelessness) or when the Prevention Duty ends and the household become homeless, the new Relief Duty is triggered. The purpose of the Relief Duty is to take steps to help the household secure alternative accommodation. Interim accommodation may have to be provided at this stage and the relief Duty lasts for 56 days. If a referral cannot be made to another local authority due to local connection, the local authority must:
- Issue a decision letter to state that a Relief Duty has been accepted.
  - Agree a Personal Housing Plan (PHP) with the applicant, detailing the reasonable steps that both the applicant and the local authority will take to relieve homelessness.
  - Refer the applicant to relevant support services, where such services are available
  - Monitor and review the PHP, adjusting it as appropriate.
  - Issue a decision letter when the duty is ended.
- 2.5 Households also have to be assessed at the same time under the Homelessness duties with a view to the Council deciding if there is a homeless duty towards them.

- 2.6 In order for the Council to take on these new responsibilities, additional staff were recruited to deal with the increased cases i.e. 2 additional Housing Officers, floating support officers and Landlord Liaison Officer to work with landlords to increase options. In addition a fund of £150,000 was made available to improve incentives for landlords to encourage them to use offer properties. A new software system had to be introduced and staff training on the new legislation and implementation as well as to learn a new module on the ICT system. At the same time, funding was successfully obtained for consultants to undertake a survey into the private rented sector in West Berkshire to assist households approaching the Council for support.

### Outcomes

- 2.7 The HRA only applies to new cases from 1 April 2018 and not existing cases. It has been in place for only 5 months, so it is too early to provide evidence of significant outcomes in such a short space of time especially as new staff were being recruited and trained and not all yet in post. If a household has 56 days prevention and 56 days relief i.e. 112 days, that is 3 months.
- 2.8 One outcome has been an increased use of temporary accommodation on a discretionary basis which would not have happened previously. It is anticipated that this will reduce over time as “prevention” will avoid the need for “relief”.
- 2.9 There have been 689 cases opened since 1 April 2018 (367 in Quarter 1 and 322 July, August and half way through September), 328 of which are still open and being worked on. A total of 71 prevention cases were closed in total, 49 of these for securing accommodation. A total of 76 Relief cases were closed in total, 51 of these for securing accommodation. Therefore, 100 households were assisted with securing accommodation. In 2016/17, a total of 155 successful actions were taken to prevent homelessness for the whole year. Of these, 105 were assisted to remain in their own home and 50 households were assisted into alternative accommodation. There is clearly a higher level of activity with successful outcomes.
- 2.11 Of the 689 cases, a legal homelessness duty has been accepted for 7 households (7 decisions made). This compares with 11 for 2017/18 and (91 decisions made) and 26 in 2016/17 (138 decisions).

### Rough Sleeping Initiative

- 2.12 An officer from the Housing Advisory Support Team (HAST) from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) visited the Council earlier in the year with a view to the Council submitting a bid for Government grant to address rough sleeping. The Council’s approached were those with rough sleeping figures of over 19. This number is the one submitted on one night in the year in November as an estimate of the total number of rough sleepers and the figure reported for West Berkshire was 20, which was an increase from 15 the previous year. A further bid was invited for 2019/2020 when the Government launched the Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2019.
- 2.13 The Council has been successful in being awarded the following grant for a range of projects:

Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding Awarded for 2018/2019 and 2019/2020

Project	2018/2019 £	2019/2020 £
Additional outreach worker	19,980	34,000
Extension of prison release housing from 7 days to 28	2,772	5,820
“Housing First” support workers	44,460	80,000
Dual diagnosis worker	45,500	20,000
GP/health visitor service	16,500	15,000
“Make it happen” fund e.g. rent and deposits	30,000	25,000
“Move on fund” similar to the above, but focussed on moving people on from hostel accommodation.	30,000	25,000
Move on floating support worker		28,000
Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator	22,200	32,000
Total	211,312	264,820

