

# **Improving Places Select Commission Briefing Paper - Homelessness in Rotherham**

This briefing paper aims to give an awareness of homelessness in Rotherham and the issues that those people in housing need face. It also details what actions are being taken to prepare for the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act which comes into force in April 2018.

## **Contents of Briefing Paper**

1. Overview of the Homelessness Strategy 2011-2018
2. Homelessness prevention activity
3. Housing Related Support
4. Changes to Homelessness legislation
5. Actions taken in preparation for new legislation
6. Duty to Refer
7. Care Leavers and personalised housing plans
8. Homelessness funding
9. Key statistics
10. Contact details

## **1. Overview of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy**

Rotherham's Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2011-2018 sets out the Council's vision which is to "*offer early intervention and support to ensure people don't become homeless.*"

The Council's main purpose is to sustain or find affordable alternative accommodation for customers and we aim to provide services that are personalised so that vulnerable people and excluded groups have increased access and choice of suitable accommodation.

There are seven priorities within the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2011/2018

- Supporting young people to live independently
- Ending rough sleeping in Rotherham
- Providing quality information on all housing options
- Reviewing the provision of temporary accommodation
- Reducing the risk of people becoming homeless due to financial difficulties
- Helping more people to access and sustain private rented accommodation
- Improving access to suitable accommodation for people leaving supported and institutionalised establishments

The Homelessness Prevention Strategy complements the wider Rotherham Housing Strategy which sets out how the Council will ensure the housing needs of Rotherham's residents are met by:

- Understanding housing needs in specific areas

- Building new Council homes and enabling homes of a wide range of tenures to be built, to achieve the 900 homes per year target
- Remodelling existing Council homes to reflect the changing needs of applicants on the Housing Register such as single person households
- Ensuring a well-co-ordinated approach between Housing, Adult Care and Children and Young People's Services to meet the needs of people requiring specialist accommodation

Both the overall Housing Strategy and the Homelessness Prevention Strategies will be reviewed during 2018, to reflect recent legislative and policy changes, in consultation with residents, Members, partners and all stakeholders.

## **2. Homelessness prevention activity**

A wide range of activities are undertaken to meet the objectives of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and tackle poverty, including the following:

- The Housing Income team interviews new applicants to try and maximise the customer's income to enable them to afford to pay the rent.
- Referrals are made to the Employment Solutions Officer.
- Affordability assessments are undertaken prior to an offer of Council accommodation.
- Pre tenancy interviews are mandatory for households wishing to join the Housing Register.
- The Allocation Policy has been amended so that new tenants must attend a pre tenancy workshop before joining the Housing Register.
- Recruitment of new pre tenancy support officers.
- Online housing benefit claims are made prior to signing for a new tenancy.
- Rent in advance loans are offered to help people access the private rented sector.
- The Allocation Policy has been amended so that the highest band is awarded to those households affected by bedroom tax.
- Alternative loans are available to help those at risk of losing their home through mortgage repossession.
- The homelessness team negotiates with landlords to allow the tenant to remain in their home, offering support to people with complex needs to sustain their tenancies.
- One member of the homelessness team spends time in the community supporting people at risk of homelessness and in need of resettlement. This includes visiting the prison in Doncaster, liaising with probation and the Community Drug Team; Clearways and also undertaking a drop in advice session at Shiloh. (Shiloh is a local organisation that helps some of our most vulnerable residents with alcohol, drug addiction and mental health issues, supporting them to move on with their lives.)
- There is positive multi agency work being undertaken with the vulnerable person's team, the police and the homelessness team to help rough sleepers.

- We have been successful in accessing additional Government Grant funding for the next 3 years. (See further information regarding its usage and other funding attained in Section 5)
- The Council is currently considering individual and sub regional approaches and protocols, sharing good practice – for example a prison leaver’s protocol, and/or information sharing between areas to support people moving around the region.
- The Council supported the opening of Shiloh’s new premises which provides a range of services for rough sleepers in the borough including access to GPs, tenancy support, meals, washing facilities, access to drug and alcohol support. If a rough sleeper was not able or didn’t feel comfortable to come into Riverside can now arrange to meet them at Shiloh.
- Amending the Allocation Policy so that Rough sleepers and single homeless households do not need a local connection to Rotherham to access the Housing Register.
- There is close working relationships with the police to identify Rough Sleepers and street beggars
- The Council is providing a safe and warm bed for rough sleepers to meet the National Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).
- The recruitment an Employment Solutions Officer to support clients who are not in employment to complete CVs and match them with employer vacancies.
- The Homelessness Prevention Grant helps to pay for upfront costs to secure private rented accommodation. The Grant also covers administration charges for private rented accommodation when the applicant is unable to afford the payment themselves.
- Supporting victims of child sexual exploitation and liaison with all agencies involved, including attendance at meetings.
- Working with the wardens and other agencies to identify and work with rough sleepers.
- A Homelessness Forum meets bi- monthly. Attendees include representatives from support providers, the police, health, education, Shiloh, and officers from various Council services.

