

Rough Sleeping Initiatives

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing & Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	John Littlemore – Head of Housing and Community Services
Lead Officer and Report Author	Hannah Gaston – Housing and Inclusion Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report sets out for information the Council's position for utilising the funding obtained from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government through the Rough Sleeper Initiative in order to assist those who find themselves sleeping rough in the Borough. It proposes changes to current policy on accommodating homeless households with respect to people who have been sleeping rough.

This report makes the following recommendations to Committee:

1. That the rough sleeping initiatives in Section 1 of the report be noted.
2. That the new ways of working be agreed (outlined in Section 2 of the report) regarding Eligibility, Relief Lite and the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing & Environment Committee	16 October 2018

Rough Sleeping initiatives

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Maidstone is an area in Kent that along with Canterbury has historically attracted a local and transient rough sleeper population that is bigger than other parts of Kent. The Council has tackled these issues through the provision of supported accommodation, such as Lily Smith House and outreach services that have been delivered either directly by the Council or through the former Kent Supporting People Programme.
- 1.2 Homeless persons who are identified as rough sleepers will normally exhibit different characteristics from those that we assist under the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA). Whereas the majority of persons assisted under the HRA are threatened with homelessness and comprise of more than one family member including children, rough sleepers in the main are single households who literally have no accommodation available to them and live in makeshift arrangements such as tents or on the street.
- 1.3 Nationally there has been a significant increase in the number of persons sleeping rough in England (up 15% between January 2017 and January 2018 alone) and Maidstone's position reflects this. The latest street count carried out in September 2018 identified 48 persons as sleeping rough, as compared with 25 in 2014. In response to this increase, the government instigated the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI), which came with funding opportunities to develop better services for rough sleepers. Maidstone was one of four local housing authorities in Kent to make a successful bid and to receive the funding.
- 1.4 Background data around the rough sleeper population is contained in the Table 1. below:

Table 1.

Year	Total	Men	Women	Non UK EU Nationals
2014	25	21	4	3
2015	38	32	6	6
2016	35	30	5	5
2017	41	37	4	0
2018	48	38	10	4

- 1.5 The Council worked with Porchlight (a large charity group specialising in single homelessness, originally operating in East Kent) from 2013 to provide an outreach service through a secondment arrangement. When the arrangement ended in 2017, the Council employed a member of staff directly. The early learning from these experiences has helped to inform the multi-agency approach and development of the RSI programme.

1.6 The outreach team provides a range of interventions tailored to the client's needs.

- To prevent rough sleeping where possible through intelligence lead engagement and directing into our homelessness prevention service
- Rapidly move those new to rough sleeping away from the street as quickly as possible through early engagement by outreach staff to place people into accommodation (Pelican Court) and support to move onto more stable housing.
- Engage with entrenched rough sleepers by gradual trust building with the aim of moving the client from the street to our new assessment centre.
- During this period work with a range of organisations to assist the client and to understand their needs and target appropriate support services.
- Once placed at the assessment centre, address complex needs through links with other services e.g. mental health team, substance misuse services.
- Identify the most appropriate next steps (personal housing plan) to enable a sustainable move back in to independent living; this might be achieved through a number of accommodation placements as a stepping-stone to full independence. This means securing accommodation by working with housing associations and private sector landlords.

1.7 Maidstone Borough Council now has a number of initiatives and opportunities for rough sleepers and those insecurely housed across the district. These have been accelerated over the previous 15 months and are outlined below.

A) Pelican Court – This is an 11 bed property acquired by Maidstone Council located in Watringbury on the border with Tonbridge and Malling. The facility, a former care home, provides accommodation seven days a week with support to clients between Monday and Friday. The project is designed to stop the flow of new rough sleepers onto the streets; people who are identified as being homeless or at risk of homelessness and who have low-level support needs are accommodated and supported with the aim of moving to accommodation where they can live independently.

Since opening in 2017, 77 clients have benefitted from the scheme with 67 clients moving on over the same period. Of these 76% went onto a positive outcome with a housing solution. The remaining 16 clients made their own arrangements and are no longer identified as part of Maidstone's street population.

B) Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) Funding – MBC has been awarded funding of £333,799 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in Year 1 2018/19. This funding will provide a package of measures, contained in our funding bid, consisting of:

- The creation of an Outreach Team comprising a team leader and four outreach workers to expand the existing outreach service and enhance our support to rough sleepers
- A seven bed Assessment Centre with on-site support

- An addictions worker contracted through CGL and an extension of funding to Pelican Court.

