

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 20 July 2021

Report Title

Update on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 - 2022 – Aim 4, To End Rough Sleeping and Begging in Rotherham.

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Anne Marie Lubanski, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-22 was approved by Cabinet in April 2019 and published in May 2019.

A progress update in respect of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy was noted by Improving Places Select Commission on 14th July 2020.

This report provides an update on progress against Aim 4 “To End Rough Sleeping and Begging in Rotherham”

Recommendations

- 1.1 Note the progress made to date on Aim 4
- 1.2 Agree to receive a full report in 6 months’ time
- 1.3 Note that consultation to start a review the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy will commence in September 2021

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Progress summary against Aim 4 Ending Rough Sleeping and Begging
Appendix 2 Climate Impact Assessment

Background Papers

- The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-22 Cabinet report April 2019
- The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-22 Improving Places Select Commission report July 2020
- The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-22

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

1. Background

- 1.1 The legal definition of homelessness is that an individual/household has no home in the UK or anywhere else in the world available and reasonable to occupy. Homelessness does not just refer to people who are sleeping rough.¹
- 1.2 There are several reasons for someone to lose their settled home. In Rotherham the most prevalent reason since the start of the pandemic is that their ‘family are no longer willing/able to accommodate’. These cases represent 27% of all cases received in 2020/21 and is a 5% increase on the previous year. This is mainly due to the Homelessness Team being unable to negotiate with family and friends to allow people to stay with them longer, due to the COVID-19 government restrictions regarding only one household occupying a private home.
- 1.3 The age profile of those presenting as homeless remains broadly in line with that in previous years. Following an increase in 2019/20 the proportion aged 65 and over has now returned to previous levels. However there has been a 2.7% increase in the 25 - 40 age band, which remains the highest proportion at 50.8%.

Age Band	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
24 or below	23.2%	23.3%	22.0%
25-40	48.1%	48.1%	50.8%
41-64	22.1%	24.2%	24.6%
65+	2.3%	4.0%	2.4%
Not known	4.3%	0.4%	0.2%

- 1.4 The ethnicity of the main household applicant remains predominantly White British at 84.4% with 12.1% from Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) groups a decrease of 3.7% on the previous year. This decrease in BME is primarily linked to a decrease in presentations from an Asian or Asian British background, over the year there were 53 presentations compared to 85 in the previous year.
- 1.5 The number of families seeking homelessness support reduced on previous year’s figures. 381 households (24.3% of total cases) had dependent children, compared to 516 (28.4%) in 2019/20 and 471 (29.9%) in 2018/19. Additionally, 54 household were pregnant at application.

¹ [Legal Definition of Homelessness is “ A person is homeless if they do not, with respect to any accommodation in the UK or elsewhere,) have (a) a right to occupy any accommodation by virtue of an interest in it or by virtue of a court order (ie right to occupy), (b) an express or implied licence to occupy, (c) occupation of any accommodation as a residence by virtue of any enactment or rule of law giving them the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of another to recover possession” – see S175 of the Housing Act 1996 for full details

- 1.6 It is often the case that those supported by the team have other underlying needs which can impact on their ability to find an appropriate home and sustain a tenancy. Households may have a number of issues in their lives. When there is more than one priority need within the household the case is classed as 'Complex'.
- 1.7 The data demonstrates that needs profile across the Homelessness caseload continues to become more complex year-on-year. In 2020/21 13.8% of cases were classed as complex, compared to 10.6% in 2019/20 and 6.7% in 2018/19.
- 1.8 Mental Health is the most common identified need and has increased year-on-year to 17.7% of all cases. Last year as part of a bid for funding the service has recently secured funding for a specialist mental health worker through the new Rough Sleeping Initiative fund to improve support in this area. The post will continue to be funded during 2021/2022. The post has helped in addressing mental health needs for those in prevention or relief duty and this is critical to their progression to become a stable tenant. This post has helped Shiloh to signposting guests to rapid access to mental health support.
- 1.9 The second highest area of need is Drugs and Substance misuse at 8.4%, closely followed by Domestic Abuse at 8.1%. There has been an increase in the proportion of ex-offenders to 7.1% following a stable position of 4.6/4.7%. Similarly, alcohol has increase to 4.2% from 2.5%.
- 1.10 In 2020/21 there has been less total demand in homelessness applications and cases than in the previous year. A total of 1941 applications for support were received compared to 2140 in 2019/20. Of these 1458 (75%) met support criteria and progressed to a case compared to 1817 (84.9%) in 2019/20. Of the 1458 cases, 1105 were placed into temporary accommodation. This is a comparable to the previous year with 1577 cases meeting the criteria during 2018/2019.
- 1.11 Although there are fewer new cases, due to the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a lack of 'move on' housing options available. This has then increased the overall caseload for workers and caused delays for service users, in moving on to settled accommodation.
- 1.12 This year from April 2021 to 30 June 21 the total number of new homelessness cases is 260. Of these, 100 presented as homeless due to family and friends not being willing to accommodate them. Of the 260 cases, 230 have been placed into temporary accommodation.