### **3. Housing Related Support (Prevention)**

Rotherham Council understands the relationship between Housing Related Support, (previously known as Supporting People) a preventative programme providing ‘downstream’ cost-effective services and social care. Rotherham has continued to commission HRS provisions. Although, over time through reduced budgets due to significant funding reductions in the Council. There continues to be an offer of both floating support and accommodation related homeless services, including the pilot of Housing First to commence at the beginning of April 2018.

HRS has a proven record in delivering good value, cost effective services that promote or maintain independence of vulnerable adults. The value is much richer than cost alone and continues to make a positive impact on people’s lives enabling

people to build capacity and resilience, as well as confidence so they develop the skills to find their own solutions and improve individuals health and wellbeing and building stronger communities.

#### **4. Changes to the Homelessness legislation**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. There are a number of clauses that amend many existing duties and bring in a substantial number of new duties. This will be enacted in April 2018.

The main changes to homelessness legislation are:

- The Act extends the period an applicant is “threatened with homelessness” from 28 to 56 days. This means more homeless applications will be triggered for people with a housing problem and risk of homelessness who meet the legal definition of ‘may become homeless in the next 56 days’.
- The Act places a new duty on local authorities to help prevent the homelessness of all families and single people, regardless of priority need, who are eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness.
- There will be a duty for ‘specified public bodies’ with the agreement of the homeless person to refer them to the Council’s homeless service that will need to take a homeless application.
- The public bodies will be specified by regulation. Judging from the examples given in debate when the measure was discussed at the report stage in Parliament they are likely to include schools, hospitals, GPs, prisons and the Police.
- There will be no local connection criteria at the 56 day prevention stage.
- The new duty will require a local housing authority to meet the customer and agree the actions that will form a written personal housing plan.

It is anticipated that homeless applications will rise by at least 50% or possibly double. This is because:

1. The duty on specified public authorities to refer will mean most referrals will trigger a homeless application.
2. Continuing impact of welfare reform and especially uncertainty over impact of Universal Credit
3. The new legislation is likely to be launched with a huge publicity campaign by the Government and charities
4. Plus the code is likely to stress, as it did in Wales, that all prevention work should be undertaken under a statutory homeless application

However, until a new Homeless Code of Guidance is published (likely to be spring 2018 following a public consultation) it will not be possible to give a final definitive view on how the new Act will work.

## **5. Actions taken in preparation for the new legislation**

The Homelessness team has been very busy preparing for the changes. An action Plan has been implemented. Some of the key actions are:

- Revising the Homelessness team's structure and processes.
- Meeting Homelessness Consultants, attending various webinars and training delivered by Shelter and attendance to regional Homelessness Forums.
- Revising the Allocation Policy to include those owed a reasonable preference to local connection exemption criteria.
- Developing the format for Personnel Housing Plans
- Upgrading the ICT systems to record new performance data.
- Implementing Housing Related Support Contracts to include a Housing First Contract
- Reviewing and implementing the Homelessness Code of Guidance

The Homelessness team will continue to be pro-active in addressing homelessness, seeking to work effectively with other services within the Council and our partners to make the best use of our resources.

## **6. Duty to Refer**

There is a duty with the new homelessness legislation on specified public bodies to refer (with consent) any household which is threatened with homelessness or is homeless within 56 days to a housing authority with the service user's consent. The following services are among those subject to the duty to refer:

(a) Social service authorities; and,

(b) Custodial institutions, youth offending teams and probation services

## **7. Care Leavers and personalised housing plans**

When a young person aged between 18 and 24 approaches directly or is referred to a housing authorities homeless service, if it is known that the young person is a care leaver or the young person says they are a care leaver, then the children's services local authority which has responsibility for them should be informed as soon as possible, with consent from the young person.

Where there is a duty to assess a care leaver's housing and other support needs and develop a personalised housing plan, arrangements should be in place to enable their Personal Adviser to be involved in the assessment process with the young person's consent. The Personal Adviser may also be requested to take actions to deliver the personalised housing plan.

Where there is no agreed local working arrangement, or where the young person has been looked after by a children's services authority which is not part of local joint protocol arrangements, the housing authorities homeless service must continue without delay with the duties owed to the young person under Part 7 of the 1996 Act.

There is further guidance on assessments and personalised housing plans in the recently published Homelessness Code of Guidance in Chapter 11.

## 8. Homelessness funding

The annual cost to run the Homelessness Service is £612,461 (for both staffing and non-staffing costs)

The Council funded a project to complete building and maintenance works for the Shiloh at their new base on Station Road, Rotherham - a former council building. The works have been carried out our housing maintenance contractors; Fortem and Mears as part of their Corporate Social Value activity. The cost has been met using the Council's share of efficiency savings from the repairs and maintenance contracts with these 2 Contractors.

