

Meeting Executive Committee

Portfolio Area Housing, Older People & Health / Resources

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HOUSING FIRST APPROACH AT STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL IN RESPONSE TO THE ROUGH SLEEPING CRISIS

KEY DECISION

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PURPOSE

- 1.1 In response to the current and evolving resource challenges facing the Council's Homelessness Service to provide housing related support to a very difficult and hard to reach client group it was felt important to bring before Executive a report that outlines the Council's immediate and developing response to meet these client's needs together with the resource pressures this creates. As this is an important and current issue that is influenced by national policy it was felt more expedient to bring a late and urgent item report to Executive than to delay the report to the next Executive meeting in August.

- 1.2 The challenge of preventing homelessness and rough sleeping is both a national and local one and has been exacerbated by the outbreak of Covid-19. Experience in Stevenage has shown that people with precarious housing circumstances have been pushed into street homelessness as a result of the current crisis. As government strategy continues to develop and is in the process of being articulated and communicated with Councils, this report sets out the Council's immediate, medium and long-term proposals to tackle the complex issues raised by the current crisis.
- 1.3 In support of this effort, recommendations are set out in this report for the Executive to instruct officers to marshal resources, monitor budget pressures and investigate opportunities (both funding and land led) linked to improving the housing related offer, including support and the supply of accommodation for tackling the current homelessness crisis in Stevenage.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Executive note the support provided to homeless households during the Covid-19 lockdown and to note the challenges faced by the Council over the coming months ahead, as outlined in this report.
- 2.2 That the Executive notes the current service pressures developing in the Housing and No More service within the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account, which will be monitored by the Council's Finance department and reported to Executive as part of the quarterly budget monitoring cycle.
- 2.3 That Executive requests officers to develop a business case for a new Housing First Model, including the potential construction of a new hostel (as outlined in 4.24), taking into account partner support and funding requirements.

3 BACKGROUND: CONTEXT OF THE HOMELESSNESS LANDSCAPE PRIOR TO COVID-19

- 3.1 In December 2019, the Executive approved the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024 (H&RSS 2019-2024). This strategy outlined the key trends locally and nationally showing that homelessness was on the increase. In Stevenage, the total number of homeless decisions being made had increased by 46% over a 4 year period from 105 in 2014/15 to 193 in 2018/19. Nationally, the Government's own figures showed that there were 25,130 families with children identified as homeless and that the overall number of children living in temporary accommodation hit a 13-year high at 126,020, up 83% since its lowest point in June 2011. Whilst other research (Campaign to Protect Rural England reported in H&RSS) pointed to an even worsening picture of the housing crisis, with growing waiting lists and not enough long term housing being built. As such, the current housing difficulties being faced by Stevenage and the country are not a result of Covid-19, but are a problem that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- 3.2 The Council's approach to tackling homelessness in the H&RSS, identified four key priorities:

1. Prevention and relief of homelessness and rough sleeping
 2. Provision of temporary accommodation
 3. Long term increase in housing development
 4. Support for our homeless households
- 3.3 Both Members and Officers recognised that these priorities would be challenging to meet and a partnership approach along the basis of the 'Housing First' approach (a model that provides housing with a wrapped support package from the outset to homeless vulnerable clients) would be necessary to protect the most vulnerable in our communities, given their deep rooted and sometimes multi-dimensional housing, support and clinical needs. The strategy sets out the Council's vision to "work co-operatively to prevent and reduce homelessness and end the need for anyone to sleep rough in Stevenage".
- 3.4 The situation In Stevenage reflects the national picture. Despite the coordinated and co-operative efforts by the Council and partners (including the Stevenage Health & Wellbeing Partnership, the Police, the Haven and other Voluntary and Community Sector organisations) in helping residents to stay in their homes, more and more households were finding themselves homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless.
- 3.5 The week prior to the Covid-19 lockdown (16th March 2020), there were 121 households in Emergency and Temporary Accommodation, including 19 in bed and breakfast accommodation. During June (after the initial lock-down period) this figure had risen to 181 with 69 in bed and breakfast accommodation. This level of demand puts a significant strain on stretched to cater for this vulnerable client group.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

POST COVID-19 OUTBREAK AND LOCKDOWN AND STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