1.13 During 2020/21, 682 homeless households were supported to move into a new home, as follows:

Date	Council	Supported	RSLs	Private Rented
Total Year ending 2020/21	393	125	68	96

1.14 During 2021/2022, there have been 143 homeless households assisted to alternative accommodation. See table below.

Date	Council	Supported	RSLs	Private Rented
2021/22	67	43	17	16

2. Key Issues

2.1 Performance and Benchmarking

2.1.1 Effective performance monitoring regimes are now in place which gives a much clearer picture about the demand and effectiveness of the Homelessness Service. The Housing Service's Business Development Unit are also undertaking an internal review of temporary accommodation and the homelessness services. The work includes benchmarking with other Local Authorities, considering best practice, policies, and procedures. One of the initiatives identified is one undertaken by Durham County Council, the Beta Project, which was recently commended at the Northern Housing Awards. This is a project which Rotherham is currently reviewing as it assists offenders with no accommodation to find housing and any support needs 6 months prior to prison release and provides continued support for 6 months thereafter.

2.2 Ending Rough Sleeping

2.2.1 At the beginning of the pandemic the Government placed a duty on Local Authorities to accommodate all those faced with homelessness and rough sleeping, including those with no recourse to public funds. Night shelters were also closed. The Government's Rough Sleeper Task Force implemented the 'Everybody In' initiative. This essentially eradicated sleeping on the streets overnight, which was a considerable achievement in extraordinary times. A taskforce, led by Dame Louise Casey, was also established to lead the Government's COVID-19 rough sleeping response.

2.2.2 Daily rough sleeper counts are being undertaken. The annual return recorded in November 2019 reported 10 rough sleepers. On 12 June 2020 this had decreased to 2 rough sleepers, who would not engage with services. At the last count on in November 2020 there were no known rough sleepers. However, as of 2 July 2021, 63 people have been prevented from rough sleeping as they have been accommodated (48 households in hotels, 10 households in Council's temporary homeless provision and 7 in First Steps.) Nationally, there has been 14,610 rough sleepers being accommodated.

2.2.3 A successful funding bid enabled an emergency accommodation hub, the First Steps Rotherham Project, providing 8 bed spaces, to open from 1 August 2020.

2.2.4 First Steps Rotherham is funded by Government funding of £378,726 through Rough Sleeper Initiative funding for the financial year 2020/2. This amount has also been guaranteed for 2021/2022.

2.2.5 The funding has also paid for staffing, which includes an Outreach and Enhanced Support Team, a mental health clinician, an Accommodation Officer and is led by a Team Coordinator. The funding also paid for 5 additional Housing First units of accommodation. The aim of the project is to tackle rough sleeping and the team will be working with people who may be or are at risk of rough sleeping.

2.2.6 The Council was also successful in accessing £296,040 Next Steps funding to support rough sleepers. The Next Steps Accommodation Programme makes available the financial resources needed to support local authorities and their partner organisations to continue to provide support for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping and to take steps to end rough sleeping for good.

2.2.7 Most recently the Council, in partnership with South Yorkshire Housing Association and Action Housing submitted a bid to the Government's Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme for 20 units of 'move on' supported accommodation for rough sleepers. The accommodation must be in operation by the end of March 2022.

2.2.8 Recently, funding of £600,000 has been provisionally identified from the remaining Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) for temporary accommodation options with wrap-around support services from not for profit Registered Providers operating in the borough. This recognises that the Housing Options Service has seen increased demand for homelessness support resulting from the pandemic, which has been further exacerbated by a shortage of affordable available properties within the social and private rented sectors. Further discussions are taking place about finalising decisions on the allocation of the COMF funding.

2.2.9 The Homelessness Prevention Grant of £587,798 (£555,216 budget plus £32,582 funding brought forward) is made up of what was previously the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Grant. This year the Government have increased homelessness grant funding nationally by £47m to give local authorities more control and flexibility in managing homelessness pressures and supporting those who are at risk of homelessness. The grant is ringfenced to fully enforce the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to:

- End rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness.
- Reduce families in temporary accommodation numbers, through maximising family homelessness prevention and reducing the use of unsuitable Bed & Breakfast accommodation for families.

2.3 Ending Street Begging

2.3.1 The police and members of the homelessness services are working together to provide rough sleepers with advice, accommodation, and to facilitate referrals to support services. The Homelessness Service, the police, and voluntary services such as Shiloh and Rotherham Independent Volunteer Organisation (RIVO) undertake quarterly rough sleeper counts in the early hours between 6am to 9am to locate any rough sleepers. The team also responds immediately to all reports of anyone begging or rough sleeping. Outreach work is also carried out in key locations to connect them to relevant help and support services. The team also make referrals into Rotherham's Housing First Scheme which has 30 units for people with complex needs.