A provisional award for Year 2 2019/20 of £369,225 has been indicated but is dependent on progress towards the outcomes for Year 1, as outlined in Paragraph 3.1 below.

The expenditure allocation is set out in Table 2 below:

RSI Funding	Budget 2018/19 £333,799	Budget 2019/20 £369,225
Enlarged Outreach Team	£129,250	£158,000
CLG Addictions/vulnerable person Worker	£42,000	£42,000
Pelican Court	£30,000	0.00
Assessment Centre Maidstone	£70,419	£50,095
Concierge service for Assessment Centre	£32,130	£32,130
Extended SWEP provision	£30,000	0.00
Housing First	0.00	£87,000

C) Housing First – The Council set aside £80,000 from the business rates retention fund that will be used to cover accommodation charges for seven rough sleepers within the Maidstone District in the first year. The project aims to stay loyal to the housing first model by ensuring we work with the hardest to engage and those who have a high profile and negative impact on the local community. Your officers are working closely with Golding Homes and Porchlight in order to develop the initiative.

D) Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) – since the winter of 2017 the Council has been offering an extended SWEP provision to rough sleepers on the first night the temperature dropped to zero and undertaking assertive outreach on those winter days to ensure everyone has access to a warm and safe environment.

2. NEW WAYS OF WORKING

- 2.1 Often those who are rough sleeping have been through the 'system' many times previously and due to their complex and challenging needs may not be easy to engage and/or not willing to participate within a process which has a range of natural barriers e.g. forms to complete, ID to be provided, interviews to attend in order to seek accommodation.
- 2.2 Having the additional funding streams provides an excellent opportunity to explore new ways to address these needs and break the cycle of street homelessness. In order to assist this particular client group we will need to flex our approach, which may require taking an alternative approach in the way we deliver our statutory duties.

- 2.3 We are seeking to undertake a range of activities to try and target this cohort – these at times will work in a slightly different manner to our normal approach and we are seeking the Committee's approval to adopt this approach.
- 2.4 **A) Eligibility** is one of the basic tests carried out when determining if we can offer a service or assist homeless people. This is directly related to an individual's immigration status including whether an applicant has recourse to public funds. Given the nature of rough sleeping, the outreach team will at times work with individuals whose eligibility for assistance from a local housing authority remains under investigation.
- 2.5 In order to support people to move away from rough sleeping and off the streets of Maidstone it is important we can provide a support offer whilst we look for alternative accommodation including reconnection to their home country or choice of location for those who are subsequently deemed to be ineligible. Our RSI funding will enable us to place people within the assessment centre and be funded through the central pot without the need for those clients to claim housing benefit (public funds). The number of potential clients within this group is low, as indicated in Table 1 above.
- 2.6 **B) Relief Lite.** The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) has an expectation that the client will participate in the homelessness processes through the engagement with a Personal Housing Plan (PHP), including working with us to formulate a plan and then agreeing to follow it. However, this is a barrier for many people who have become street homeless and who as a result of their life experience do not trust public authorities; as noted above this particular cohort have challenging needs and are often non-compliant to the point where agreeing the PHP would prove to be a barrier to resolving the client's situation.
- 2.7 The pragmatic solution to this issue is to offer a "Relief Lite" approach to those who would fall within the 'Relief' duty of the Homelessness Reduction Act. Under the Homelessness Reduction Act where the local housing authority is unable to prevent the homelessness the next stage is the Relief duty. Accordingly we propose that the Council provides accommodation during the Relief stage using our discretionary power to accommodate under the Housing Act 1996 S.205(3). The outreach team will then support these people through the assignment of a key worker and individual, tailored support to complete support plans, which in effect will form the required Personalised Housing Plan.
- 2.8 A fundamental principle of the 'Relief Lite' approach is that the client will not be disadvantaged or receive a lesser service than if they had been assisted in the normal way through the HRA. The main difference will be that the client will not experience the range of bureaucracy that is a feature of the HRA in terms of the various letters that are required to be issued at each stage of the process.
- 2.9 **C) Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).** In previous years, the Council has provided SWEP accommodation in line with national guidance that suggests if the temperature falls to zero or below for three consecutive nights then emergency accommodation should be provided. In Maidstone in the winter of 2017/18 an operational decision was taken to

provide accommodation from the first night that the temperature dropped to zero, after undertaking assertive outreach to ensure no one was left out in the cold.

