

Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Introduction

This section sets out how we plan to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in our district. The evidence from the Homelessness Review (see Appendix A) has shown that tackling homelessness is a complex issue and can only be addressed through a thorough understanding of the reasons why people lose their home or become at risk of homelessness. It is also important to understand why some people, in particular vulnerable adults and rough sleepers, repeatedly struggle to sustain their tenancies. The review has shown that one of the most important ways of successfully preventing homelessness is through good partnership working with other agencies and stakeholders to provide sustainable solutions. With this in mind, this Strategy has been written in consultation with partners who share a common goal with us to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.

Homelessness can be extremely traumatic on individuals and families and have a huge impact on their health and wellbeing. For example, a report by the Local Government Association¹ found that homeless people in England are more likely to have long-term physical health or mental health problems than the general population, and children who experience homelessness are more likely to suffer from stress and anxiety, resulting in depression and behavioural issues. In

addition, they are also at greater risk of becoming homeless themselves when they reach adulthood.

We are therefore committed to tackling all forms of homelessness by either preventing households from becoming homeless or assisting those that do to secure suitable and permanent accommodation as soon as possible. In many cases, this will require strong multi-agency partnership working to help those with complex needs who may struggle to find and keep a home.

In addition to tackling homelessness in general, all local authorities are now required to update their homelessness strategies to incorporate how they plan to address rough sleeping in their area. This is in response to the government's own Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018, which states the commitment to halve rough sleeping in England by 2022 and end it by 2027.

This Strategy therefore sets out how the council plans to tackle both homelessness and rough sleeping in the district over the next five years. This will be achieved through our priority and objectives which have been compiled based on the evidence from the homelessness review and through consultation with our stakeholders.

¹ Leng, G. (2017). The Impact of Homelessness on Health – A guide for Local Authorities. London. Local Government Association

Achievements

Since the adoption of Lichfield District's last Homelessness Strategy in 2013, we have:-

- **Reviewed our use of temporary accommodation** resulting in better self-contained unfurnished accommodation which has removed the need for us to pay storage costs.
- **Improved access to the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme** to make it more accessible to households who are in hardship and facing potential homelessness.
- **Revitalised the local Landlord's Forum** by combining it with Tamworth Borough Council's in order to make it more appealing to landlords with property in both areas. This group meets quarterly and gives private landlords the opportunity to meet with other landlords, council officers and other relevant organisations to discuss issues and best practice relating to the private rented sector.
- **Successfully bid for Rough Sleeper Initiative and Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding** to enable our rough sleeper outreach and Housing First scheme to commence.
- **Facilitated the opening of a Winter Night Shelter for the first time in February/March 2019.** This was run by a local charity called Churches Together and was made possible through government cold weather funding awarded to us that we match funded.
- **Reviewed our Homeless Prevention schemes** to simplify the number available and make it easier for vulnerable households to access grants or loans to secure suitable accommodation.
- **Set up a partnership with Fusion Credit Union (FCU),** a not-for-profit financial co-operative that administers low-cost loans, including loans for deposits or rent in advance.
- **Provided funding for Citizens Advice South East Staffordshire (CASES)** through our Community and Voluntary Sector funding to enable them to advise and support people who are in crisis due to homelessness or at risk of homelessness due to debt.

By far the most significant event to occur since the adoption of our last Homelessness Strategy is the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) which was enacted in April 2018. This has fundamentally changed the way that local authorities in England deliver their homelessness and housing options services. Councils now have a duty to assist all those affected by homelessness, not just those in 'priority need' or with a local connection. In addition, a person can now be considered at risk of homelessness if they are in danger of losing their home within 56 days rather than 28 under the previous legislation. Councils also now have a statutory duty to prevent or relieve homelessness and are required to carry out in-depth interviews to compile a personal housing plan (PHP) for each household that presents as homeless or at risk. The PHP contains actions that the applicant and the council must take in order to help them with their homelessness, including contact with supporting agencies, if appropriate. These new duties have increased the number of customers accessing our housing option services and also lengthened the time that officers will assist them in resolving their housing issue. As a result, we have:-