- 4.1 The global scale and national impact of Covid-19 has been widely documented. Its impact on Rough Sleepers is all the more acute, as this client group is notably more likely to be suffering from issues relating to addiction and support needs for their mental and physical health.
- 4.2 Following the Government announcing that the country was going into lockdown from 23rd March 2020, there was a directive to ensure that rough sleepers were accommodated ("Everyone in for good" 28th March). Whilst the Council responded to this immediately, by securing accommodation via hotels, it was logistically not possible to secure sufficient bookings in a single venue, or solely in Stevenage. Stevenage Borough Council, like many in Hertfordshire, needed to utilise hotel spaces in neighbouring authorities in and outside of Hertfordshire given the urgency of the challenges.

- 4.3 Block bookings (at discounted rates) were secured at the Holiday Inn Express, the Novotel and the Gate Hotel, within Stevenage, as well as a number of rooms at a hotel in Stansted. This provision provided shelter and protection for the vulnerable client group during the national Covid-19 lockdown.
- 4.4 All those who approached the Council as rough sleeping, or at risk of rough sleeping, were offered accommodation and support. The Government advised that this provision should be for a 12 week period up to the 19th June 2020 and in the absence of any alternative options or developments from Central Government, this has been extended to the end of 31st July 2020 (by agreement of the Executive at the 10th June 2020 meeting).
- 4.5 The projected cost of this accommodation is expected to be in the region of £404,000 and includes accommodation, basic food provision and all security costs. To date the Government has confirmed direct funding of just £11,500 to Stevenage, which has led to a significant pressure on the Council's finite resources.
- 4.6 The Council has engaged three rough sleeper workers, who together with the Council's No More service have administered essential support to homeless clients. The provision for these clients is not just limited to accommodation, but has also included meals and mobile phones, which are essential tools for them to communicate and access both professional and personal support networks.
- 4.7 Security arrangements have been put in place in order to meet with the hotel requirements and provide assurances over safety for clients, members of the public, hotel and council staff. It is disappointing to note, that despite the intensive support, some rough sleepers disengaged from the accommodation, following continual breaches of the hotel accommodation conditions and for participating in criminal activity, including violent antisocial behaviour. Given the complex nature and often multiple challenges facing this client group, visits and inspections have been conducted in conjunction with private security and the police service.
- 4.8 At the time of reporting a total of 48 rough sleepers are accommodated, however this is an evolving number as the service continues to receive new referrals, as well as finding housing solutions for others. The makeup of this number includes those that were long term rough sleepers in Stevenage (approximately 16) but also those that could have been classed as hidden homeless and have been forced on to the streets (28). This includes people that were relying on the good will of family or friends to be able to 'sofa surf' prior to the restrictions that were introduced as part of the social distancing measures. Throughout the lockdown period the Council had received a total of 113 enquiries that have been assessed and supported in some way for varying lengths of time. These 113 are individuals that would not have normally been owned a housing duty, but all have been eligible to claim public funds.
- 4.9 Earlier updates to Executive estimated the cost of the Council's interventions at £419,000 and, as stated earlier, the Council has now spent, or committed to spend £404,000 to the end of July. However, these costs have now been mitigated by an assumption for housing benefit claims and support through

Herts CC for transport and food costs. If these claims are met and, allowing for continuing expenditure over the coming months, the latest projection shows a net revenue cost of £274,000 to the Council. This estimate is under constant review and will depend on the level of benefit claims that can be recovered (currently being processed) and the availability of any further support from the Government. This figure and the implications it poses will be reported in the programmed financial monitoring reports to Executive.

