

COUNCIL – 16 DECEMBER 2020**QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL****(A) How did you support Homeless people during lockdown 1 & 2?**

Answer (Councillor Jeannette Thomas):

In the week prior to the Covid-19 National restrictions (16th March 2020), there were 121 households in Council owned Emergency and Temporary Accommodation, (EA/TA) including 19 in bed and breakfast accommodation. During June 2020 (after first National restrictions period) this figure had risen by 66% to 181 cases in Council owned Emergency and Temporary Accommodation and a 27% placement increase to 69 cases in bed and breakfast accommodation. This level of demand placed a significant strain on already stretched resources to cater for this vulnerable client group. At the start of September 2020 the Council had 153 households accommodated in temporary accommodation and 47 cases in bed and breakfast which was at an all-time high. The teams have been working at pace to bring forward the actions detailed in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to achieve the 4 priorities which are vital in addressing the additional demands placed on the Council due to COVID.

Since the “Everyone In” directive was put in place on 26 March 2020 the Council has had 126 cases that were rough sleeping or an imminent risk of rough sleeping that have been placed in accommodation that had been sleeping rough or at imminent risk of rough sleeping. There are 26 cases currently accommodated and of these there are 16 clients in nightly let accommodation and 10 of these cases within the Council’s own Temporary Accommodation stock.

Following the second national restrictions introduced in early November 2020 Local Authorities have been directed to follow the “Protect programme” to ensure rough sleepers have the opportunity to isolate in the same way they did during the first national restrictions. In the two weeks following these restrictions the Council had 26 rough sleepers accommodated with 8 out of the 14 cases known to the teams to be rough sleeping after the first national restrictions who are not currently engaging and accommodated. The Council must therefore be prepared for at least these 8 cases to make a further approach.

The Council has 3 Rough Sleeper Co-ordinators following a successful bid for funding who offer support to these households as well as using the No More service and working with colleagues in the Police, Voluntary sector and the Haven.

During the national restrictions all rough sleepers placed were provided with a mobile phone and food and the teams worked with the individuals to identify areas of support needed.

During the national restrictions SBC provided hotel accommodation with support and we continue to work with cases.

Detailed information on all of the work completed during this period can be found in our Housing First Executive report heard on 9th December 2020.

(B) What are your plans to support Homeless people over the Christmas period?

Answer (Councillor Jeannette Thomas):

We are currently working to convert suitable properties for rough sleeper use, these 15 rooms expected in December 2020 will be utilised for cold Weather emergency placements. By utilising these units as they become available we hope not to have to make use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for Cold Weather provision.

Cold Weather provision is invoked when the temperature drops below 0 degrees for three consecutive nights.

The length of any provision will in part be determined by the National approach being adopted to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is likely in response to the national approach, that provision will need to be made for a longer period than in previous years.

Attempts are made to attend all public reports of rough sleeping in order to give advice and assistance to the person in need. This includes notifications via external agencies (such as StreetLink), as well as those made directly to SBC. Visits will be made by staff across Stevenage Borough Council and The Haven.

The team operate a duty rota and provide a 24/7 service. Number of who to contact are available on our website.

When the first national restrictions were put into place SBC were 1 of 3 Hertfordshire LA's that set up the Hertfordshire Accommodation cell which is a multi-agency group that met weekly and now two weekly to share good practice and approaches to assisting the rough sleeper cohort. There has been a lot of joint working that has come from this cell including the Hertfordshire Tracker that captured details of all rough sleepers accommodated during the national restrictions and the support needs that each individual has. From this tracker we have Multi-Disciplinary meetings between each local Authority, primary and secondary health care services,

and various local support agencies. This ongoing work is being completed in order to ensure individuals are supported in all aspects of their need.

(C) Are you doing anything about environmental projects that we can be involved in?

Answer (Councillor John Gardner):

Covid-19 is unfortunately limiting the community projects we are able to undertake at the moment. However, upcoming projects include:

- January 2021: planting an acre of trees to extend the existing Memorial Woodland in Fairlands Valley Park. We are currently putting together a schedule to ensure that we can manage numbers of people safely and in accordance with the Covid-19 guidance.*
- September 2021: We will be supporting the Keep Britain Tidy Great British Spring Clean campaign with community events.*
- September 2021: we will be planning an event for National Recycling Week.*
- November / December 2021: National Tree Planting Week – there will be an event to plant tree seeds in sites to be determined.*

We welcome the opportunity to work with the Youth Council, and will keep you informed as other projects start to come on line.

(D) What are your plans to keep racial equality at the forefront of people's minds?

Answer (Councillor Jackie Hollywell):

Following the Council motion in July 2020, the Council has been working to establish an Equalities Commission. We are currently recruiting an independent chair to lead the commission. It is envisaged that the commission will establish a number of equality issues to tackle locally and it is anticipated that these will be driven during the course of 2021. Internally, the Council will also be revisiting its own Equality Objectives and will set a number of actions for the organisation to continue to improve equalities practice over the coming years.

(E) Will you be continuing the conversation about the black lives matters movement?

Answer (Councillor Jackie Hollywell):

We have been undertaking a listening exercise which was launched as part of Black History Month in October. We are absolutely clear that this is an ongoing conversation with communities across Stevenage. As we continue

our listening with local residents, businesses, faith groups, young people and community organisations. We welcome views and thoughts around this and have set up a dedicated email address listening@stevenage.gov.uk for anybody who wishes to contribute.

(F) What are your plans to educate local people about the BAME community?

Answer (Councillor Jackie Hollywell):

The Equalities Commission is likely to come up with a number of recommendations around education. We welcome the establishment of community-led groups such as BeMe to champion understanding and inclusion and look forward to working with them moving into 2021. We also welcome the involvement of the Youth Council in driving this agenda.