

## ROUGH SLEEPER INITIATIVE UPDATE

Housing and Health Advisory Committee - 7 November 2023

**Report of:** Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, People and Places

**Status:** For Noting

**Key Decision:** No

**This report supports the Key Aim of:** the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023 to 2028

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Cole

**Contact Officer(s):** Alison Simmons, Extn 7272

**Recommendation to Housing and Health Advisory Committee:**

To receive and note the report.

**Reason for recommendation:**

To raise awareness of the progress being made to deliver the priorities set out in the Rough Sleeping Initiative.

### Introduction and Background

- 1 As a Local Housing Authority, the Council has a duty to provide advice and assistance to homeless households and in certain circumstance, as a duty to secure suitable accommodation. These duties are set out in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness 2002 and 2017 Acts).
- 2 Single homelessness continues to see an increase due to welfare benefit changes, universal credit and the changes to the homelessness legislation setting out which people are classed as vulnerable, This increase has been recognised both nationally and across Kent.
- 3 The Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) is a grant programme provided by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to Local Authorities to provide local support for people living on the streets. The Government's objectives for RSI 5 are:
  - Prevention – activities to stop people sleeping rough for the first time
  - Intervention – Support for those currently sleeping rough to move off the streets
  - Recovery – Support for those who have slept rough to ensure they do not return to the streets

- Systems support – Systems and structures to embed change and monitor progress

4 The following areas have worked well in developing and establishing services and options to end rough sleeping in the Sevenoaks District:

### Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy

The Council completed the review of homeless services with partners and drafted the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy. Following consultation the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy was approved by Cabinet and full Council in February this year. The objectives of the Strategy are:

<b>PREVENTION</b>	Quality housing needs and standards - services dedicated to effective advice, holistic and informed assessment. Preventative casework - working alongside partners, to stop those seeking help from becoming homeless. Targeted preventions for the most vulnerable groups through the provision of agreed pathways into support. Strategic activities that seek to identify issues that drive homelessness across the District and apply remedies to reduce it.
<b>INTERVENTION</b>	Tackling rough sleeping - continue supporting the County wide approach to reducing harm and addressing associated multiple, complex needs. Partnership working - maximise the effectiveness of joint working and pathways for at risk groups. Temporary housing - provide a good quality, safe, secure, value for money accommodation portfolio and reduce the use of emergency placements.
<b>SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS</b>	Re-housing establish a range of sustainable housing and move-on options for rough sleepers, vulnerable and homeless households.  Support - deliver effective support services to help households maintain accommodation once housed.

The multi-agency Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Forum was launched as part of the consultation process for the review and drafting of the approved Strategy.

The Forum will continue to meet to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan.

## **Recruitment of Housing Pathway Coordinator**

The Housing Pathway Coordinator has developed the Council's partnership outreach rough sleeper service to create efficient pathways into housing for vulnerable people at risk of homelessness.

Following the completion of the homelessness assessment we have introduced the vulnerability assessments for customers to support with signposting to the appropriate services, these are booked in following the initial assessment so that the customer is not overwhelmed. This has proved successful in being able to obtain the information required to make informed decisions resulting in positive outcomes for the customer.

## **Introduction of the Housing and Community Hub and Drop Ins**

The Housing Pathway Coordinator has created a dedicated hub of local partners, integrating the prevention work of Council teams, voluntary and statutory agencies, to focus on upstreaming preventative activities and coordinate casework.

The Housing and Community Hub offers a one stop shop for customers to discuss any concerns they have with Council officers and local partners. The officers and partners provide advice and support to help customers resolve their issues and concerns they are experiencing in person.

The Housing and Community Hub is held monthly with a variety of local partners and organisations Citizens Advice, Porchlight, Kent County Council Young People's Services and the Council's HERO and Housing and Housing Benefit teams. The Hep C nurse attends to provide advice and tests and Dent Aid will be at the next Housing Hub. Dent Aid, a charity who provides dental care and oral health advice for people experiencing homelessness and other underserved communities.

Two drop in services have been set up in the District. A drop in service is run for customers who are homeless and require housing advice at the Swanley Link Library from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm every Tuesdays in collaboration with Porchlight. The service has been valuable to those who would like to see an officer in person locally as they are not able to travel to the offices in Sevenoaks due to financial and medical reasons.

## **Rough Sleeper Count**

The rough sleeper count completed with our partners was successful with the feedback we received from the independent verifier from Homeless Link. The verifier commended the Council's planning and execution of the count which was "evidenced in a flawless execution, creating a dedicated group of people working as a team willing to go the extra".

## **Relaunch of HERO**

The HERO service was relaunched to support Sevenoaks residents in the private rented sector and owner occupiers. The Service focuses on upstreaming preventative activities to assist residents before they hit crisis point and can provide support and advice when moving into accommodation.

HERO provides personalised advice and support for:

- Saving money on fuel bills
- Support with households costs, including food
- Debt, rent or mortgage advice and support
- Welfare benefits
- Retraining and skills options, getting back to work
- Volunteering
- Referrals to community support services
- Referrals for Housing Advice

HERO officers work closely with the Housing Pathway Coordinator and draw up a HERO Action Plan with all residents that access the service and support them to work through the actions with them.

### **Provision of supported accommodation Orchard Close and Vine Court Road**

Completing the refurbishment of the West Kent Housing Association owned Vine Court Road and Orchard Close properties has provided supported accommodation for 11 customers with support services to be tenancy ready to enable them to access and sustain their accommodation with social and private landlords.