2.4 Increasing Temporary accommodation provision

2.4.1 The availability of temporary accommodation is not static and is subject to both inward and outward occupancy activity. The Homelessness Team are regularly managing new placements, as people move out into more permanent housing. However, at the current time, we will not be in a position where temporary accommodation is not in use. Temporary accommodation is being closely monitored to ensure that it is being used when requested and made available for further use when it becomes vacant.

2.4.2 In response to the "Everyone In" initiative, to meet the demand for temporary accommodation, the Council's portfolio of temporary accommodation units was progressively increased from an initial 29 units to 114 units by 30 October 2020.

2.4.3 Unfortunately, the time spent in temporary accommodation has hit a critical level with 15 cases over 84 days and 22 cases over 168 days as of 31 March 2021. This is due to the lack of 'move on' housing options and the specific support needs of the customers.

2.4.4 Rotherham has not previously relied on the use of hotel accommodation, but due to unprecedented demand it has played an important part in supporting those at risk of rough sleeping. The highest number of people accommodated in hotels during the pandemic was 69, on 2 July 2020. This has placed a considerable pressure on the Council's General Fund and the Homelessness Service. Last week the number of households placed in hotels had risen to an unprecedented 94 single people and 8 families. 92 other households were in Council temporary accommodation.

2.5 Hotel costs

2.5.1 The “Everyone In” initiative placed additional pressures on temporary accommodation provision. The use of hotels played a significant part in helping to meet demand. However, there is no dedicated budget for hotel expenditure. The costs have been covered by COVID-19 related grants. The expenditure during 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 was £829,571.

2.5.2 There has been an increase in people approaching the Homelessness Service advising that they are faced with rough sleeping. This is mainly due to the Homelessness Team being unable to negotiate with family and friends to allow those people to stay with them longer, due to the prevailing COVID-19 restrictions that only one household can occupy a private home. However, when current restrictions are lifted, negotiations with family and friends can re-commence within a more normalised context.

2.5.3 Prior to the “Everyone In” initiative, only those in priority need, including single vulnerable people and families with children, were provided with temporary accommodation. Single people not in priority need or vulnerable were reliant on negotiations with family and friends for temporary accommodation.

2.5.4 The reasons for each person currently occupying temporary accommodation are known and understood, with plans in place to move them on to more suitable accommodation when appropriate for the individual.

2.5.5 As of 30 June 2021, the Homelessness Team were accommodating the following households:

Temporary accommodation:

88 in total – 77 Priority Need Placements and 11 Non-Priority Need Placements

Hotel and Bed & Breakfast Placements:

98 in total – 54 Priority Need Placements and 44 Non-Priority Need Placements

2.5.6 Placing non-priority single people in Council emergency accommodation is creating an adverse pressure on temporarily accommodating families in priority need. This is because single people are occupying emergency accommodation bed spaces which means that 8 families with children are now being accommodated in hotels.

2.5.7 Sub regionally, plans have been developed to reduce the number of people who are offered accommodation on presentation, following on from the 'Everyone In' initiative. Barnsley, Doncaster, and Sheffield are beginning to reduce placements to people who are not in priority need and to whom the Council does not owe a duty under homelessness legislation to offer temporary accommodation. However, support will continue to be offered to anyone found to be rough sleeping, in accordance with each Council's rough sleeper initiative programmes and appropriate offers of accommodation will be offered in these cases.

2.5.8 To help the position locally, subject to the lifting of remaining COVID-19 measures, temporary accommodation placements will revert to the pre COVID-19 service approach, which is to provide temporary accommodation for those in priority need. Section 189 of the Housing Act 1996 defines categories of people who are in priority need as follows:

- Pregnant women, or a household with a pregnant woman
- Households with dependent children
- All 16 – 17 years old
- All 18 – 20 years old, whilst under the age of 18 were looked after children
- Any person who loses their accommodation because of an emergency
- And finally, vulnerable persons

2.5.9 A vulnerable person is classified as someone who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or disability, having been in care and aged over 21, having been a member of the armed forces, having served a custodial sentence, or having had to leave accommodation because of violence or threats of violence or some other special reason.

2.5.10 Those eligible for temporary accommodation are those presenting as homeless and falling into the above categories, in addition to:

- Homeless single people with no recourse to public funds who are supported by Adult Social Care
- Homeless families with no recourse to public funds who are supported by Children and Young People's Services
- Current non-priority single homeless households who can remain in temporary accommodation and receive support to move on
- Verified rough sleepers who are willing to engage with services, along with those who are at risk of rough sleeping, that are confirmed by the Homelessness Assessment and Prevention Officer as having no alternative accommodation.