- **Appointed an additional Housing Options Officer** to address the need for more in-depth interviews and the creation of PHP's.
- **Seconded an officer to undertake additional projects** relating to the implementation of the HRA and the requirement to record more detailed homelessness information required by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- **Purchased a new IT system**, which has resulted in an improved service to customers. This new homelessness database (called Housing Jigsaw) records activity in response to the HRA and collates data required by MHCLG. It enables customers to submit an online homeless application through a customer portal which can also be used to access their PHP, upload documents and update actions.
- **Raised Awareness with our Stakeholders** through meetings with agencies such as mental health services, the Through Care Service (which supports Care Leavers) and Probation to make them aware of the new legislation and their role in helping to prevent homelessness.
- **Appointed a Tenancy Sustainment Officer** to help deliver the new prevention duty. This officer will assist those customers who need additional help to become 'tenancy ready' and help vulnerable tenants who may be at risk of losing their home through debt issues or underlying support needs.
- **Commissioned Spring Housing Association to manage accommodation and provide an outreach service for rough sleepers and other homeless people.** This service, which commenced in September 2019, is in conjunction with Cannock District Council and will provide at least five units of supported accommodation within the district. It is based on the Housing First model and has been enabled by government funding.

In addition, we have committed to the purchase of up to four properties, to

be used by Spring as supported accommodation for rough sleepers and homeless people with complex needs. Funding for this has come from

unallocated section 106 affordable housing money along with some housing capital reserves.

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A Snapshot of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in Lichfield District

[Infographics will go here]

Infographics

- 2013-2018 we received 6308 housing advice enquiries
- 2018/19
518 households contacted us for housing advice
230 households were owed a prevention or relief duty
- 2018/19
The top three reasons for the loss of last settled home
 - Family no longer willing or able to accommodate
 - The ending of a private rented tenancy
 - Relationship breakdown
- 2018/19
44 referrals were made us under the Duty to Refer
- 2018/19
122 households were owed the prevention duty, 108 households were owed the relief duty
13 households were able to remain in their existing home, 40 were found alternative accommodation
- 2018/19
49 households made a homeless application due to the ending of a private rented tenancy – nearly 4 times as many than 2017/18
- 16
The average number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of each quarter in 2018/19
Average length of stay in temporary accommodation 15 weeks

- 24

The number of households recorded that lost their home due to domestic violence (an increase from 12 in 2017/18)

- 14

The number of households that secured private rented accommodation to relieve their homelessness in 2018/19

- 33

The number of households that secured social rented accommodation to relieve their homelessness in 2018/19

- 5

The number of rough sleepers at the annual rough sleeper estimate 2018

- 151

The number of households identified as having support needs

- 69

The number of households identified as needing support due to mental health issues

Our approach to tackling homelessness will not be without its challenges and we recognise that the following factors will have a significant effect on the delivery of our services:-

- **We have the highest house prices in Staffordshire** meaning that home ownership is out of reach for many local residents. This has resulted in an increased demand for alternative housing options such as private rent and social housing.
- **The district has a smaller than average private rental sector** with high rent levels. Low income households are therefore priced out of the market with landlords more likely to rent to higher earning households with more stable incomes.
- **There is a shortage of affordable social rented housing** and the turnover does not meet demand.
- **We have a low number of shared housing**, which is often the choice of young people moving out of the family home.
- **The lack of shared properties and small private rented sector** particularly affects the ability of single non-priority applicants to find suitable accommodation.
- **The ending of Supporting People funding** resulted in the loss of several local schemes designed to help vulnerable people. The Lichfield Foyer, which helped young people live independently, has closed as well as supported housing for adults with mental health issues and the county floating support scheme also ended.
- **Access to local support agencies for people at risk of homelessness is limited in Lichfield district.** Numbers of homeless people and rough sleepers are relatively low compared to those of other local authorities in the county. This means that resources tend to be located in other local authority areas with greater need.
- **There are an increasing number of customers with multiple and complex housing needs** and the accommodation options available to them are limited. Access to registered provider housing is now based on an assessment of a customer's ability to sustain a tenancy, with higher risk customers often being denied access to accommodation without a package of support in place. The erosion of support available from the statutory and voluntary sector and the lack of supported accommodation within the district makes options for rehousing this cohort extremely difficult, and may have impacted upon the increase in rough sleepers.
- **There is also an increasing number of customers with low level support needs** that currently lack all the skills to enable them to successfully sustain a tenancy
- **Lichfield district has no direct access hostel** which limits the choice of emergency accommodation for single homeless people and rough sleepers.

