
To review the prevalence of homelessness in West Berkshire and to review the impact of the Council's activity over the winter period – Supporting Information

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 A report was brought to this Committee on 9 October 2018 outlining the Council responsibilities for tackling homelessness and in that report, details were provided of the new legislation, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) which was implemented on 1 April 2018. At that time, the Council provided additional revenue funding to address the new responsibilities contained within this legislation as well as new burdens funding provided by the Government.
- 1.2 The report also contained details of the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding received from The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 following the launch of the Governments Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 and details of the progress with the variety of projects supported by that funding. The aim of this report is therefore to provide an update to the HRA and RSI projects.
- 1.3 In addition, the Homelessness Strategy Group (HSG) developed a short term winter strategy for 2018/2019 as well as other longer term projects. This report will also provide an update of the review of this winter plan and the outcomes for homeless and rough sleepers within West Berkshire and implications for future years moving forward.

2. Supporting Information

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

- 2.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 received Royal Assent on 27th April 2017 and introduced new duties for local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness. The new duties consist of a new prevention duty and relief duty.
- 2.2 The Prevention Duty requires that an application is triggered for all households who approach the Council as homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days. 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.
- 2.3 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.

- 2.4 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.

Outcomes

- 2.5 There were a total of 1,772 housing enquiries in the first 12 months (1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019). In the first 9 months, 457 cases were assessed. Statistics collated in Appendix B demonstrate the reasons households are requesting assistance as well as the outcomes and make-up of the households.
- 2.6 The majority of households were either facing an end to their private rented tenancy (23%), parents or family were no longer willing to accommodate (19%) or were losing a social tenancy (11%). A total of 29% of approaches were from households with “no fixed abode”. Single males comprise 32% of approaches with female single parents with dependent children making up 25% of approaches. The third highest category is 23% single females. This means that over 50% of approaches were from single people. The statistics also show that there were many households with a range of issues such as mental health problems, physical disabilities, a history of offending, rough sleeping and repeat rough sleeping. So, there are some households with complex needs which are difficult to address.
- 2.7 There was an increased use of temporary accommodation on a discretionary basis which would not have happened previously. On average, per quarter there were over 50 families in temporary accommodation while their cases were assessed. It is anticipated that this will reduce over time as “prevention” will avoid the need for “relief”. The Council has purchased units of accommodation to provide self-contained temporary accommodation within the District rather than in using Bed and Breakfast in Slough. It also reduces the costs of Bed and Breakfast. The number of households in temporary accommodation is 0.78 per 1,000 population which is better than the other Berkshire authorities where it is 0.9 in Wokingham, 3.07 in Bracknell Forest, 3.19 in Reading and 8.26 in Slough. Figures are not available for Windsor and Maidenhead.

Rough Sleeping Initiative

- 2.8 The Council was awarded £476,132 grant funding to tackle rough sleeping by the MHCLG for 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 to fund a variety of projects. The Council's official rough sleeping count in November 2017 was 20 and grant funding was awarded to all 83 Local Authorities with a rough sleeping count/estimate of over 19. Following the initial awards, further funding has been made to other Local Authorities not in this original group.
- 2.9 There have been further bid rounds and the Council has benefitted from receiving a further £102,560 in a “Rapid Rehousing Pathway” bid round for a Supported Lettings Officer and Navigator role. The aim of the Supported Lettings Officer is to provide assistance for single people to find accommodation, to provide practical assistance to secure a letting and to be a single point of contact afterwards to ensure tenancy sustainment. The other post is a “Navigator” role to assist Outreach workers to liaise with agencies to ensure people don't return to the streets. This

budget includes funding to support activity. Regular meetings are held with the MHCLG and monthly monitoring takes place to ensure that the Council is accountable to the Government for the initiatives being funded.

- 2.10 In July 2019, a cross Berkshire meeting of housing services is being facilitated by the MHCLG which will assist to identify the schemes that have been more successful than others to meet local needs. The original £476,132 supports the following projects:

Rough Sleeping Initiative Projects

Project	Progress
Homelessness Reduction Co-ordinator	The post was approved to manage the project and an officer has been appointed employed by the Council.
Additional Outreach Worker	Appointed by Two Saints and working with rough sleepers and over the winter period with the night shelter.
2 x Housing First workers	This scheme is aimed at entrenched rough sleepers and provides housing first with intensive support to ensure tenancy sustainment. Two workers have been recruited by Two Saints and currently there are 3 people housed and one more property identified. The scheme is limited by the availability of suitable voids.
Dual Diagnosis worker	This post aims to tackle the clients who are passed from one service to the other. One post holder has left, so a replacement is being advertised and will be recruited by the Council.
Move on worker	A post recruited by Two Saints designed to assist people to move out of their temporary accommodation into permanent housing.
Extension of the prison release scheme	Temporary housing at Two Saints is provided for 28 days instead of 7 on prison release.
Detox and Rehab	Some funding was allocated to pay for 2/3 rough sleepers to go to detox and rehabilitation. It is aimed at those at most risk and willingness to take this route.
“Make it Happen” fund	A fund to assist people into housing e.g. rent in advance and deposit or other relevant items. Criteria have been agreed and applications are being made for the fund.
“Move on” fund	A fund to pay for items to assist people to move on.
Outreach health and dental services	The RSI initially funded the outreach GP/nurse service and now the outreach dental services have been offered.

