

Report To:	SCRUTINY PANEL B	Date:	7 FEBRUARY 2017
Heading:	SCRUTINY REVIEW – ACCESS TO HOMELESSNESS SERVICES		
Portfolio Holder:			
Ward/s:	ALL WARDS		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject To Call-In:	NO		

Purpose Of Report

At that last meeting of the Panel held on 8th November 2016, Members of the Panel were introduced to a new Scrutiny topic of homelessness and agreed the following terms of reference;

“To undertake a review of access to homelessness services and how we work with our partner agencies in addressing and preventing homelessness at the earliest possible stage.”

In attendance at the next meeting will be the Homelessness Prevention Officer and the Housing Strategy Team Leader to update Members on homelessness in Ashfield, current practices and procedures and preparations being developed to support any changes required should the Homelessness Prevention Bill reach Royal Assent.

Recommendation(s)

Members are requested to;

- **Note the information set out in this report;**
- **Consider any additional information required to progress this review.**

Reasons For Recommendation(s)

Reviewing access to homelessness services and understanding how we work with partner agencies was added to the Scrutiny Workplan in 2016.

Alternative Options Considered (With Reasons Why Not Adopted)

No alternative options have been considered as part of this review to date. All options considered will be detailed in a final report to Cabinet in due course.

Detailed Information

Following the last meeting of the Panel, Members requested a summary of how the Shared Homelessness Service operates. This is detailed below.

Housing Options Team (Ashfield and Mansfield)

Ashfield District Council deliver homelessness services through the Housing Options Team, this is delivered jointly with Mansfield District Council and operates under a 'shared service' arrangement where advice and assistance can be obtained in either Ashfield or Mansfield.

The housing options service is available to anyone who is homeless or who could become homeless in the near future or would like general housing advice.

The Team provide a range of support services to anyone that;

- Have nowhere to live;
- Have been told to leave your home by a parent, relative, friend or partner;
- Need to leave your home because of domestic abuse, violence or threats;
- Have mortgage or rent arrears that you cannot afford to pay;
- Have been told by your landlord that you need to leave.

The Housing Options Team also provide advice and help to assist in the prevention of homelessness. This includes;

- Advice on the different housing options available, which might include being able to stay in current home or having to move;
- Advice you about rights as a tenant or as an owner;
- Explore options to prevent having to leave the home;
- Advice on paying housing costs, which may include how to claim benefits;
- Assistance to find other housing accommodation including private rented, council, housing associations, supported accommodation, emergency housing and refuges.

The Team also provide a range of other specialist support services that may help prevent homelessness or assist with someone who presents themselves as homeless. These include;

- Specialist debt advice
- Bond Guarantee Scheme
- Sanctuary Scheme
- Referrals for Tenancy Support
- Referrals to Supported accommodation

Homelessness Reduction Bill 2016

The Homelessness reduction Bill discussed at the last meeting of the Panel passed through both the report stage and third reading in the Commons on the 27th January 2017, with cross-party support and government backing. It will now pass to the House of Lords, before receiving Royal Assent and becoming legislation.

The bill seeks to prevent homelessness by placing extra duties on councils to intervene at an earlier stage with households who are at risk of homelessness, provide more detailed advice on housing options for those at risk of homelessness and make it easier for applicants to appeal a decision against them. It's proposals include;

- An extension of the period during which an authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days.
- Clarification of the action an authority should take when someone applies for assistance having been served with a valid section 21 notice of intention to seek possession from an assured shorthold tenancy.
- A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness.
- A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants.
- A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Additional Funding – (National Rough Sleeping Grant)

In 2016, Nottingham City Council successfully bid for £185,000 of Government money each year for the next two years on behalf of the city and the district councils of Ashfield, Gedling, Mansfield, Newark and Sherwood and Bassetlaw as well as Rushcliffe and Broxtowe.

This money will help to fund an expansion in professional street outreach services to areas outside the city of Nottingham. Framework, which will deliver the new, expanded service, will contribute a further £150,000 for each of the next two years – money raised from supporters, the general public and from other sources.

While there is already a street outreach team in the city, run by Framework on behalf of the City Council, no such service exists in the boroughs and districts outside the city. This means that homeless people can go without the support they need, and increases the likelihood of homeless people from outside the city gravitating towards Nottingham.

This new funding will establish a countywide Nottinghamshire Rough Sleeper Prevention Service which will offer interventions to prevent rough sleeping and where it happens, keep it to a minimum.

The new service will be run in accordance with the principles of a No Second Night Out policy. Staff will work closely with housing teams to identify people in danger of rough sleeping and deliver interventions to reduce rough sleeping by those new to the streets and among more established rough sleepers.