- 2.14 The additional Outreach worker has been recruited and interviews have taken place for the Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator whose role will be to manage the project and report back the MHCLG on outcomes. Reports have to be submitted on a monthly basis. The Housing First model is where housing is provided with intensive support to ensure the tenants have sufficient support to enable a sustainable tenancy. This scheme is designed to assist a few tenants e.g. 5/6, and Sovereign has offered to provide flats to support this scheme. The Move On support worker will assist to free up rooms at Two Saints.
- 2.15 The other projects are being progressed ready for the winter of 2018/2019 and the MHCLG will expect the numbers of rough sleepers to decline in line with the Government Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018.
- 2.16 In addition to the above projects, a Company called Green Trees has approached the Council in order to refer rough sleepers to a housing project in Newbury. Green Trees has developed a building to provide 27 units of self-contained accommodation with intensive support specifically for rough sleepers. It is intended that referrals will be made via the Council into the scheme. Green Trees have also sourced 2 additional schemes of 20 and 18 and further details are awaited about these schemes.

## The Homelessness Strategy Group

- 2.17 The Homelessness Strategy Group (HSG) has been in existence for many years to monitor and feed into the Council’s Homelessness Strategy. The group has been re-formed with a renewed strategic emphasis on tackling homelessness. Membership was reviewed to make the group more strategic rather than operational. The RSI bid award has been a focus for the group and there have been sub-groups formed to work on
- A short term strategy for tackling rough sleeping focussed on the winter of 2018/2019
  - A longer term strategy to be developed
  - Provision of a drop in centre
- 2.18 The HSG is jointly chaired by the Manager of Two Saints, Sam Headland and Head of Public Health, Matthew Pearce with a view to reporting to the Health and Wellbeing Board. This is in accordance with the Governments recently launched Rough Sleeping Strategy. It is attended by many internal and external providers including Swanswell, CCGs, NHS as well as the voluntary agencies such as Loose Ends, 8 Bells, West Berkshire Homelessness Charity and the Soup Kitchen.
- 2.19 The approach to deliver the short term strategy for the winter of 2018/2019 is for Two Saints to provide an extended service for rough sleepers which extends beyond the Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) to operate from November 2018 to March 2019. SWEP is normally activated in extreme cold or heat. The intention is to open Two Saints for the winter for people with a local connection. Anyone accessing Two Saints without a local connection will be offered one nights accommodation and redirected to their home town. It has been agreed that assistance will be offered by volunteers working with the charities to offer daytime activities and assistance to find housing from Two Saints with all agencies being able to access the “Make it Happen” and “Move On” funds to assist. There are cases where this co-operative partnership approach is already taking place with financial assistance being offered by way of deposit and rent in advance.
- 2.20 The Green Trees scheme has been delayed for practical reasons and it is not certain that it will be delivered in time for this winter. There are also difficulties recruiting staff to manage the scheme. As a back-up plan, West Berkshire Homeless charity has agreed to set up an “overflow facility” for any rough sleepers who cannot be accommodated at Two Saints. There is a limit of 20 rough sleepers who can be accommodated at Two Saints. There has been an increase in the number of rough sleepers over the summer months and the count is currently 30, so it is likely that some may have to be accommodated in a temporary facility. Premises are being sought at the moment and it is proposed that the overflow facility will take referrals only via Two Saints or the Council rather than being direct access. All of the charities have agreed that volunteers will work at Two Saints and offer day time activities and support for anyone rough sleepers and West Berkshire Homeless Charity has offered to continue with the good work of sourcing housing and employment for those who have less complex needs.
- 2.21 The HSG has worked with the Council’s Public Relations Team to develop a “Communication Strategy” to publicise the work being undertaken by the Council and its partners positively. The Group are working together in a very positive way

with a common mission to resolve the issues relating to homelessness and rough sleeping.

- 2.22 In addition to the HSG group, there are multi-agency groups to such as the Rough Sleeping Task and Targeting Group who meet regularly to discuss operationally referrals of rough sleepers to various agencies.

### **Make Every Adult Matter (MEAM)**

- 2.23 The MEAM Approach is a framework to help local areas develop effective, coordinated services for people facing multiple disadvantage, and promote lasting, embedded change to local systems. The Council was successful in securing funding for a MEAM Co-ordinator to promote the MEAM approach. People with multiple needs face a multitude of problems including homelessness, substance misuse, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health and the aim of the programme is to develop co-ordinated services and challenge existing approaches to secure successful outcomes for this small cohort of people. There is a partnership working group which meets regularly to discuss cases, barriers and solutions.
- 2.24 The MEAM Co-ordinator has assisted to support 3 clients who were previously not engaging with benefit claims and moving them into accommodation. Over 200 actions have been made under MEAM. A total of 47 referrals have been to the MEAM triage stage, with 11 people in total accepted onto the cohort to date. There have been 19 fortnightly multi-agency MEAM Operational meetings. With a mix of statutory and voluntary sector agencies working together to improve outcomes for the cohort, new systems have been developed and new ways of working.