The Homelessness Strategy Group and the Winter Plan

- 2.11 The HSG has been in existence for many years to monitor and feed into the Council's Homelessness Strategy. The group was re-formed with a renewed strategic emphasis on tackling homelessness. 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
- 2.12 The winter plan was agreed to consist of Two Saints providing an extended winter provision service for rough sleepers which extending beyond the Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) to operate from 1 November 2018 to 31nMarch 2019. SWEP is normally activated in extreme cold or heat. The extended winter provision was for people with a local connection and paid for by the Council.
- 2.13 Before the winter provision commenced, there were a high number of rough sleeper's using Two Saints and it was considered that a "back-up plan" was required. Meetings took place with West Berkshire Homeless charity (WBC) to investigate if an "overflow facility" could be set up for any rough sleepers who could not be accommodated at Two Saints if the building was full. There is a limit of 20 people who can be accommodated at Two Saints in emergency accommodation. The proposal suggested was the use of church halls on a rotational basis, similar to the arrangement in Reading. It was proposed that the overflow facility would take referrals only via Two Saints rather than being direct access.
- 2.14 It was not possible for WBC to set up the "pop up" shelter in the end due to practical arrangements and lack of time and buildings available. It was considered that Two Saints would be sufficient so the request came quite late for the arrangements to be accommodated in a safe manner. In November/December, a local developer offered a building to WBC and they opened a night shelter from January to the end of May 2019.
- 2.15 A need was identified in the winter plan for extended day time activities and volunteer assistance at Two Saints. Loose Ends were able to extend their opening hours on 2 days a week and WBH volunteers visited Two Saints to assist with meal times and mentor people staying at Two Saints.

Review of the Winter Plan

- 2.16 A sub-group of the HSG met to review the winter plan with a view to identifying "lessons learned" and feeding into the winter plan for 2019/2020. This has taken place and a report will be presented to the HSG on 2 July 2019 for the recommendations to be accepted.
- 2.17 The night shelter opened in January, and there was an agreement between WBH, Two Saints and the Council about working together and how referrals would be made between agencies. The referral mechanism did not operate as agreed with

the result that the night shelter attracted people without a local connection, sofa surfers and some who had rooms or were using the winter provision at Two Saints.

- 2.18 A total of 25 people used the night shelter over the winter period and the shelter was kept open for 3 more weeks to enable joint working to accommodate the 13/14 remaining occupants. When the shelter closed, 3 people returned to the streets. The current number of rough sleepers is 8 and there are plans for some of those to enter into Housing First. So, there has been a significant reduction in the numbers of rough sleepers.
- 2.19 The conclusion of the winter plan review group was that overall, there was an excellent outcome for most of the people using the night shelter. There was good partnership working between Two Saints including the Outreach Workers and the Council to assist with housing options as well as WBH finding more “half way” houses for the remaining occupants of the night shelter. There were a number of rough sleepers who did not use the shelter, or who moved in and out.
- 2.20 A number of recommendations were made to the HSG and for other services moving forward as some gaps were identified. For example, day time activities are still required to ensure that people are helped to engage and can find some assistance back into work and to keep them occupied. The full list of recommendations are listed:
- Rough Sleeper/Homeless (existing and previous experiences) focus group to be set up
 - Positive promotion of Two Saints
 - A Two Saints users working group to be set up
 - A single gateway approach agreed and adopted for future years
 - A single point of contact recommended to avoid confusion with the client group
 - Mental health services review in relation to rough sleepers/homeless
 - Seek solutions for daytime activities for the residents of Two Saints, and other vulnerable clients which may involve submitting bids for a worker e.g. Public Health funding, National Lottery, other charitable funds.
 - To work jointly with other services who deal with vulnerable people with the express desire to support individuals, prevent disengagement and provide a longer term health and wellbeing cost benefit for the Council and NHS
 - Report to the HWBB to seek financial support for future funding if the RSI funding is not supported beyond 2019/2020.
- 2.21 There is a recognition that there are plans to assist most of the remaining rough sleepers with the RSI initiatives such as using Housing First. Therefore, by the winter of 2019/2020, the number of entrenched rough sleepers will have reduced significantly. Therefore, the recommendation for the winter of 2019/2020 is that there may be a need for a small emergency provision but not as large as the provision in the winter of 2018/2019.

Joint Working and MEAM (Make Every Adult Matter)

- 2.22 There were a number of liaison groups involving internal and external agencies:

- MEAM strategic group
- MEAM operational group
- HSG
- RSTTG (Rough Sleeping Task and Targeting Group)
- Blue Light group

2.23 It was decided to streamline the groups as attendees are often the same. The MEAM strategic group was merged with the HSG. The MEAM operational, RSTTG and Blue Light groups were all convened on the same day to ensure continuity. To avoid confusion for clients i.e. many different people dealing with each person such, the merging of the operational groups will help with the recommendation of a single point of contact for clients.

The Encampment

2.24 An encampment of rough sleepers had been present on an area of Council owned land behind the football club for a few years and it was agreed that court action would be taken to dismantle the encampment. After intensive work with all parties involved and court order obtained, the encampment was removed and all occupants directed to alternative housing options. Together, the Outreach workers and WBH assisted by offering storage facilities and encouragement to dismantle voluntarily with alternative housing options. The result was a peaceful return to open land with no adverse publicity to the action taken by the Council.

The Housing and Homelessness Strategy

2.25 The Council is progressing the new Housing Strategy where it will be an opportunity for all partners, internal and external to feed into setting the vision and housing strategic objectives moving forward, linking into the newly adopted Council Strategy. At the same time the Homelessness Strategy is being developed which is a statutory requirement. The Council has already drafted a Rough Sleeping Plan as required by the MHCLG which will feed into the Homelessness Strategy. Both strategies will outline the housing need and what is required to meet those needs.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Since the HRA and RSI legislation and projects have been in place, a great deal of successful outcomes have been achieved to prevent homelessness and to assist rough sleepers to get into permanent housing.
- 3.2 The partnership working by all agencies involved, linked by the HSG has helped to deliver these successful outcomes.