

Report of the Chief Executive

HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN BROXTOWE1. Purpose of report

To update the Committee on the Council's current and future approaches to managing and improving the services provided to clients threatened with homelessness and/or rough sleeping. It also outlines measures that have been taken in response to Coronavirus.

2. Background

The Housing Act 1996 Part 7 and the Homelessness Reduction Act provide the legal framework and duties that the Council uses to assess homeless clients.

The Council works with partners, both within Broxtowe but also organisations that work across the County, as well with other Council's to help deliver a number of services to clients that are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Council also works in partnership to develop a variety of initiatives to support this vulnerable client group.

Since April 2020 and in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, the government launched an 'Everyone In' scheme to try to reduce rough sleeping by Council's accommodating this group, regardless of eligibility and circumstances. This scheme will continue until March 2021 and therefore the Council will not be making separate Christmas arrangements this year.

3. Detail

The attached Appendix outlines the following:

- A brief overview of the legislative framework
- The partnership work across the County to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping
- Work that has been done by the team to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic.
- The initiatives that are offered additionally in Broxtowe
- New initiatives being developed

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to NOTE the approach being taken to address issues of homelessness and rough sleeping in Broxtowe.

Background papers

Nil

APPENDIX**Homelessness in Broxtowe**

The legislative framework for the provision of Homelessness Services within Broxtowe are outlined in statutory guidance, namely the Housing Act 1996 Part 7 and the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

The Homeless Reduction Act introduced two new duties, the duty to prevent homelessness and the duty to relieve homelessness.

There were several new provisions introduced by the Homeless Reduction Act

- The duty to prevent and relieve homelessness
- Requirements to carry out an assessment and provide a personalised housing plan
- Public bodies now have a duty to refer people whom they know are threatened with homelessness
- Applicants have the right to request reviews of Council decisions at additional stages

The Council tackles these issues at both a county and local level. The approaches and prevention tools are outlined below.

The County and Sub Regional Approach

The Homeless Strategy document, shared by the South Nottinghamshire Partnership with Gedling Borough Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council, outlines some of the practical measures taken to address homelessness across the three areas.

Nottinghamshire County Council chair a strategic group called the Homelessness Executive. This includes representatives from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Health and Social Care, partner agencies dealing with rough sleeping and substance misuse as well as representatives from Districts and Borough's. Broxtowe Borough Council is represented on this group.

Broxtowe Borough Council is also part of County wide initiatives to assist with homelessness and rough sleeping. These include;

Rough Sleeper Outreach Services

These are currently offered by Framework Street Outreach. The services attempts to engage rough sleepers on the streets of Nottinghamshire, offering advice and assistance to try and encourage them to engage positively with services, whether this be the local authority or drug and alcohol services such as CGL.

Rough Sleeper Coordinator

The Rough Sleeper coordinator coordinates services that surround rough sleepers across the County and creates cohesive partnerships between all partners, providing some practical assistance where necessary.

Call Before You Serve

The “Call Before You Serve” scheme provides advice and liaison between private tenants, private landlords and local authorities to try to work with all concerned to prevent evictions and therefore homeless presentations to the Council.

Social Lettings Agency

To source accommodation throughout the County for homeless persons and act as the agent between the local authorities, clients and landlord.

Hospital Discharge Navigator

The Hospital Discharge Navigators aims to improve services and liaison between NHS colleagues and local authorities where clients in hospital are threatened with homelessness.

Prison Navigator

The Prison Navigator aims to improve services and liaison between colleagues in the Prison service and local authorities and improve accommodation options to certain prison leavers.

Mental Health Navigator

The Mental Health Navigator aims to improve services and liaison between colleagues in the health and social care services and local authorities. Particularly those suffering acute mental health problems and whom have had a hospital admission.

Landlord Liaison Officer

The Landlord Liaison Officer aims to source accommodation in the private sector that is likely to be affordable to clients, respecting Local Housing Allowance rates, to assist in easing pressure on waiting lists.

Bespoke provisions at Broxtowe Borough Council

Along with these County wide initiatives, the Council also has initiatives that it operates to assist in the prevention and relief of homelessness. These include;

Partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau

The Council assists in the funding of the housing advice post and the provision of housing surgeries provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau. Having a close relationship with an independent advice service is important so clients can get independent advice when they wish to review decisions made by the Council for instance.

The Council also works in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide a Homeless Prevention Fund. This fund offers a one off payment to assist prevent a client's homelessness or secure accommodation.

Deposit Guarantee Scheme

The Deposit Guarantee Scheme assists households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to access private rented accommodation. It provides a written guarantee by Broxtowe Borough Council to the landlord that can be used to cover damage to the property or its contents, up to maximum value of one month's rent.