- **The introduction of Universal Credit and other welfare reform initiatives**, such as the spare room subsidy have caused difficulties for some households.
- **Some households are having to stay in temporary accommodation for longer than is necessary due to**

a history of debt issues and/or rent arrears. This is because some registered providers and private sector landlords are reluctant to offer these households accommodation until they have proven they can afford and maintain the tenancy.

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What are the Homelessness Issues in Lichfield District?

The evidence from the Homelessness Review tells us that, prior to the introduction of the HRA:-

- The number of housing enquiries made to the council had reduced since the last Strategy was produced in 2013 with the annual average dropping by 11%.
- The number of housing applications made to the council increased by 51% from 2014 to 2018. Homeless acceptances, however decreased by 19% over the same time.
- The number of acceptances in relation to applications was also decreasing due to a focus on homeless prevention techniques adopted by the council.
- The number of homeless acceptances was low in comparison to the rest of the county, the West Midlands and England as a whole.
- From 2013 to 2018, over a third of households accepted as homeless were female single parent families. Single men made up about one in five of homeless acceptances during these years.
- Almost half of households accepted as homeless from 2013 to 2018 were aged between 25 and 44 years old. It was rare for an older person to be made homeless, as only four applicants aged 65 or over were accepted as homeless over the years 2013 to 2018.
- The most common reason for being made homeless was due to 'parents no longer willing or able to accommodate', which accounted for 27% of cases over the five years. The second and third most common reasons were relationship breakdown (22%) and the loss of a private rented tenancy (16%).
- The last rough sleeper estimate before the HRA came into force showed that numbers were low, having fluctuated from one rough sleeper to three from 2013 to 2017. Lichfield district had the county's third lowest number of rough sleepers recorded during the annual count over these 5 years.

Since the introduction of the HRA:-

- At 518, this is less than half the number of approaches to the council regarding homelessness issues in 2018/19 than in 2017/18. All approaches to the council are now directed through the new Jigsaw housing portal. Customers can either self-refer through the portal or a Housing Options Officer will assist them. This has resulted in the drop in housing enquiries recorded as logging them has become more streamlined and efficient.
- Households owed a housing duty increased by 81% from 127 in 2017/18 to 230 in 2018/19. However, the number of applicants accepted as owed the main housing duty reduced by 44% from 56 to 24 in the same years. The rise in applications is predictable as we have new statutory duties to help all eligible applicants (not just those who are statutory homeless). The new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness before applicants are owed the main housing duty is also the most likely reason for the dramatic reduction in these figures, as many applicants will have had their homelessness issue resolved before they would be owed the main duty.
- From October 2018 to September 2019, we received 44 referrals from public agencies under the new 'Duty to Refer' requirement.

