

SUBJECT:	THEMATIC REVIEW - HOMELESSNESS
DIRECTORATE:	HOUSING AND REGENERATION
REPORT AUTHOR:	YVONNE FOX – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Performance Scrutiny Committee with information relating to the provision of homelessness services following the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 on the 3rd April 2018
- 1.2 To inform Members of the successful bid from the Rough Sleeper Fund to reduce and prevent rough sleeping in the City Centre

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act places new duties on English Councils so that everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status or local connection to the authority they approach.
- 2.2 Several new duties are introduced including:
 - Duty to assess all eligible applicants cases and agree a Personal Plan
 - The Prevention Duty: in cases of threatened homelessness
 - The Relief Duty: in cases where the applicant is homeless

In addition, there are new duties on Public Authorities; the Public duty to refer, and on applicants. Any applicant who fails to co-operate may mean that they cease to be eligible for further assistance

- 2.3 At present, Local Authorities are unable to predict what the impact of the new legislation may have. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), have created a new Homelessness Advice and Support Team (HAST) comprising of national, senior homelessness professionals. This team provides advice and support to all local authorities and we have received several visits from the HAST advisor for the East Midlands since March this year.
- 2.4 The Government acknowledges that rough sleeping has increased across the country over recent years. As a result the MHCLG has provided £30m of funding to the 83 Councils that have the highest numbers of rough sleepers.
- 2.5 The City of Lincoln was invited to bid for funding and a comprehensive bid to address the rough sleeping problems in Lincoln was submitted.

2.6 The Council has been successful in their bid and has received £376,747 for the remainder of the financial year, 2018/19. We have been invited to bid for further funding for 2019/20 and the bid was submitted as requested on the 28th June 2018. A decision on this bid should be made by the 16th July.

3. Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

3.1 As mentioned, the Homelessness Reduction Act places new duties on English Councils so that everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status or local connection to the authority they approach.

3.2 The definition of homeless or threatened with homelessness has also been changed. The Act extends the number of days before a person becomes threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days.

3.3 This change has been introduced to enable people to apply for help and advice at an earlier stage and to give the local authority time to prevent homelessness or give advice to enable the applicant to secure alternative accommodation

3.4 The Duty to provide advisory services requires the authority to provide advice on:

- Preventing homelessness,
- Securing accommodation,
- Advice on legal rights
- Any help that is available from other agencies for example, debt advice

3.5 If a local authority believes that a person is homeless or threatened with homelessness in 56 days and is eligible for assistance, the prevention duty is triggered and the council has a duty to assess every applicant's circumstances and housing and support needs and reach an agreement with the applicant on a personalised plan which sets out what the authority will do and what the applicant must do to ensure accommodation is secured or retained.

3.6 If a person is or becomes homeless, then the relief duty is triggered and will continue for up to 56 days. The council has a duty to help all homeless applicants to secure accommodation for at least 6 months, if they have a local connection with the authority. If not, their case will be referred to the relevant authority to progress. It is important to note that it is expected that the majority of applicants owed a relief duty to secure accommodation will be helped to secure private rented accommodation.

3.7 If an applicant fails to cooperate with the council in order to prevent their homelessness or secure accommodation then the council can serve a notice on the applicant explaining the consequence of continued non-cooperation. As a consequence of non-cooperation, the council could choose to decide that the person is no longer eligible for assistance.

3.8 On October 1st 2018, the Duty to Refer will be introduced which requires a number of public bodies to notify the council if they are working with someone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness

4. Current Position – Homelessness Reduction Act

- 4.1 A significant amount of work was required by local authorities to be ready for the new duties which came in to effect in April. The Housing Solutions Team has received specialist training to assist them and, following a visit in May by our Homelessness Advisor, we are statutorily compliant with the new Act.
- 4.2 At this stage, it is difficult to predict what the impact of the Act will have. It is predicted that homelessness applications will increase by 25% but acceptances will reduce and the use of temporary accommodation will reduce. The team have noted an increase in applications since April of around 10%, the majority of these are single people who the authority would previously not have had any duties other than the provision of advice and assistance.

5. Rough Sleeping in Lincoln

- 5.1 As Members are aware, rough sleeping has become more visible particularly in Lincoln City Centre over the last 2 years. Lincoln is a 'magnet', particularly for single people, who gravitate towards the City. Despite the City having a nightshelter, supported accommodation and a street outreach team, numbers continue to rise and at the moment, around 30 people sleep rough in Lincoln each night.
- 5.2 The Lincoln Business Community (Lincoln BIG) have been working with the Council and have launched a diverted giving scheme to encourage people to give donations to a fund which will be used to help and support rough sleepers, rather than to give to people who are begging on the streets and who may actually not be rough sleeping.
- 5.3 The Council has also successfully bid for £376,747 of funding to target rough sleeping and prevent the flow of new rough sleepers on to our streets. The funding will provide:
- A new Rough Sleeper Team working alongside the Council's Housing Options Team
 - An additional street outreach worker and specialist Addiction and Recovery nurse and a mental health nurse
 - Funding to open the nightshelter for several hours during the day time which will mean that people do not have go back on to the streets at 8am
 - Funding to recommission the Cornerhouse project for entrenched rough sleepers who have high support needs
- 5.4 This funding will make a huge impact on rough sleeping in Lincoln and will positively assist those people who are sleeping rough to secure accommodation which is right for their needs with the support that they need.

6.0 Organisational Impacts

- 6.1 Finance - the impact of the extended duties are as yet, unknown. It is anticipated that the use of temporary accommodation will reduce but additional staffing may be required for which resources would need to be identified from existing budgets.

6.2 Legal Implications - the council is fully compliant with the provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act

6.5 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights – the Council is compliant with all requirements

7. **Risk Implications** -not applicable

8. **Recommendation**

8.1 For Members to note the contents of the report and to receive an updated report on the first year post-introduction of the Act and outcomes of the Rough Sleeper initiatives.

Is this a key decision? No

Do the exempt information categories apply? No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? No

How many appendices does the report contain? none

List of Background Papers: None

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