Partnership with Broxtowe Youth Homelessness

The Council currently provides a grant to the service each year to provide assistance to the under 25's who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This includes providing education and awareness sessions in local schools.

The Council has also been piloting a Tenancy Training scheme with its partner contractors to provide some practical advice on how to maintain their accommodation and tenancy, such as decorating tips, energy tips and fire safety.

Domestic Abuse Services and the Sanctuary Scheme

The Housing Options Team have recently taken on domestic abuse coordination on behalf of the Council and has also taken over responsibility for the Sanctuary Scheme.

The Sanctuary Scheme provides security improvements and enhancements to enable survivors of domestic abuse to remain in their properties.

Tenancy Sustainment and Financial Inclusion Services

These services are predominantly part of our landlord services. However, they provide useful advice to new tenants or applicants that are going to be tenants in the near future. They also play a key role in preventing homelessness by sustaining tenancies.

Homelessness within the Coronavirus pandemic

In the period prior to the nationwide lockdown in late March, the Council identified rough sleepers at a potential high risk and vulnerable group and extended its

emergency provisions, normally only used in extreme weather, to the pandemic and accommodate any rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping.

Since the lockdown period began, the government launched an initiative to all local authorities in England that was termed “Everyone In”. This essentially was advice to all Councils to rehouse people sleeping rough or in homeless shelters in self-contained accommodation that was not shared, such as hotel rooms or other temporary accommodation. Broxtowe Borough Council was already taking this approach in the weeks prior.

The Everyone In initiative has been very successful nationwide as has led to it being extended to March 2021. The government has made additional funding available to Council’s in terms of direct award funding or grants available to assist with the financial pressures that this presents.

Broxtowe Borough Council also assisted in providing food parcels to those rough sleeping, in partnership with the Coop, whilst clients were staying in hotel accommodation.

Broxtowe Borough Council has assisted in in excess of 30 people who were rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping since the lockdown period began. Most of the people assisted have been found permanent accommodation or a place in supported accommodation.

Since the lockdown started, the Council has also been part of a coordinated City and County approach to managing the issues of rough sleeping within Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The Housing Sub Group, ensures communication between agencies, triaging of pressing issues, that pressures are managed and problems that are identified can be tackled and resolved.

New Initiatives

Increase in Temporary Accommodation Provision

This year the Council has started to increase its own units of temporary accommodation that it has within the Borough.

The Council has traditionally had a small number of units at Knapp Avenue in Eastwood, Plowman Court in Stapleford and Nether Street in Beeston that it uses for temporary accommodation. These are a mixture of single units and accommodation suitable for families.

The Council uses hotel accommodation in emergencies and this usage has increased during the Coronavirus lockdown period. In the majority of cases, the Council looks to move the client to their own unit of accommodation as soon as possible whilst it is assessing their needs, priority or eligibility for assistance. Increasing our units allows us to do this quicker and easier and means that clients

who may have ties to the Borough, such as schooling, employment of other health or wellbeing needs can stay closer to home.

Prevention and Resettlement Workers

In response to some of the issues identified in the Housing Sub-group, the County local authorities have agreed to reassign some of the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding that was awarded to the County by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as part of a joint bid to fund a number of Prevention and Resettlement workers working throughout the County.

The remit of the Prevention and Resettlement workers is to offer support with a range of matters that are important to ensuring that tenancies are sustained. These could be financial assistance, accessing support for health concerns, helping clients set up utilities, bills etc. The support would not just cover those at risk of rough sleeping or those that are in 'Priority Need' groups in accordance with the Legislation, but could also assist groups such as prison releases and helping those that may be living in non-secure accommodation, such as 'sofa-surfing', in finding and assisting them into more permanent and appropriate accommodation.

Mediation

The Council is currently exploring the possibility of pursuing a trial partnership with Broxtowe Youth Homelessness and the Citizens Advice Bureau with a view to those services working in partnership to provide a mediation service on behalf of the Borough.

The results of this possible trial will be communicated with the Committee in the future.

Rough Sleepers Action Group

This monthly meeting focusses on case specific examples of rough sleeping within Broxtowe and has all the relevant agencies invited. The aim is to share information between agencies surrounding those who are sleeping rough to help ensure better outcomes. These meetings are currently on hold because of the Coronavirus pandemic and are superseded by the County group outlined above.

Living Well Live Better Brand

Working with the Communications Team, a brand based around health and living well is being produced. As homelessness is linked to health, wellbeing and staying well, the services provided by the Council's Housing Options Team are included within the scope of the brand.