- The number of households owed the main housing duty decreased by 57% from 56 in 2017/18 to 24 in 2018/19. This is expected due to the changes in legislation which gives councils additional responsibilities before the main duty is owed.
- The number of households owed a housing duty is low compared to other Staffordshire local authorities. This shows that homeless numbers are still relatively low even with the new responsibilities of the HRA.
- However, this is not the case with households who were owed the main duty we had the second largest number of households in 2018/19 in the county.
- The new requirements brought about by the HRA has changed the most common type of household owed a housing duty. In 2018/19, single males were most likely to be owed a duty with single females the next most likely group. These groups made up 54% of the total households owed a duty. This amounted to 125 single people in 2018/19 compared to only 12 in 2017/18. The third most common type of household was female single parent families. This is a reflection of the new requirement to assist all eligible households rather than just those with a priority need. It also demonstrates how disregarded these groups were under previous legislation.
- There is evidence that homelessness is affecting more households at both young and old age ranges. 52 households aged between 18 and 24 were owed a duty in 2018/19 compared to only 20 in 2017/18 and 28 in 2016/17. 11 households aged 65 or over were also accepted as homeless including 7 aged 75 or older. Between 2014 and 2018 only 4 people in total aged 65 or over were accepted as homeless.
- The top three most common reasons for homelessness applications in 2018/19 were families no longer able or willing to accommodate (21%), the ending of a private tenancy (21%) and relationship breakdowns (19.5%). These were the most common reasons identified in the 2013–2018 Homelessness Strategy though numbers are on the rise with double the number of relationship breakdowns and family evictions occurring in 2018/19 compared to 2017/18 and nearly quadruple the number of private rented tenancy losses.
- In 2018/19, the number of domestic violence cases recorded doubled from 12 in 2017/18 to 24 in 2018/19.
- 22% of applicants owed a duty in 2018/19 were in full-time work, which confirms there is a lack of affordable housing options in Lichfield district.
- It is clear that many households who are assessed as owed a duty now have more complex and multiple support needs. Two-thirds (66%) of households owed a duty were assessed as having a support need, 46% of which needed support with their mental health and 22% were due to physical disability.
- In 2018/19, only 25% of households were prevented from becoming homeless by being able to remain in their existing home. The remaining 75% were found alternative accommodation before they became homeless. Moving home causes more disruption and is more costly and time-consuming than being able to stay. It is therefore preferable for households to remain in their existing home if at all possible.

- The use of temporary accommodation peaked in 2015/16 with an average stay of 19 weeks. This dropped to 15 weeks in 2018/19. However, the average length of stay in B&B accommodation has increased.
- We have continued to be a high user of temporary accommodation compared to the other Staffordshire local authorities (second only to Tamworth). This was also identified in the 2013 Homelessness Strategy.
- The majority of households (77) who were owed a duty had their homelessness resolved through the allocation of a registered provider property whereas only 21 were offered a private rented tenancy.

In addition to identifying issues through the Homelessness Review, the council has also carried out consultation with our partners and stakeholders to share our emerging priorities and seek additional evidence to assist with the formation of this Strategy. This event was held on 11 September 2019 and was attended by 30 people representing 16 organisations working with homeless and vulnerable people across the district.

The attendees were invited to comment on our findings of the homeless review as well as participating in a workshop to discuss case studies based on recent homeless cases.

As a result of this consultation, a number of recommendations were made:-

- Investigate the possibility of a private sector leasing scheme
- Promote the use of shared accommodation
- Identify private sector landlords with a social conscience
- Have access to more support services especially around tenancy support
- Develop eviction panels and protocols with registered providers to reduce the number of evictions due to rent arrears.
- Facilitate the development of more supported accommodation
- Utilise the availability of Discretionary Housing Payments to prevent more homelessness through payment of rent arrears.
- Reduce debt by encouraging referrals to money advice e.g. CASES
- Ensure registered providers' policies do not exclude people on financial grounds
- Promote the services of Fusion Credit Union
- Ensure there is access to employment & training opportunities such as those provided by Job Centre Plus.

How we currently tackle Homelessness through Partnership Working

We recognise that, in order to successfully tackle homelessness issues in Lichfield district, it is vital to work in partnership with other public agencies and organisations. We have good working relationships with our voluntary and statutory agencies and without them, it would not be possible to provide a complete service to our customers. We will, therefore, continue to build good working relationships with these agencies and also develop new partnerships with others that can help us to address the key homelessness issues in the district.

Currently, the council has access to the following services to assist in the prevention and relief of homelessness:

Registered Providers (Housing Associations)

The council works very closely with several registered providers to ensure they provide the right type and number of affordable housing to meet local needs. For those who are homeless, access to this housing is through the council's Housing Register which ensures that all social housing within the district is allocated fairly to those in greatest housing need. The provision of affordable housing plays a vital role in preventing homelessness and reducing the number of households that require temporary accommodation.