2.10 This approach is different from the extant guidance but is viewed as a more humane approach and is not uncommon amongst other Local Housing Authorities in Kent and London. During the last cold spell, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government did write to request authorities provide accommodation from night one. In the past year we have spent nearly £20,000 on SWEF.

2.11 The RSI funding this year will pay for our SWEF provision – we obtained £30,000 with a view to fund the early opening of the Winter Shelter from November but the provider felt unable to provide the range of service that we require. Officers are now looking to use the designated funding to provide emergency accommodation directly sourced from landlords. We have an agreement in principle with an agency who will provide up to 18 beds for the winter period and it is intended to commence this provision from the 1st November. Sufficient allowance has been made to continue to support the Winter Shelter provided by the third sector with a £10,000 grant donation.

3. TRAJEGTORY AND ASPIRATIONS

3.1 Our aspiration for the service is to reduce rough sleeping significantly across the district, ensuring those who do find themselves homeless or in threat of homelessness are offered accommodation and support to quickly break the cycle of homelessness. As part of the funding agreement, the Council is committed to carrying out rough-sleeper counts every other month and to provide regular updates in activity to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. In numerical terms, the aim is to have reduced the number of people sleeping rough to 13 on the night of the count in March 2019.

3.2 The new service will continue to work closely with existing service providers and landlords in order to achieve our aims. This includes voluntary organisations like Homeless Care, as well as the statutory agencies such as Police, the Health Service and Probation. The Council has engaged with a range of private landlords in addition to our main social housing provider, Golding Homes, in order to provide housing solutions.

3.3 By using these new techniques, we are determined to provide a robust support offer to those who are not only the most vulnerable within the community but also can cause the most difficulty and expenditure to the public purse.

4. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

4.1 Option 1 is to agree that the Council adopts the new ways of working outlined in Paragraph 2 above set out as A - Eligibility, B – 'Relief Lite' and C – Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, this will ensure the best possible offer to rough sleepers in order to address their continued homelessness.

- 4.2 Option 2 is not to change our approach to rough sleeping. This is not recommended, as this will not enable the Council to help change lives and will place the funding for the various programmes in jeopardy, as the Council will unlikely to be able to deliver the outcomes for which we have been funded. We also will not achieve the outcomes as required, which could mean that Year 2 of the RSI funding is at risk.
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5. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Option 1 is our preferred option – this will give the Council greater control on the support offer provided to rough sleepers and ensure an equality to all, addressing the concerns of both public and businesses in Maidstone like.
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6. RISK

- 6.1 Option 1 enables us to manage the support provided to rough sleepers in the best possible way, but there is an element of risk associated with the "Relief Lite", as this proposes a new way of implementing assistance to homeless persons. A client might raise a complaint that we have not followed our processes for other homeless applicants assisted under the HRA but given the nature of the client group, we feel the likelihood is low and the demonstrable negative impact on the individual is minimal, whereas the potential benefits to a wider group of vulnerable individuals negates this concern. We also believe that the support offer to the clients will be robust in ensuring a rounded approach to their support needs and the identification of appropriate accommodation.
- 6.2 There is an associated risk that by providing an enhanced level of service our area becomes more attractive to the transient rough sleeper population. This might result in an increase in rough sleepers who have no connection to our area. It is not possible to quantify this risk but the outreach service through its engagement with the street population will monitor the composition of rough sleepers and make appropriate interventions such as reconnection to the client's area of origin or to locations where affordable housing is in not such high demand as in London and the South East.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 Once the recommendations are agreed, the Housing Service will engage with our key stakeholders and partners to commence immediate delivery of the initiatives.
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8. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve a Home for Everyone.	Head of Housing & Community Services
Risk Management	Covered in the risk section 8. By not proceeding with any option we are exposed to more risk.	Head of Housing & Community Services
Financial	The initiatives described in this report can be met from available funding, so no additional funding is required for implementation. Note that the funding is one-off in nature, so a longer term strategy would require either a reduction in the number of rough sleepers or the identification of ongoing revenue budgets.	Director of Finance & Business Improvement
Staffing	Additional staff have been recruited, or are in the process of being recruited as part of the RSI funding.	Head of Housing & Community Services
Legal	Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties and act under the spirit of the new homelessness legislation	Head of Housing & Community Services
Privacy and Data Protection	Accepting the recommendations will increase the volume of data held by the Council. We will hold that data in line with the agreed measures for complying with the Council's statutory Housing duties.	Head of Housing & Community Services
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service that would require an equalities impact assessment	Head of Housing & Community Services

Procurement	None identified	Head of Housing & Community Services
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9. REPORT APPENDICES

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