- 4.10 It is important to recognise the legal context and financial implications of the Councils interventions in this area, as they have important implications for both the General Fund (GF) and the HRA. The Council has various statutory housing duties and the resources for remedying these have to be accounted for in accordance with the relevant legislation that is detailed below.
- 4.11 Where the Council has a duty to house an individual under Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Reduction Act 2017), then that cost is a cost to the Housing Revenue Account. It is also possible to use section 9 of the Housing Act 1985 to provide housing accommodation, by building or acquiring properties and then letting those properties through the HRA. If the powers under Part 2 of the Housing Act 1985 (section 9) were used for the provision of temporary accommodation, i.e. where a duty to house an individual had not been established, the role of the HRA would be limited to solely being a landlord function and all other costs and additional services would have to be funded from the General Fund.
- 4.12 The single rough sleepers that have been accommodated by the Council are unlikely to fall within any specific housing duty, such as under section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 and therefore are being supported through the Council's general power of competence under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. Therefore these costs will also have to be resourced through the General Fund.
- 4.13 The Council's Finance team are supporting the Housing and No More Service teams to make sure appropriate funding is available and accurately recorded. This will also allow for budget pressures that are building in Housing services and the Council's No More service to be monitored accurately. At present it is anticipated that a further budget pressure, as a result of the need to support the additional influx of homeless rough sleepers, will place a strain in the order of £77,500 on the Housing Team and a potential £150,000 on the No More service. This is based on the presumption they will be required to provide extended support to all of the current 48 additional rough sleepers for a six month period and secure accommodation into the private sector. At this stage, the extent to which this level of support will be needed has not yet been fully determined (as it requires engagement with the client that is set to receive the support), and therefore the costs associated with it will be monitored in line with the recommendations and be reported in the programmed financial monitoring reports to Executive.

MEDIUM TERM RESPONSE: MOVING FORWARD WITH MORE SECURE HOUSING OPTIONS AND DEVELOPING CLIENT SUPPORT NETWORKS

- 4.14 A more secure and sustainable accommodation and support offer is needed for homeless clients. The fact that hotel accommodation may no longer be open to councils, as the hotel industry seeks to return to normal operational practices, creates an urgent need to identify and secure alternative accommodation. Housing however, has to be matched to need and the inability of some clients to manage independently is a key factor that will need to be taken into account.
- 4.15 Whilst in hotel accommodation, the Council's No More service and Rough Sleeper Co-ordinators have been able to visit and communicate with the clients on a daily basis. They have begun to develop personalised support plans and establish referrals to other professional services. These personalised support plans cover the clients housing, health and specific clinical wellbeing needs. These plans are now being assessed to determine what category of accommodation is realistically open and an option for the client. The plans seek to identify pathways into new housing options for individuals, based on their capacity to sustain particular housing, the risks associated with independent or shared living, as well as the availability of housing opportunities. In summary, Pathway One is intended for individuals who can manage or have managed to live independently before, but have recently been forced to sleep rough. They will be assisted to secure private sector accommodation and either establish or sustain support networks. Pathway Two, is for those that display a higher level of need, as a result of more frequent or sustained level of rough sleeping that has caused them to lose networks of support and become isolated. These individuals will need a greater level of support. Pathway Three is for clients who display acute levels of need and require intensive, crisis intervention measures, usually in 24 hour managed supported housing, or hostel schemes, in order to manage complex challenges.
- 4.16 Through adopting a multi-agency approach pathways will be developed to help clients into more secure forms of accommodation. These pathways are described in the following table:

Support Need	Housing Options	Estimation of Numbers
<p>Pathway one: Low support needs with established professional and clinical support networks</p>	<p>Secure accommodation directly into Private rented sector or via temporary stay in Council Emergency Accommodation /Temporary Accommodation (EA/TA) if time does not permit</p> <p>Consider shared accommodation with Floating Support.</p>	<p>Current estimation is that approximately 10 existing clients will fall into this category</p>
<p>Pathway Two: Medium level support needs with greater</p>	<p>This is for those that experienced a sustained level of rough sleeping and require far more</p>	<p>Current estimation is that approximately 18 existing clients</p>

connections and referrals to professional support needed	support. Consider shared TA/EA via staffed Council premises or independent accommodation with higher frequency of multi-agency support before finding alternative private sector or Council/Registered Social Landlord accommodation subject to eligibility	will fall into this category
Pathway Three: High level client needs that require the most intensive support due to addiction or underlying clinical issues	Seek specialist partner agency accommodation such as that offered by the Haven hostel for a sustained period before move on accommodation is sought.	Current estimation is that approximately 10 existing clients will fall into this category
Reconnected	Through support, and professional agency referrals it is possible on occasions to secure reconciliation between family networks.	1
Yet to be completed assessments	Support plans are not yet fully developed to enable assessment due to additional multi agency input	5
Unsuccessful and showing signs of disengaging	Sadly, due to violent anti-social behaviour and other criminal activity some clients disengaged or were taken into custody by the Police	4

- 4.17 Whilst the analysis provided above hugely under-represents the personalised interventions that support staff have been delivering, with huge effort and skill, it does help to highlight that the Council will need to secure more accommodation and support resources to help cater for the increased needs of the clients involved.
- 4.18 It is possible that increased accommodation resources will be needed to cope with providing the interim pathway accommodation to the group of rough sleepers that are not eligible for long term secure housing support from the Council.