It will also involve a nurse from the NHS Homeless Health Team carrying out health assessments, as the health needs of rough sleepers often act as a significant barrier to sustainable independent living.

The move comes at a time when Government figures suggest a doubling in rough sleeping nationally between 2010 and 2015 – with local council estimates showing it tripled in Nottinghamshire over the same period.

Helping people who sleep rough is not a straightforward matter of providing more accommodation. Many of the people on the streets have multiple additional problems in their lives, including substance abuse, mental health problems and history of repeat offending.

Ashfield Housing Strategy 2016 – 2020

The Housing Strategy for Ashfield outlines the priorities, actions and aspirations the Council have for tackling homelessness. These are;

- Develop debt and money advice services for people at risk of losing their home - dealing with impending welfare reforms – promotion of financial inclusion, signposting to debt / support services and assistance with accessing private rented sector housing
- Improve partnership working with health and social care to tackle the increasingly complex needs of homeless households;

- Work with private landlords to increase access to shared accommodation / HMOs for single person households under 35 who will be affected by the reduction in housing benefit entitlement from April 2017;
- Increasing prevention activity specifically for single people under 35;
- Expand the existing prevention service to incorporate 'rent in advance' scheme, the use of mediation and increased use of the private rented sector;
- Completion of the Gold Standard Programme
- Adopt the principles of the 'no second night out' promise to rough;
- Increased use of the private rented sector to discharge homeless duty and to secure accommodation for non-priority need households with the use of Discretionary Housing Payments where necessary;
- Improve the support and assistance offered to victims of domestic abuse.
- Secure additional funding to sustain the 6 refuge units past the end of December 2016 when the pilot project ends
- Work with Community Safety to gain the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)

In addition to the priorities listed above, the strategy also sets out our work with partner agencies in addressing homelessness. This includes being a member of the Interagency Forum, a sub-regional group that is the central point for partnership working across the three districts of Ashfield, Mansfield and Newark and Sherwood.

The Gold Standard

As part of the shared service commitment to tackling homelessness the shared homelessness service across Ashfield and Mansfield have committed to improving service delivery and prevention rates and is currently signed up to the Gold Standard Pledge and aspiring to work to the principles set out in the 10 step approach towards achieving the Gold Standard in service delivery.

The ten local challenges are:

- 1.** To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which works across all local Council services;
- 2.** To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs;
- 3.** To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients, which includes providing written advice;
- 4.** To adopt a No Second Night Out model or effective local alternative;
- 5.** To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support;
- 6.** To develop a sustainable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
- 7.** To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme;
- 8.** To have a Homelessness Strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs;
- 9.** Not to place and young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation;
- 10.** Not to place families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than six weeks.

Next Steps

In agreeing to undertake this review, Panel Members have set out that they would like to;

- understand the priorities in addressing homelessness and what we as a Council can influence;
- In the event that additional funding is available what areas would this be best spent on?
- The importance of Members being aware of the process to be followed should a person present themselves as homeless outside of office hours (ensuring that relevant contact numbers are available);
- Shared Sanctuary Scheme with neighbouring authorities;
- Understand how placing a duty on Councils to recognise earlier those who are at risk of becoming homeless (changing the period from 28 days to 56 days) will impact on the Council?
- Consider the importance of locating individuals when referred to areas where they can access support networks;

To help support this, In attendance at the next meeting will be the Homelessness Prevention Officer who will provide a presentation on our current commitments to homelessness and how we work with others to address it and the Housing Strategy Team Leader who will provide a an overview of the actions that need to be considered in preparation for the Homelessness Reduction Bill receiving Royal Ascent in 2017.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

The Corporate Plan for 2016-2019 reflects the Council's corporate priorities in addressing homelessness by ensuring that we understand the reasons for homelessness and adopt measures to assist those affected and prevent where possible.

Legal:

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, Housing Act 1996, and the Homelessness Act 2002, place statutory duties on local housing authorities to ensure that advice and assistance to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness is available. The Homelessness Reduction Bill had its second reading debate on 28 October 2016.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	N/A
General Fund – Capital Programme	N/A

Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	Financial implications relating to this review are not yet known. Advice will be sought from finance before any recommendations are made to Cabinet (likely to be in early 2017).
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	Financial implications relating to this review are not yet known. Advice will be sought from finance before any recommendations are made to Cabinet (likely to be in early 2017).

Human Resources / Equality and Diversity:

Further advice on equality and diversity implications relating to homelessness, particularly in light of the implications of the Homelessness Reduction Bill, will be sought during consideration of this topic.

Other Implications:

Not applicable.

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