### **Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018**

- 2.25 The Government launched the new Rough Sleeping Strategy (RSS) in August 2018 and there are some implications for the Council as well as opportunities for bidding for funding for additional schemes. The aim of the RSS is to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate the need for rough sleeping by 2027. The strategy is supported with £100million of funding for a variety of proposals. The themes of the RSS are:

- Prevention
- Intervention
- Recovery

### **Prevention**

- 2.26 There is a lot of emphasis on preventing rough sleeping in the first place and the Government has introduced legislation and regulation already, including:
- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
  - Consultation on more regulation for longer tenancies in the private rented sector
  - The Troubled Families programme, as a lot of rough sleeping is linked to poverty

- “All public services should work together to provide a person centred, understanding of individual needs, environments that are appropriate for vulnerable adults”
- An emphasis on the role of businesses, communities and the voluntary sector
- Use of Social Investment and social impact bonds to delivery successful rough sleeping projects
- Housing First pilots and other related schemes
- A commitment to reviewing the HRA in 2 years but now extended to other legislation such as the Vagrancy Act which criminalises rough sleepers
- A commitment to local homelessness and rough sleeping strategies to be monitored by the Government (uploading them to the MHCLG)
- A report on the HSGs linked to Health and Wellbeing Boards in 12 months’ time.
- A role in Safeguarding Boards reviewing the death of rough sleepers.
- The continued role of the National Homelessness Advisory Service (NHAS) for training and advice to front line staff.
- Improve data and introduce data pilots by summer 2019
- NHS data collection on housing status and targeted work for homelessness prevention work in the NHS (NICE guidance)
- Develop hospital discharge and primary care procedures
- Improve prison discharge and launch pilots
- Accommodation on release from prison for women pilots to be launched
- Pilots for care leavers such as extending foster placements and providing personal advisors
- Welfare assistance to be extended
- Review of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates post 2020

## Intervention

2.27 There are a number of interventions proposed:

- The provision of Rough Sleeper navigators
- “Somewhere safe to stay” – a speedy response to rough sleeping
- An announcement was made that supported housing benefit would be retained as there were proposals to abandon payments as originally made. This is good for hostels and there is due to be a review of hostels in Spring 2019
- Focus on training for frontline staff
- People who sleep rough from outside the UK funding initiatives and support team
- Domestic abuse accommodation review
- NHS and healthcare audit
- End of life care for homeless review
- NHS to spend £30m on healthcare for rough sleepers over the next 5 years.
- Tackling street activity with partners
- Drug mis-use and alcohol strategy
- Role of police in tackling homelessness (national lead on homelessness) - best practice
- Development of a new Streetlink to support alternative “giving” by members of the public as well as identification of rough sleepers.

## Recovery

2.28 Recovery takes the form of new housing and reviewing and rolling out pilots. There are a number of bidding opportunities the Council can benefit from and which will be progressed:

- Boost supply of affordable housing with capital funding available where there are opportunities
- A “move on” fund for housing options to include support as well as housing
- Housing First review
- Supported Lettings Fund of £19m to provide flexible support and tenancy sustainment
- Review of housing related support services (Sept)
- More landlord regulation
- Private rented sector Access Fund (£20m)
- Letting Agency fund
- Young Futures Fund (Social Impact Bond) aimed at NEET – 18 to 24
- Focus on local business and charities with round table discussions to take place
- “Work Coach Homelessness Expert” in every job centre
- Job centre managers to work in partnership with housing authorities
- Focussed guidance and share best practice
- Will support further pilots

## Conclusion

2.29 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.

2.30 The HRA has resulted in housing services assisting more people and with new initiatives being explored, will aim to help more households into housing moving forward. The Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 aimed at eliminating rough sleeping by 2022 also provides opportunities for bidding which will be positively explored.

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