Support for Young People

YMCA Rugeley Foyer has 26 self-contained flats and provides supported housing for young people aged 16 - 25 with a local connection.

Sutton Coldfield YMCA accommodates young single people aged 18-30 in housing need, especially those moving out of home for the first time and those newly arrived in the area for training, study or work. The person must have a local connection to Sutton Coldfield, Tamworth or Lichfield district.

YMCA Burton provides supported housing that assists single homeless people aged 18 – 64. It has 71 single occupancy units of accommodation across 3 sites, all located in the Burton area.

YMCA - Walsall Housing. Accommodation for vulnerable single young people aged 16-30 with support needs. No local connection required.

Wilbraham Court Support Care Accommodation. Supported accommodation for vulnerable single homeless men aged 18 and over in need of support who may have a diagnosis of mental health, learning difficulties, drug or alcohol addictions. No local connection is required.

Erdington YMCA - The Orchard. Accommodation for young homeless people aged 16 plus. Can include parent and a child and no local connection required.

T3 Young Person's Substance Misuse Service – Staffordshire. This is a free and confidential service for young people up to 18 years old in Staffordshire and helps young people make informed choices about their alcohol and drug use, and to raise awareness of all the risks involved. This includes providing high quality and

responsive support to parents, carers and statutory services.

Floating Support and Supported housing for people with drug/alcohol issues.

Burton Addiction Centre specialise in rehabilitating people who are dependent on alcohol or drugs.

One Recovery Staffordshire offer help and support to people with substance misuse problems. They offer a range of activities, one to ones and group work to design a care plan personally tailored to the individual.

Supported housing for ex-offenders.

Nacro provides self-contained leased and managed properties in Burton-on-Trent, Newcastle-under Lyme, Rugeley and Stoke-on-Trent to individuals or families in need of housing, including those moving on from supported or insecure housing.

Debt advice & Loans

Citizens Advice South East Staffordshire (CASES) advises residents in the district on issues such as debt management, welfare benefits and housing advice. The council provides grant funding in recognition of how important this advice is in the prevention of homelessness.

Fusion Credit Union offers a community information service as well as savings and loans. The council provides support to eligible applicants by underwriting any loans provided for housing issues such as rent deposits or rent in advance.

Domestic Abuse

Pathway Project provides accommodation and support for adults, young people and children who are experiencing or affected by domestic abuse.

New Era offers help to all those affected by domestic abuse in Staffordshire and provides free and confidential support for victims, perpetrators and their families.

Employment Education and Training

Evolve helps people with multiple barriers to regain their confidence and move closer to the jobs market. Evolve can support anyone who is aged 16 years and over, is unemployed or economically inactive, have complex needs or multiple barriers and require support to fully and independently engage with existing services. Available to residents of Lichfield District, Cannock Chase, Tamworth or East Staffordshire.

Talent Match works with 16-30 year olds to get them into employment, education and volunteering. The service covers Lichfield and Cannock districts.

Care Leavers

Through Care Service. Young people leaving care are provided with support to enable them to live independently in the community. A range of supported and other accommodation is available, as well as the Staffordshire mentoring project.

Those who have served in HM Forces

We have access to several organisations which give accommodation and support

to ex-forces personnel, such as Alabare Supported Housing (ex-service personnel) Royal British Legion, SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association), Veterans Gateway and Haig Housing.

Rough Sleepers

Lichfield Emergency Night Shelter (LENS) Churches Together Lichfield provided an emergency night shelter in several Lichfield city churches for rough sleepers throughout February and March 2019, offering a hot evening meal and bed and breakfast for up to eight street homeless people a night. This was the first year this service was offered and was a joint initiative by churches and other faiths, the council and the local community. It received funding from the government's Cold Weather Fund, which we match-funded.

Spring Housing Association. In September 2019, we commissioned Spring Housing Association to manage accommodation and provide an outreach service for rough sleepers and other homeless people in the district. This will be a two year project, with a view to extend if successful and funding allows.

Late Night Listeners. This service, run by volunteers occurs every Friday and Saturday night in Lichfield city centre and offers assistance to late night revellers as well as rough sleepers who are bedding down for the night.