Support is commissioned through Look Ahead, who work with each person as an individual, supporting them to address their needs, take control and make forwards with their lives. This includes mental health, substance misuse or physical health needs, with many experiencing complex trauma and abuse, rough sleeping or relationship breakdown.

### **Partnerships**

Working with statutory and voluntary partners has been integral to mounting an effective local response to homelessness, and a wide range of dedicated partners have joined efforts to help prevent homelessness and provide support to vulnerable households.

- Commissioned services with Porchlight:
  - Assessment Resettlement Officer to support our homeless customers in emergency accommodation that have additional substance misuse needs. This officer is able to work very closely with these customers supporting them to engage with CGL, homeless service, housing register, GP, assisting with form filling, providing paperwork and referring to mental health teams as well as any other services identified.
  - Outreach worker who verifies rough sleepers, supports them into the office for face to face assessments, support them to access required paperwork, support them into extra services such as GP and mental health teams.

Porchlight's Team Leader is the Kent champion and trainer for the NRM for modern day slavery and human trafficking and the Council's point of contact.

- Partnered with Compaid offering digital online training gifting either a tablet or phone to enable our clients who are struggling to access the internet and navigate around benefits and house hunting.
- One You Kent Service Collaboration - once our homeless customers are settled into their move on accommodation, we are able to access the One You 'Healthy Lifestyles' service for tenancy settlement and any other health needs that are identified. One You are able to support with nutrition guidance, cooking classes and advice and support needed to take steps towards a healthier lifestyle.
- The Council struggled to commission a local service partner to deliver Social Prescribing support, notably due to voluntary and community sector services being oversubscribed from the ongoing pressures of the cost of living. We have therefore brought this service in-house. Our dedicated officer has established an ecosystem of connectors within primary care, voluntary and community groups and social and private landlords. The officer is able to provide a holistic, person-centred approach offering employment support, financial and digital inclusion, health and wellbeing and community support, including links to social and physical activities in the community.

5 The Council continue to face the following challenges:

### **Engagement with Customers**

Developing and improving the communication with customers to promote our services to those who need them and build trust within the communities of interest.

When trying to arrange to complete our holistic assessment with customers we have found that some have chosen not to engage with the Council and or Porchlight.

For the customers that we have been successfully working with we have found the following areas challenging:

- Lack of supported and affordable accommodation in the District to assist those with complex needs
- Customers have difficulties in registering with GP surgeries
- Very few opportunities to support customers back into work
- Customers have been unable to open Bank Accounts
- Increase in the number of Modern Day slavery cases and Domestic Abuse perpetrators applications

### **Emerging trend of hidden homeless**

Homelessness has been rising since 2018 as a result of welfare reform, the impact of COVID and the rising cost of living. Identifying the hidden homeless who cannot, or find it difficult to, access Council support when they most need it to prevent homelessness or rough sleeping. This may include people who find it physically difficult to attend the offices, those who do not know about our services or those who for other reasons feel they cannot access our services.

### **Lack of Affordable Housing Options**

A lack of social housing and private rented affordable housing options within the District and accommodation for low income households. There is an overall affordable housing need for 423 homes per year, as set out in the Targeted Review of Local Housing Needs (TRLHN 2022). Between 2017-2021, the annual new delivery averaged at 87 homes having been impacted by the pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

### **Customers with support/complex needs**

There is a high demand for supported housing for customers with complex support needs, and who require intensive support in order not to fail in accommodation and to sustain their accommodation.

There is a need for increased accommodation and support services in the District for people who sleep rough and or have complex needs.

### **Supported Housing within District**

The removal of the Kent Homeless Connect support contract by Kent County Council has significantly impacted on the provision of much needed supported accommodation and intensive support for rough sleepers with multi-complex needs and challenging customer base across the County.

In 2023-2024 Kent County Council have a further £50m savings to be made across their services which includes Social Care, Social Services and Mental Health Services which will have a further impact on the provision of much needed accommodation and support services for our customers.

### **Rising Cost of Living**

The rise in the cost of living has seen an increase in the number of approaches to the Council. The strong consumer demand for goods, rising energy prices and higher costs for businesses are reflected in higher prices within supermarkets, petrol stations and utility bills resulting in more customers reaching crisis point..

6 We have developed a 2023-2023 Ending Rough Sleeping Plan with a focus on the challenges detailed below:

- Engagement
- Gaps in local service pathways
- Lack of affordable private rented accommodation in the District
- High level of complex needs cases presenting and require intensive support whilst in emergency accommodation and when re-housed
- Support and deliver effective services to help customers maintain accommodation once housed
- Lack of supported accommodation within the District of Sevenoaks

### **Other options Considered and/or rejected**

None

## **Key Implications**

### Financial

All immediate activity summarised in the report and in the 2023-2025 Ending Rough Sleeping Plan are funded through the Government Rough Sleeper Initiative financial award to the Council.

### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

The Council has a number of statutory obligations in relation to homelessness as set out in the Housing Act 1996 and amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2002 and 2017 which extended existing and introduced new duties. The Council is required to produce and publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy in line with its obligations under the Homelessness Act 2002 and national Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018).

The interventions provided by RSI funding minimise or remove the risk of harm through providing timely, effective interventions to individuals who are, or at risk of, rough sleeping.

Funding under this initiative ensures there is not an additional strain on other Council resources, including but not limited to the core homelessness budget.

### Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

### Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the District or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

## **Conclusions**

Delivery of the Rough Sleeper Initiative is progressing well with some notable successes, in terms of the delivery of services to single homeless households.

## **Appendices**

### **Background Papers**

[Policies, strategies and plans - Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023 to 2028 | Sevenoaks District Council](#)

**Sarah Robson**

**Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – People and Places**