
Briefing Paper

Ending the National Scandal of Homelessness

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Barbara Brownridge - Lead Member for Neighbourhoods and Co-operatives

Executive Director: Helen Lockwood - Executive Director Economy, Skills & Neighbourhoods

Report Author: Ann-Marie McGinn, Principal Homelessness Strategy Officer

Ext. 5148

8 November 2017

1.0 Background

1.1 Motion 2 – Ending the National Scandal of Homelessness

This Council notes:

- The national scandal of homelessness, with official figures showing over 4,000 people sleeping rough on any one night, in England last year and over 250,000 people in some form of homelessness.
- That figures for sleeping rough have increased by nearly 50% in the last two years.
- That Greater Manchester has a particular homelessness problem, with Manchester having the fourth highest rates of rough sleeping in the country.
- The charities, Crisis, Centrepont, Homeless Link, Shelter and St Mungo's have launched the End Rough Sleeping Campaign to call upon politicians of all parties to make a commitment to end rough sleeping and homelessness.

Working with our social housing and voluntary sector partners, Council reaffirms its commitment to ending rough sleeping and homelessness.

2.0 Council Motion

The following motion was agreed at Council on 13th September 2017:

- Adopt as policy the aspirations outlined in the End Rough Sleeping Campaign that in this borough:

2.1 No-one is sleeping rough

As far as possible staff seek to ensure that no-one is sleeping rough within Oldham. There are good links with the Neighbourhood Police Team for the town centre and staff within the district teams. On occasions where there is a report of someone rough sleeping in Oldham, agencies have communicated quickly and worked together to try and engage with the person and resolve the situation. Unfortunately for some people there may be barriers to accessing housing options due to previous tenancy issues, which may include eviction due to rent arrears or anti-social behaviour. This may mean that it is very difficult to access housing options for some.

Guidance from the CLG advises that Severe Weather Emergency Provision arrangements (SWEPEP) are triggered when the night time temperature is predicted to be zero degrees or below for three consecutive nights, to ensure that people are not at risk of dying on the streets during cold weather. In Oldham, Cold Weather Provision (CWP) arrangements are slightly more generous and are based on any night that the temperature in Oldham is anticipated to drop to zero or below. These arrangements will commence on 1st November 2017 until 31st March 2018. (This date may change if there is extreme weather expected beyond this date). During this period of cold weather short term accommodation (or shelter) will be provided to households who the council (or partner agencies) considers are at risk of sleeping rough. Threshold and Depaul UK have been approached and asked to be part of these arrangements. This commitment includes the provision of somewhere to sleep (which may be the couch in a communal lounge or on a camp bed) along with food, warm drinks and access to washing and laundry facilities.

Work is ongoing at a Greater Manchester (GM) level to develop pathways for rough sleepers and prevention options for those at risk of rough sleeping. This includes accommodation and support and will be accessible by all authorities in GM. Oldham Council has fed into this based on information provided by partner agencies. In addition the GM Public Service Reform Board met on 6th October 2017. Following this meeting the GM Mayor (Andy Burnham) announced that Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service has pledged to open up its stations to support homeless people in partnership with community and voluntary groups to provide a range of services. This will be explored in Oldham.

2.2 No-one is living in shelters, hostels or other emergency accommodation without a plan to move into suitable and settled housing within an agreed appropriate timescale

All households who are placed by the council, through the Oldham Housing and Advice Services (OHAS) contract with First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) in any form of temporary or emergency accommodation will have a housing assessment and will be advised of their housing options. They will be advised how to maximise their housing options and actions that they should take to increase their chances of accessing move-on accommodation quickly. They will be supported with this. This will

include support with making applications to supported accommodation or to contact letting agencies to access private rented accommodation. In terms of accessing social housing if applicants do not place regular bids for suitable properties that become available, the staff will place bids for them. Activity in respect of all households in temporary or emergency accommodation is regularly monitored by council staff.

It is a requirement of the Homelessness Reduction Act going forward that all households who approach the council as homeless, or at risk of homelessness, will have a personal housing action plan. New IT systems and staff training commissioned at a GM level are currently being developed to support this.

2.3 No-one is homeless as a result of leaving the care system, prison or other state institution

Close links are in place between housing/homelessness staff and colleagues in other services, including After Care, Probation, and the Royal Oldham Hospital. There are local protocols in place in respect of young people (including care leavers) who are homeless and at a GM level in respect of hospital discharge. Staff from within the Housing Strategy Team are represented on the Reducing Reoffending Board, Corporate Parenting Board and Youth Justice Main Board. People who are leaving care, hospital, prison and the armed forces are prioritized in respect of the council's Allocations Scheme and also in terms of access to supported accommodation. Multi-agency meetings or case conferences will take place where there are people who are coming out of institutions and need a specific housing offer.

