

SUBJECT:	HOMELESSNESS IN LINCOLN – THE CURRENT SITUATION
DIRECTORATE:	HOUSING AND INVESTMENT
LEAD OFFICER:	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 update Members on the successful bid from the Rough Sleeper Initiative to reduce and prevent rough sleeping in the City Centre.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act placed 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 were introduced including:
 - Duty to assess all eligible applicants cases and agree a Personal Housing 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 The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) 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 the Act was implemented.
- 2.4 The Government acknowledges that rough sleeping has increased across the country over recent years. As a result the MHCLG 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 was successful in their bid and received £376,747 for the remainder of the financial year, 2018/19 and has been awarded £519,396 for 2019/20.

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,
 - 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 the applicants 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 was 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 and worked very hard over the last year to ensure that we are statutorily compliant with the new Act.

- 4.2 The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act has resulted in an increase in the number of people approaching the Council for advice and an increase in the number of people we have accepted a duty for.
- 4.3 A review is currently underway into the processes and procedures that are being used within the service to look at the best way to deliver the service in the future. The findings of the review so far have demonstrated that the staff are now seeing more people and a higher proportion of these customers are presenting with more complex needs and an increased complexity to their cases. This is especially apparent when working with customers that are street homeless or at risk of rough sleeping.
- 4.4 The team strive to prevent homelessness rather than relieve it and as part of this undertaking additional work is required to update the information that is available to customers on their first contact with the Council, whether it be online or in person. There is also the need to encourage the understanding of more private sector landlords and promote the benefits of engaging with their tenants in a more understanding way to prevent homelessness by making more agreements with their tenants and also making more of their accommodation available to people with more complex needs.
- 4.5 The city also has a shortage of adequate temporary accommodation and the provisions that are in place are not sufficient for the current demand, both with the number of units that people with a variety of needs require and also the level of support available once a person or family are in the accommodation.
- 4.6 The Housing Solutions Team continue to receive training relevant to their work and there is a training plan in place for this to continue over the coming year.

5. Current Position - Rough Sleeping in Lincoln

- 5.1 Following the successful bid for funding from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) the Rough Sleeper Project Team commenced in October 2018.
- 5.2 The Rough Sleeper Team consists of a Co-ordinator, two Rough Sleeper Officers, one Substance Misuse Worker and one Mental Health Nurse. The project also funds one Outreach Worker employed by P3. The project includes accommodation at the Corner House, a complex needs unit which is owned and managed by Framework Housing Association, and houses fifteen service users. We have also secured an extension to the opening hours at the Nomad Night Shelter to include a day centre run by the YMCA, offering day services to those who are street homeless. The team has also had access to five bedsit type units provided by the YMCA to both relieve and prevent rough sleeping for those with limited options. Private tenancies have also been utilised as much as possible.
- 5.3 The project engages with those who are already street homeless and also works to reduce the flow of those leaving prison and hospital into rough sleeping through early notification and intervention. The work has so far been extremely challenging and very fast paced and is expected to remain so.

- 5.4 Partnerships with P3, YMCA, Framework Housing Association, Addaction and Lincoln Partnership Foundation Trust have been strengthened and working relationships with both the prison and the hospital are being further developed. Work has begun on an agreed protocol between the Council and the prison to address the numbers of people losing their accommodation whilst in prison on short sentences and those leaving without suitable housing.
- 5.5 The service users engaged by the team are, in the main, very complex with multiple issues including serious mental health, substance misuse, offending history and various former tenancy arrears. They are often classed as high risk individuals. Many have limited housing options having been previously excluded by other housing providers.
- 5.6 The additional funding secured in December 2018 will see the opening of a 'Somewhere Safe To Stay Hub' with appropriate support workers. This will allow up to eight service users at any time to access the hub, for a period of 72 hours. Whilst on site the service users will be assessed for all needs and started on not only their housing pathway, but also allowing access to health, substance misuse and other support services.

6. 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.
- 6.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights – the Council is compliant with all requirements..
7. **Risk Implications** - Homelessness is a statutory function and there is a risk to vulnerable people and the Council if the service is not compliant with legislation and current guidance.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 For Members to note the contents of the report.

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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