2.5.11 From 19 July 2021, those not eligible for temporary accommodation placements would include:

- People who have been evicted or asked to leave temporary and supported accommodation or hotels, within the last 6 months, due to causing anti-social behaviour and/or damage to the accommodation.
- Single people not in priority need
- Those who, following placement, where enquiries subsequently find that the applicant does not have priority need or are not eligible or not homeless or does not have a local connection.

2.5.12 Where a negative decision is reached, applicants will have 21 days in which to request a review of that decision.

2.5.13 Those households who are homeless but not in priority need and are eligible are still owed a duty to try and prevent or relieve homelessness, irrespective of whether they may have a priority need for accommodation. Assistance includes:

- Processing and assessing a homeless application
- Help to find alternative accommodation
- Negotiating with family or friends to remain temporarily, if it is safe to do so
- If eligible to join the Council's housing register and the applicant has a local connection, Band 2 priority status will be applied.
- If eligible to join the Council's housing register, Band 4 status will be applied to those without a local connection to Rotherham

2.5.14 The rough sleeper outreach team will continue to undertake street outreach and help to move anyone rough sleeping into accommodation. There are still challenges with regard to finding suitable move on accommodation due to affordability and access to the right support. Many have complex needs, with mental health and substance misuse problems.

2.5.15 A close watch is being undertaken to prevent rough sleeping as there is likely to be an increase in homelessness presentations because of job losses, or reduced pay caused by the pandemic, particularly as the furlough scheme and evictions ban end.

2.5.16 As the United Kingdom has left the European Union, new regulations regarding the allocation of housing and homelessness assistance under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) have come into force on 30th June 2021. The Ministry of Housing and Local Communities have issued guidance regarding the EU exit which set out the legal position. The homelessness team have been encouraging those in temporary accommodation to apply for settled status. If there are families/single households that have not applied for settled status the Homelessness team will consider our duties under legislation such as the Children's Act 1989 or Care Act 2014. Settled Status support is also available from The Clifton Learning Partnership and Citizens Bureau.

3 Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The recommendations arising from the Rough Sleeper Strategy are detailed within a progress update summarised at Appendix 1.

4 Consultation on proposal

4.1 The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-22 was approved by Cabinet in April 2019 and published in May 2019. The strategy had been developed in consultation with a wide range of partners and stakeholders. To help shape the strategy the Council held forums, worked with members, staff and volunteers from a range of local organisations, as well as seeking the input from officers across all Council directorates. One of the main themes arising from the consultation was for the Council to end rough sleeping and begging. The Strategy is due to be reviewed this year and further consultation will be undertaken to help inform and shape the strategy going forward.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 Delivery against the recommendations in the action plan are being monitored by the Strategic Housing Forum

- 5.2 The overall accountable officer is Paul Walsh, Interim Assistant Director for Housing.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

- 6 None arising from progress report

7 Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

- 7.1 None arising from progress report

8 Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no other implications resulting from the report.

9 Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 None arising from progress report

10 Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Ensuring that the customer voice is heard is instrumental in how the Council develops and delivers its services and is of paramount importance. The homelessness service aims to offer a high quality and accessible advice service to all customers, ensuring that our residents have access to housing and can live with dignity and independence.

11 Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 There are digital service improvement actions that are being implemented and these will contribute to the Council's ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030. The improvements include virtual viewings and electronic signing of occupancy agreements. The website is also being updated to improve customer access and self-service opportunities. This will reduce the potential number of physical visits Council officers will make to complete all paperwork and assessments, by offering this digital solution. The creation of this digital service will reduce paper and printing requirements of the service as well as reducing multiple visits to customers where possible, reducing the services carbon emissions through reduced car usage.

- 11.2 Please see the Emissions Impact Assessment attached at Appendix 2

12 Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The Homelessness Service will continue to work with partners towards delivering the recommendations in the action plan. Delivery of these recommendations will involve collaboration across relevant Council services and with key delivery partners.

13 Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The Rough Sleeper Strategy provides the direction for our services until 2022 and although the Homelessness team are successfully progressing the action plan, and officers are working with more customers, the risk of homelessness in the borough continues to grow. The ending of the furlough scheme and hold on evictions will present major risks, both to our customers who will be under financial pressure and will find it harder to access housing, and to the Council due to increased demand for social housing and housing advice. There is a risk that homelessness applications might increase, and the Homelessness team will have a duty to house growing numbers of households without the corresponding accommodation being available.
- 13.3 The Homelessness team will need to 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.

14 Accountable Officer(s)

Approvals obtained on behalf of:-

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive		Click here to enter a date.
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Owen Campbell	9 July 2021
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Delaina Benjamin	8 July 2021
Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)	N/A	
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	Trish Law	8 July 2021

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