Foodbank

Lichfield Food Bank provides emergency food parcels to people on low incomes and in crisis.

In addition, we also attend the following meetings to assist with homeless prevention, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups:-

Lichfield & Tamworth Through Care Working Group. Brings representatives from Lichfield District Council, Tamworth Borough Council, Through Care and registered providers together. This enables identification of imminent care leavers, suitable accommodation upon leaving care and barriers to their independent living, promoting a smooth transition for applicants leaving care.

MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)

This group focuses on domestic abuse cases that are prioritised according to severity and risk. The MARAC then creates a multi-agency action plan to address the identified risks and increase the safety and wellbeing of all those at risk. It is a victim focused information sharing and risk management meeting attended by all key agencies and housing is often a key issue in these cases. The meetings are currently held on a fortnightly basis and we are able to offer advice and assistance when appropriate. Many of our Target Hardening referrals originate from MARAC.

MAPPa (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements)

Police, probation and prison services have a duty to make arrangements for the identification, risk assessment and management of people with convictions for violent or sexual offences in the community. These arrangements are known as MAPPa. The aim of MAPPa is to

identify relevant offenders, share information about them, assess the risks they may pose and manage those risks. MAPPA is intended to promote the sharing of information between all the agencies, resulting in more effective supervision and better public protection. We are asked for our input when an offender is being released from prison and has nowhere to live.

Vulnerability Hub

This is a local multi-agency panel that meets on a weekly basis to discuss referrals that are made by partner agencies with concerns over the welfare and vulnerability of people they may be dealing with, or have had contact with, in the course of their work. The aim is to ensure that these people are receiving an appropriate service and that the relevant agencies are made aware of them. The agenda also covers anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, hate crime and child sexual exploitation. Housing and homelessness is often a common thread meaning our input is important. The Hub is currently under review to increase its effectiveness and scope.

Lichfield & Tamworth Private Landlords Forum

We hold a quarterly private landlords' forum in conjunction with Tamworth Borough Council and the National Landlords Association. The forum gives private landlords the opportunity to meet with other landlords, council officers and other relevant organisations to discuss issues relating to the private rented sector. We also use the forum to consult with landlords, update them on the latest regulations and legislation, and make them aware of new products, services and

training. We also host guest speakers from public, private and commercial organisations. We are currently reviewing the structure and frequency of the Forum meetings to ensure that it meets our needs.

Rough Sleeping

We are committed to helping rough sleepers get the right support and services as soon as possible to end rough sleeping and access settled housing. We have set ourselves the national target to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027.

We recognise that rough sleepers are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. A recent parliamentary briefing² refers to studies showing a strong link between homelessness and complex personal situations and support needs. Some can suffer from substance misuse (alcohol or drug dependency) and mental or physical health issues, or a combination of these. Evidence has also shown that many entrenched rough sleepers are homeless because they have repeatedly been unable to sustain accommodation due to these multiple and complex support needs.

Since 2010, we have carried out an annual rough sleeper estimate in accordance with government requirements. The estimate is based on consultation with various external agencies who encounter rough sleepers during the course of their work, such as the police, probation, the community mental health team, citizen's advice and local voluntary groups. The purpose of the estimate is to get as accurate a representation as possible of the number of people sleeping rough on one particular night. Though this method does have its limitations, it is an effective way of standardising the process and comparing levels amongst local

authorities and monitoring numbers annually.

Rough Sleeping data

- The last annual rough sleeper estimate in November 2018 reported five rough sleepers. This was the third largest number of rough sleepers in the county behind East Staffordshire and Stafford.
- As the rough sleeper estimate is only a snapshot of numbers on one particular night, we know from unofficial sightings that there could be more.
- The numbers in Lichfield district are relatively low but are increasing, as three were recorded in 2017 and one in 2016.
- Of the 151 individuals owed a prevention or relief duty in 2018/19, eight of those had a history of rough sleeping.