- 4.19 As such Officers are considering increasing the stock of temporary and emergency accommodation, available to the Housing Options teams, should these be needed to accommodate individuals on a temporary and interim basis. Alternatively, the Housing Options team may also grant additional direct offers of accommodation to people who would be eligible for such housing offers, to free up supported accommodation for other homeless clients with complex needs.
- 4.20 At this stage officers are unable to predict precisely how many of the former rough sleepers will be able to be accommodated into the private sector, or how this group will engage with support and therefore it is difficult to determine the level of the accommodation resource required at this stage.
- 4.21 Clients that could manage their own tenancy with minimal support will be assisted through the Council Rent Deposit Scheme, to help secure private sector accommodation. It is envisaged that the Council will assist up to an additional 20 households through this scheme, depending on the availability of private rented accommodation.
- 4.22 In the event that further accommodation resources are needed, they will be requested for a time limited and defined purpose, in connection with this current crisis. They will be further subject to the accounting and appropriation regulations governing any transfer of resource from the General Fund and HRA and officers will seek approval in accordance with constitutional and statutory processes.
- 4.23 Other options under consideration for increasing the supply of accommodation include; repurposing existing Council general needs stock and retail buildings, further open market acquisitions or repurposing some existing HRA new build schemes, and entering into reciprocal arrangements with specialist providers to create additional move on accommodation in supported housing schemes.

LONG TERM RESPONSE: MOVING FORWARD WITH A HOUSING FIRST APPROACH

- 4.24 The need for flexible accommodation that helps to support an individual and allow professional practitioners to efficiently deliver their services, plays a huge part in ensuring successful housing and personal outcomes for clients. This kind of service is best built and delivered through a new purpose built hostel in Stevenage and would be similar to the service successfully operated by the Stevenage Haven. The Council's Housing teams will investigate if the demand and opportunity (in terms of land, multi-agency support and funding) is there to deliver such a service.
- 4.25 The Council's existing HRSS sets out an ambition to justify and resource a 'Housing First' model service. This would allow Stevenage Borough Council to grant a stable offer of accommodation to those who would otherwise struggle to gain access to long term appropriate accommodation. The model sees housing as the first 'stepping stone' to recovery and long term sustainment and that, through support and engagement, it can be a powerful catalyst in changing clients' lives and reducing rough sleeping substantially in

the long term. Trialled in over 75 schemes in the UK, it is a model that has enjoyed huge success.

- 4.26 It is important to realise that the success of these schemes depend on the level of wrap around support that is provided to clients with highly complex needs. Therefore this will require a level of commitment from a range of agencies in the planning, delivery and continued operation of such a scheme.
- 4.27 In order to establish if there is sufficient partner commitment to a Housing First model, it is proposed that Executive recommend that officers engage and work with key partners including Hertfordshire County Council, the Clinical Commission Group and the Haven, to explore and develop a business case for the Executive’s future consideration.
- 4.28 Given that recent Government announcements have begun to indicate potential funding being made available, officers consider there will be scope to develop bids in support of a Housing First business case. The funding includes the £105 million announced to help local authorities implement a range of support interventions for people placed into emergency accommodation during the Covid-19 pandemic and a further £16 million to assist those with substance dependence treatments announced by Luke Hall MP (24th June 2020).
- 4.29 The Government also announced, on 24th May 2020, that it would be providing funding of £433m to help deliver 6000 new homes for the homeless and rough sleepers. At the time of writing this report the Council was still seeking clarification on the funding criteria, with the intention to bid and secure capital resources that could potentially fund the development of a new hostel.