FCHO currently fund a Hospital to Home service and Housing Options for Older People (HOOP), which are focused around expediting discharge from hospital for households whose current accommodation is unsuitable. The OHAS also receive referrals from ward staff/social workers of households who may be homeless. Appointments are then made for people to attend interviews at the centre or for a member of staff to visit them at the hospital to undertake a homelessness assessment and discuss housing options.

There are a number of services which are in place within local prisons including Shelter who provide housing advice. Staff seek to prevent homelessness before a person is released and Oldham Reconnect (Young Persons Mediation) will engage with the young person and their family whilst the person is still in custody. Staff from the OHAS will also visit people within prison to complete a homelessness assessment and discuss housing options.

2.3 Everyone at immediate risk of homelessness gets the help they need to prevent it happening.

There is a strong partnership approach in the prevention of homelessness within the borough and a large number of partners contribute towards this. The council funds a number of initiatives using Preventing Homelessness Grant. This includes Oldham Reconnect (Young Persons Mediation Service) and Oldham Nightstop to prevent young people from becoming homeless. There is also Spend to Save (Homelessness Prevention funding) that can be used to flexibly to prevent homelessness. Historically

Oldham has reported one of the highest returns in terms of preventing homelessness across Greater Manchester and a number of partners contribute towards this including FCHO, housing providers, Oldham CAB, supported accommodation providers and other services within the council. During 2016/17, 2046 households were prevented from becoming homeless by a range of means including mediation with family, legal advice, support to address housing benefit or rent problems or to access social housing before they become homeless.

A Pre-Eviction Protocol has been developed across housing providers to establish actions that they must take when they are seeking to evict including linking in with OHAS.

A number of events have taken place with colleagues in Department for Work and Pensions to raise awareness regarding homelessness issues amongst their staff, promote joint working and provide information regarding access to services to enable them to signpost people into services if they have concern that someone is at risk of homelessness.

Joint work is taking place with colleagues in mental health, substance misuse, offending and homelessness services regarding people with complex needs and to identify people who are homeless and also those who are in accommodation but might be at high risk of becoming homeless.

2.4 Ask the Chief Executive to write to the charities involved with the End Rough Sleeping Campaign to give the campaign this Council's support and to ask the campaign to register the Council as a supporter.

The Chief Executive has written to the charities as requested.

2.5 Ask the Chief Executive to write to our three Members of Parliament, urging them to support a range of action at a Government level.

The Chief Executive has written to the Members of Parliament as requested

- Support measures to tackle homelessness at a Greater Manchester level, including:

2.6 Supporting the Homelessness Action Network created by the Greater Manchester Mayor

The GM Homelessness Action Network was launched in July 2017. Staff from the council and some partner agencies attended this initial launch and committed to be involved with further work as this progresses.

2.7 Working together as ten boroughs, and using our devolved powers to collectively bring an end to homelessness as an urgent priority.

There are a number of ways in which Oldham is working with colleagues in the other GM authorities to prevent homelessness. The Principal Homelessness Strategy Officer attends and is an active participant in the GM Housing Needs Group which includes the strategic links to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)

work on homelessness. The GM Housing Needs Group meets bi-monthly but there is currently a lot of activity outside of these meetings to support the strategic commissioning of services and training required to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act. Bespoke training is to take place across the GM region and all staff working in homelessness services will be required to attend this.

The Senior Housing Needs Officer is also working with other GM authorities in respect of a number of housing sub-groups developing the processes, systems and paperwork required to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Colleagues in First Choice Homes and other housing providers are also linking in at a GM level to develop responses to address homelessness. These include developing shared accommodation, Housing First and projects linking with health. The GM Housing Providers Group have published a number of pledges and the council is working with them to take these forward at a local level.

2.8 Ensuring that a revised Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF), and the Oldham Local Plan, has appropriate and affordable housing as a core priority.

The GMSF is legislatively required to meet objectively assessed housing need and this means that the GMSF must address how GM will meet all housing need including Oldham's affordable housing needs in terms of its type, tenure and amount.

2.9 Ensure that Oldham Council, and our social housing and voluntary sector partners, are doing everything we can to contribute to ending homelessness by asking the Leader to bring a report to Council outlining how our local services are working to end homelessness in the Borough.

Report attached.