The Challenges

- Over the last year the council has been aware that it has a growing number of rough sleepers with complex needs (2 or more support needs).
- A shortage of supported housing and support for substance misuse and mental health issues plus high housing costs and welfare reform are all factors that have contributed to the rise in rough sleeping.
- Of the five rough sleepers recorded in November 2018, at least 2 of these can also be described as entrenched.
- We have no direct access hostels, for either men or women, and no residential treatment centres for drug or alcohol addiction. This often leaves the only available option as

² Rough sleeping (England) BRIEFING PAPER
Number 02007, 6 February 2019 By Wendy Wilson
Cassie Barton

accommodation outside of the district and away from any support networks an individual may have, which in turn reduces the likelihood of success and increases the incidence of repeat homeless presentations.

How we currently help Rough Sleepers

Homeless & Rough Sleeper Housing Pathway

In June 2019, the council, along with Cannock Chase District Council, entered into a partnership with Spring Housing Association to deliver a housing pathway for rough sleepers and homeless individuals with multiple and complex needs to ensure that no one has to spend a night sleeping on our streets. It is hoped this pathway will contribute to a reduction in rough sleeping and repeat homelessness in both districts by the end of 2020 and increase the housing options available to individuals with multiple and complex needs living in precarious housing circumstances. The service incorporates a street outreach facility where officers will monitor areas of known rough sleeping at appropriate times of the day when they are likely to make contact. A rapid assessment of need is undertaken to support rough sleepers away from the street as quickly and sustainably as possible. Where a connection to the district doesn't exist, Spring will support individuals to access accommodation and support options in areas where they do have a local connection.

A significant barrier to ending rough sleeping and homelessness for those with multiple and complex needs within the district is the lack of supported

accommodation. To combat this, the pathway also delivers units of supported accommodation in the form of Housing First which will include flexible support for as long as is needed as well as accommodation.

Lichfield Emergency Night Shelter (LENS)

In 2019, the council and central government funded an emergency night shelter provision within the district throughout the months of February and March, to provide shelter, food and support to our rough sleepers.

- The service was managed by Churches Together, a local faith group and was hosted by five different churches over seven nights a week.
- It was staffed by eight paid members of staff and fifty-eight volunteers.
- Over the course of the two months, eight rough sleepers accessed the provision with average occupancy levels of three rough sleepers on any given night.
- On average people tended to stay for twenty-two nights.
- Four of the rough sleepers were supported in moving into their own independent or supported accommodation.
- Three have since been offered accommodation.
- Two are now engaging in recovery services to support them with their substance misuse.

It is clear from the above results that there is a need for this service and so we are planning to fund a night shelter this winter as well. It also demonstrates that when services are in place, people can be

helped to lead a life away from the streets.

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

In times of severe weather³, rough sleepers are particularly at risk of harm and in extreme cases, death. The SWEP is therefore intended to get rough sleepers off the streets during periods of extreme weather. It has two aims:

- to ensure that no-one dies on the streets due to severe weather
- to ensure that every effort is made to engage individuals with support services during the coldest months

Anyone who is sleeping rough is eligible for accommodation whilst the SWEP is in place; they do not need to fit the eligibility criteria for temporary accommodation.

Evidence from the SWEP data from the last three years demonstrates that this is an important service and, though it is not a legal requirement, we see it as a moral duty to help rough sleepers in extreme weather. Over the last three years, this protocol was triggered seven times from 2017 to 2019 for a total of 60 nights. A total of 7 rough sleepers were accommodated at a cost of £667.

Street Begging

Street begging is often associated with rough sleeping and we have seen an increase in the number of street beggars, particularly in Lichfield city centre. However, not all street beggars are rough sleepers. Intelligence from Staffordshire

Police and other partners suggests that there are some individuals who visit the city to beg as a lifestyle choice. They are not homeless but 'professional' street beggars. A project is therefore being developed to look at the available options to support those begging in the street, to work alongside the Housing First initiative and to reduce the visible presence of street begging in the city. The primary option being considered is to develop a 'diverted giving scheme' that would seek to dissuade people from giving money directly to street beggars but instead to a scheme that would support people on the street to move away from begging and into a better alternative lifestyle, or would fund a winter night shelter. Options around the implementation of this are currently being considered; any scheme needs to ensure that only those genuinely in need are supported and the consideration for enforcement against those that travel to the city to beg should be explored.