WORK PROGRAMME

- 4.30 In order to transition the Council’s response from immediate relief to one that seeks a more sustainable and longer term, a range of actions will need to be undertaken during July and August. The table below summarises the actions and priorities officers will be taking forward over coming weeks:

Work & Decision Theme	Purpose	Indicative timescales
Co-ordinated Work by the Rough Sleeper Workers & No More service to complete Support Plans and the assessment of Client capacity for independent living	To identify suitability of individuals ability to live independently or in supported accommodation and identify the correct move on pathway into more suitable accommodation	10 th July 2020
To detail a planned programme of reducing the use of Hotel accommodation to minimal levels before 1st August.	To ensure effective use of resources and that the most suitable accommodation is made available to clients Housing Operations Manager Providing	17 th July 2020

	homes supported by seconded resource	
To develop a Housing First Business Case and appraise development options for the provision of new emergency and temporary accommodation. To develop governance approval routes in line with Council & Statutory requirements	To establish new schemes, or repurposed schemes with appropriate council authority. This may include new Executive and Council approvals for the development of temporary/emergency Accommodation.	November 2020
Work with partners to analyse hostel supported housing move on performance in Stevenage.	To ensure effective use of partner resources and to give partners reciprocal support in helping Stevenage residents. The Council will be working with partners to see what more can be done to improve move on rates through hostels and supported housing and to assess whether there are more people currently within the hostel and supported housing system who would qualify to access private rented accommodation with tailored support packages.	Aug 2020
Submit grant applications for Government Funding as and when they are announced	To win capital and revenue funding for new supported schemes in Stevenage.	Within prescribed deadlines
Continue to lobby Government to be able to build new genuinely affordable council homes and for greater resources to support the vulnerable during this difficult period.	Council wide role.	Ongoing

- 4.31 Following completion of the activities listed above a further report will be presented to the Executive in December 2020 (or sooner) that will set out the potential business case for a Housing First Model, including the feasibility and viability of a new hostel.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications:

The required work detailed in the report at 4.27 and 4.30 and referred to in recommendation 2.3, will be met from existing resources. However, the service pressures highlighted in 2.2 may require additional resources and this will be monitored and reported back to Executive as part of the regular budget monitoring programme.

5.2 The table below gives a breakdown of the current projected cost of the temporary accommodation used to home rough sleepers up until the end of July. A further estimated £64,000 of net costs is currently included for the period after July, but this will be impacted by the work outlined in this report. These figures are under constant review, particularly the amount of benefit support that can be claimed, and are likely to change as more information becomes available. There is also the possibility that further Government grants could reduce the impact, but the details of this funding have not been published yet.

	Initial Period 18/06/2020 £	Extension 31/07/2020 £	Total £
Accommodation	176,111	72,700	248,811
Security	39,317	49,866	89,183
Food	31,667	10,527	42,194
Other	23,615	0	23,615
Total Cost	270,709	133,093	403,802
HCC Grant	(31,667)	(10,527)	(42,194)
Benefit Claims	(69,727)	(82,305)	(152,033)
Net Cost	169,316	40,260	209,576

5.3 Legal Implications:

5.4 Sections 4.10 and 4.12 above set out the legal requirements in relation to the General Fund and the HRA.

Where the Council has reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, or threatened with homelessness, it has a duty to make such inquiries as are necessary in order to satisfy itself:

- Whether the applicant is eligible for assistance (this will depend on their immigration status) and
- If so, whether the Council owes any duty (and if so, what duty) to the applicant under the Housing Act 1996 (“HA 1996”).

Under Section 189A of the HA 1996 where the Council is satisfied that an applicant is both homeless/threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance, it has a duty to carry out an assessment of their circumstances and then try to agree with them what steps they need to take to ensure they have and can retain suitable accommodation and what steps the Council needs to take under the HA 1996.

The Council owes the “full housing duty” to applicants who are:

- eligible for assistance and
- homeless, and not intentionally homeless and
- in priority need

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced a number of new duties for Local Housing Authorities which are designed to try to prevent or deal with homelessness at an early stage

5.5 **Equality Implications:**

5.6 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.

Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the Council’s statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Officers do not consider that the recommendations above will have an adverse impact on those with protected characteristics but this will be kept under review as proposals are developed.

6. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Homelessness & Rough Sleepers Strategy 2019-2024. (Stevenage Borough Council). Available at:

<http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/content/15953/21310/167267/224752/Homelessness-Rough-Sleeper-Strategy-2.pdf>

7. APPENDICES: NONE