

## **SCRUTINY PANEL B**

**Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,  
on Tuesday, 7th February, 2017 at 6.30 pm**

**Present:** Councillor Helen Hollis in the Chair;  
  
Councillors Lee Anderson, David Griffiths  
(substitute for Chris Baron), Rachel Madden,  
Cathy Mason, Lauren Mitchell and Paul Roberts  
(substitute for Lachlan Morrison).

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillors Chris Baron, Lachlan Morrison and  
Christine Quinn-Wilcox.

**Officers Present:** Lynn Cain, Eileen Jackson, Mike Joy and  
Ian Scholes.

**In Attendance:** Councillor Mike Smith.  
Jason Marriott (Framework Street Outreach  
Team).

### **SB.10 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **SB.11 Minutes**

RESOLVED  
that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 be  
received and approved as a correct record.

### **SB.12 Scrutiny Review of Access to Homelessness Services - Update**

The Chairman introduced the item and briefly summarised the business from  
the last meeting whereby Members were introduced to the new topic regarding  
the provision of homelessness services and how the Council was working with  
partner agencies to endeavour to prevent homelessness at its earliest stage.

The Panel were introduced to Ian Scholes, Homelessness Prevention Officer,  
Eileen Jackson, Housing Strategy Team Leader and Jason Marriott, a  
representative from the Framework Street Outreach Team (currently working  
within Nottingham city).

## Housing Options Shared Service

To assist with the review, the Council's Homelessness Prevention Officer undertook a presentation to the Panel in relation to the delivery of homelessness services through the Housing Options Shared Service Team.

The shared service with Mansfield District Council commenced in March 2015 with the team remaining based at the Council Offices in Kirkby in Ashfield. The sharing of resources and expertise has led to greater resilience and easier access to advice, assistance and emergency accommodation.

As an example the Panel were informed that in 2014/15 the cost for bed and breakfast accommodation was in the region of £150,000. Since the inception of the shared service only one person has been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation with alternative solutions being found for the majority of people/households presenting as homeless including use of the hostel facilities in Mansfield.

Legislative requirements obligated local authorities to provide advice and assistance to all households who sought it. In addition, the Council had a duty to make accommodation available to household who were:

- eligible for assistance
- unintentionally homeless
- in priority need
- have a local connection.

Demand for this service in Ashfield was increasing year on year but not at the same rate as was presenting nationally.

Current demand was as follows:-

<b>Demand:</b>	<b>Total:</b>
Number of homelessness applications taken in first 3 quarters 2016/2017:	118
Number of new service requests taken to date 2016/2017:	685
Number of households attending drop-in to date in 2016/2017:	940
Number of households prevented from being homeless in first 3 quarters of 2016/2017:	151 (compared to 68 in 2014/2015)
Estimated number of rough sleepers in Ashfield (November 2016):	9 (compared to 8 in 2015 as estimated)

Officers within the Housing Options team utilised a variety of prevention tools to assist people or households under threat of homelessness and these included a Bond Guarantee Scheme, Sanctuary Scheme, informal mediation and referrals for specialist debt advice. All the preventative work was undertaken in partnership with key organisations who offered different areas of

expertise and support i.e. Youth Homeless Forum, Social Services, Women's Aid, Framework and many more.

It was recognised by the Panel that accessibility to the service was of vital importance and various methods of contact included telephone, drop in sessions, appointment at the Council offices, home visits and an out of hour's service.

To conclude the Homelessness Prevention Officer took the opportunity to convey some of the challenges facing the team for the future. It was almost inevitable that demand would rise due to an increasing lack of housing supply exacerbated by the impact and ramifications of the Welfare Reform Act. Casework was becoming increasing more complex with an increase in homeless single people with mental health issues and the ongoing problem of a shortfall in support for vulnerable people within local communities.

However, the team were fully aware of the challenges facing them and had recognised possible solutions for coping with future demands which included enhanced customer focus (understanding recurring issues and causes), great partnership working, cultivating better relationships with private landlords, regular staff training and innovative use of scarce resources.

#### Framework Street Outreach Team

Jason Marriott took the opportunity to address the Panel and talk about the work of the Framework Street Outreach Team. Up until now, the team had only been working within Nottingham city but were preparing to expand their services out into neighbouring districts following receipt of £370,000 additional Government funding (over a 2 year period) and match funding by the City Council. Recruitment was currently taking place and it was envisaged that the service expansion would commence within the next couple of months.

The Outreach Team worked predominantly with rough sleepers and offered ongoing care and support to hopefully get them back into secure accommodation. However, many rough sleepers did not fit into the category of 'vulnerable adults' and therefore did not automatically fall under the homelessness legislation which placed a duty on local authorities to provide accommodation.

The Panel were informed that Framework offered a 24 hour helpline number and they currently received around 2,000 calls a month. The new outreach service would run in accordance with the principles of a "No Second Night Out" policy and would involve the presence of a nurse from the NHS Homeless Health Team to carry out any necessary health assessments.

The new Outreach Team covering the neighbouring districts would be focussing on need and being available to respond to any referrals they received (day or night). Drop in sessions were also being arranged to offer health and housing advice to anyone who attended and required support and assistance. It was envisaged that a Rough Sleepers Steering Group would be established, with a representative from each district authority, to ensure continuous sharing of information/feedback and to develop cross-district preventative solutions for tackling homelessness and assisting rough sleepers as appropriate.