³ The SWEP arrangements are activated when the night time temperature is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius for three consecutive nights.

Action Plan

Following consideration of the Homeless Review and in consultation with our partners, we have identified the following priority and 3 objectives for this section of our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 – 2014:

‘To prevent or relieve all forms of homelessness including rough sleeping’

This will be achieved through the following objectives:-

Objective One: Improve the range of suitable housing options for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

To achieve this, we will:-

- Increase the supply of affordable private rental accommodation (including shared housing) by working with landlords to develop the right incentives and support to encourage them to rent to vulnerable and low-income households
- Continue to assist households who are at risk of homelessness through domestic abuse to utilise the council’s target hardening scheme
- Continue to promote DHP and homeless prevention funds to enable households and individuals to access the private or social rented sector
- To continue to work with registered providers and developers to maximise the number of new affordable housing that meets local needs

Objective Two: Identify and provide support to those who face barriers to accessing and maintaining suitable accommodation.

To achieve this, we will:-

- Promote the work of the Tenancy Sustainment Officer to private sector and registered providers to enable vulnerable and low income households to access the private and social rented sector.

- Compile a directory of all support agencies that households can access to help them take control of their homelessness issue.
- Work with Registered Providers to establish a protocol to reduce the number of evictions from social housing
- To work in partnership with other council departments who can help us to prevent homelessness such as:-
 - Our Revenues and Benefits team to ensure optimum use of the DHP scheme to secure suitable accommodation and prevent homelessness through financial hardship
 - Our Community Safety team to ensure incidents of violence or anti-social behaviour are addressed as soon as possible to avoid households being forced to flee their homes
- To develop prevention methods to enable a household or individual to remain in their home wherever possible
- To improve on our homeless prevention levels and increase the number of vulnerable households able to remain in their existing home rather than finding alternative accommodation
- To encourage good communications and links with supported accommodation providers and other organisations who provide support to vulnerable homeless households.
- Work with partner agencies and third sector organisations to identify and provide support to those with complex and multiple needs. In particular, we will develop partnership working with those agencies who support the following groups:-
 - Young people
 - Older people
 - Those who have served in the Armed Forces and their families
 - Those affected by domestic abuse and other forms of violence
 - Those with mental health issues
 - Those with drug and alcohol dependencies
- Set up multi-agency panels to manage and co-ordinate the response to those households with complex and multiple needs
- Build relationships with local support providers including supported accommodation and floating support to ensure access is available for local households in need.

- Review the usefulness of the weekly Vulnerability Hub and ensure that all agencies who can help in the prevention of homelessness are invited to attend

Objective Three: Tackle rough sleeping so that no one needs to sleep rough

To achieve this, we will:-

- Monitor the Spring Housing rough sleeper outreach service and supported accommodation 'Housing First' project to ensure it is an effective use of government and council funding and delivers its outcomes
- Develop our Homeless Prevention Forum of housing providers, support services and partner agencies in order to cultivate close links with our partners and devise sustainable solutions to tackling rough sleeping
- Develop discharge protocols with public agencies where appropriate
- Actively promote and engage with the agencies and charities that support rough sleepers in the district, such as Late Night listeners
- Review the SWEP protocol in line with government guidance to include the option to trigger it in all cases of extreme weather, such as a heatwave rather than just extreme cold. To also ensure that the appropriate agencies are aware when SWEP is triggered and can use the opportunity to encourage engagement with rough sleepers to help them into sustainable accommodation.
- Work closely with Churches Together and Spring Housing to evaluate the future need for a winter night shelter
- Take advantage of any government grants and bid for future funding made available in order to fund initiatives designed to support rough sleepers and encourage them into secure and sustainable housing
- To work with partners on the District Board to explore the suitability of a 'diverted giving scheme' or similar initiative to dissuade street begging and promote other more proactive schemes that would support people to move away from begging or fund a winter night shelter.