We have been successful in accessing additional Government Grant funding to support 4 key themes. The global grant funding totals:

2017/18 = £319,063

2018/19 =£314,710

2019/20 = £166,831

Details of the 4 themes are set out below:

1. **The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and New Burdens Funding** will support the introduction and new duties of the Homelessness Reduction Act. This will include all prevention activities such as support and advice to all homeless households or those threatened with homelessness, irrespective of priority need.
2. **The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and New Burdens Funding** will cover the cost of the above. It is also proposed that this funding covers other prevention measures including new prevention officers, bond and rent in advance schemes and additional outreach work.
3. **The Rough Sleeper Funding** is earmarked to recruit more people to work with those who have been on the streets for some time, or those at risk of sleeping rough, and to improve how services work together. The grant has funded a Development Officer for the rough sleeper programme who is now in post to help those already on the streets of Sheffield, Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham. Their role will be to develop of an out of hour's place of safety where individual's needs are assessed and rough sleepers can be advised on their housing options. A street outreach service is also being proposed which will give us accurate intelligence of the issues rough sleepers face and the support they require. An annual amount of £37,500 is available to each of the authorities, and is being used to support rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping.

In Rotherham we are commissioning a street outreach service pilot, over a 3 month period to provide a comprehensive picture of the issues in Rotherham. This service will provide information of people found to be sleeping rough and work with them intensively to assist in finding accommodation, help to make benefit claims and seek medical help needed. They will also visit Shiloh weekly to

provide an additional outreach service to local people. It is also proposed to employ part-time mental health worker, with the remaining funding, to work with anyone who is rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping.

4. **Domestic Abuse Funding** - this has provided accommodation with support for victims of domestic abuse that would not normally be able to access a refuge e.g. due to age of children and pets. Intensive support is offered in the accommodation and a perpetrator programme is included. One property has been set up and a further property will be set up during 2018.

### **What more can we do with further funding?**

There is uncertainty regarding funding for homeless households beyond the year 2020 so the Council will continue to actively make bids for external funding. The Council's ambition is to reduce the number of homelessness people and ultimately eradicate homelessness in Rotherham especially families with children.

Other innovative solutions for homeless households are being considered as detailed below:

- The Council is currently considering the cost and feasibility of setting up a small pilot of modular construction method, allowing additional accommodation units for homeless households to be built on unused land. The intention is for the units to be used to house homeless single people waiting to find a permanent residence, either with the council, housing association or private rented accommodation. This accommodation will also be available for rough sleepers.
- Rotherham's Furniture Scheme is also considering setting aside £100,000 for the next three years to help homeless households and young people with the cost of furniture when setting up their home.

## **9. Key statistics about homelessness in Rotherham**

### (a) Reasons for homelessness

In the most recent quarter (October – December 2017), the top five reasons for homelessness in Rotherham were:

- Loss of an Assured Shorthold (private rented) tenancy
- Relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate
- Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate
- Required to leave accommodation provided by the Home Office
- Relationship breakdown

During the same period, the top five priority need categories were:

- Applicants with dependent children
- Pregnancy
- Vulnerable due to a physical disability
- Vulnerable due to a mental illness

- Fleeing home because of domestic abuse or threat of violence

(b) Numbers of homelessness acceptances and preventions

There are currently 132 open homeless cases which undergoing assessment. The outcome of these cases could be potential preventions or acceptances.

Two rough sleepers were identified on the Rough Sleepers Count in November 2017.

The number of Homelessness acceptances:

- 2016/2017 = 100
- April 2017 to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018 = 92

The number of homelessness preventions:

- 2016/2017 = 611
- April 2017 to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018 = 451

During April 2017 to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018, 55 households have been rehoused into Council Housing

(c) The Housing Register

On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018 there were 6512 applicants on the Housing Register. Applicants who join the Housing Register are assessed and placed into one of the following bands:

Band 1 = There are 184 applicants with immediate housing need  
 Band 2 = There are 1586 applicants with very urgent housing needs  
 Band 3 – There are 1724 applicants with urgent housing need  
 Band 4 – There are 1819 applicants with no housing needs  
 Transfer Band – There are 1199 Council or Housing association tenants with no housing need

**Total - 6512**

There were 1586 registered in band 2 for a variety of reasons, for example due to medical requirements. The households detailed below have approached the authority due to homelessness issues and have been placed in band 2 on the Housing Register:

- 148 households not ready to leave supported accommodation
- 99 households subject to domestic abuse
- 65 households ready to leave supported accommodation
- 37 households who have been assessed as statutory homeless

283 households have been assessed as 'non priority homeless' and of these 68 are under the age of 25

## **10. Contact details**

The Homelessness Team is based in Riverside House and is part of the Adult Care, Housing and Public Health Directorate.

Key contacts for further information about homelessness are:

Sandra Tolley, Housing Options Manager, 01709 255619,  
sandra.tolley@rotherham.gov.uk

Jill Jones, Homelessness Manager, 01709 255618, jill.jones@rotherham.gov.uk

**28<sup>th</sup> February 2018**