## Homelessness Reduction Bill

The Council's Housing Strategy Team Leader gave an update presentation to the Panel in relation to the draft Homelessness Reduction Bill.

The Draft Bill had already passed through the House of Commons and would be progressing through the House of Lords with the second reading due on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2017. It was hoped that the Bill would be enacted by the end of 2017 and twelve new measures were being introduced to amend the existing legislation. A summary of the twelve measures/changes were circulated at the meeting.

It was acknowledged that should the Bill be passed, it would have implications for the Council as follows:-

- expected 25% rise in homeless applications;
- suitable IT and monitoring systems would need to be in place;
- new procedures finalised for non-priority need applicants;
- protocols agreed to work with specified referral agencies;
- enhanced self help and advice services on the website;
- templates for personal plans;
- agreed additional staffing requirements
- development of new prevention initiatives;
- informing partner agencies and stakeholders of changes through homelessness forum.

In relation to timescales for implementation of the Bill, it was noted that funding arrangements would hopefully be clarified by the end of March 2017 when scoping would begin by the Council to ascertain the remit for the enhanced services and the requirement for any additional staff. A report would be consider by the Cabinet in the summer with an intention to pilot the enhanced services and finalise the staffing arrangements as necessary by the autumn. Presentation would commence to forum members and stakeholders around October/November 2017 with the Act hopefully gaining Royal Assent in December with the production of relevant Codes of Practice as appropriate.

The Panel were advised that the changes would be funded by the additional Government funding for rough sleepers, the £61m national Government funding to enable local authorities to implement the changes arising from the Homelessness Reduction Bill and existing budgets. An announcement as to how the £61m would be allocated had not yet been received but it was presumed that the funding would be allocated to local authorities nationally based on their P1E Quarterly returns (for households dealt with under the homelessness provisions of the 1996 Housing Act and homelessness prevention and relief).

It was acknowledged that the Strategic Housing Team would need to give consideration to the following issues to ensure a smooth transition once the Act had been passed:-

- enhanced cross-County working to share best practice and ensure consistency;

- negotiation for new sites to provide accommodation to single people under LHA rates;
- to update the Home Finder Lettings Policy;
- alternative private sector solutions;
- improved links with private sector landlords;
- understanding the impact of Welfare Reforms;
- potential further uses for Discretionary Housing Payments;
- effective working with health and social care to deal with complex cases.

To sum up, the Housing Strategy Team Leader talked around the current homelessness provision and the importance of increasing the Council's homelessness prevention activities in the future. Consideration would need to be given towards staffing requirements as reviews (currently carried out by the Team Leader) would increase significantly following implementation of the Act. Progress of the Bill was being tracked by the Team and initial preparations were being made accordingly.

Following the presentations, the Panel Members debated the issue and considered amongst other things:-

- to what degree the Council publicised contact numbers and guidelines for homeless people in need and what referral mechanisms were in place for partner organisations;
- the possibility of advertising contact numbers and support services in late night venues (i.e. food outlets);
- the methods undertaken for collecting data in relation to rough sleepers within the Ashfield District;
- the potential impact on homelessness from the recent introduction of the Council's new Selective Licensing Scheme;
- how the Council's homelessness prevention fund was currently utilised;
- the difficulties being experienced by 'sofa surfers' and what support was currently being offered to assist them;
- the potential requirements for new staff following implementation of the Act and how this might be funded;
- the success of early intervention strategies in Wales and its impact on homelessness figures and costs (with the cost decrease achieved mainly from a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast provision);
- the process of eviction via a S21 notice;
- the possibility of the Council photographing rough sleepers (with consent) to build up a database of persons requiring assistance and acknowledging that the practice was already utilised by the Outreach Team as necessary.

Following conclusion of the presentations and debate, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank Ian Scholes, Eileen Jackson and Jason Marriott for their expertise and valuable contributions towards the Panel's review.

**RESOLVED**

that the following recommendations be submitted to the next available meeting of the Cabinet for consideration:-

- a) that Council recognises the importance of developing effective prevention initiatives (the Bill seeks to place extra duties on Councils) to facilitate early intervention with households/persons at risk of homelessness to provide more detailed advice, support and guidance thus preventing homelessness wherever possible;
- b) that Council continues to strengthen relationships with third sector organisations to facilitate the pooling of resources for tackling homelessness or the threat of homelessness within the Ashfield District;
- c) Members to be furnished with a copy of the 'How to Contact the Housing Options Team' leaflet;
- d) to consider the possibility of working with late night establishments and community initiatives to raise awareness and facilitate the necessary signposting should persons present themselves as homeless or are believed to be under threat of homelessness;
- e) to continue to work effectively with local services and communities to ensure the new outreach service is as effective as possible;
- f) to ensure that Panel Members are kept informed of progress with the Homelessness Reduction Bill and to have the opportunity to review any changes to the structure of the Housing Options Team following enactment of the Bill, prior to submission to Cabinet for consideration.

(During consideration of the review, Councillors Cathy Mason and Lee Anderson left the room at 7.37 p.m. and 7.51 p.m. and returned to the meeting at 7.40 p.m. and 7.52 p.m. respectively. Councillor Rachel Madden also left the meeting at 7.28 p.m.)

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

Chairman.