

Agenda Item 7
Report to Safer and Stronger
Communities Scrutiny & Policy
Development Committee
Thursday 25th Feb 2021

Report of: Policy and Improvement Officer

Subject: Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Author of Report: Suzanne Allen

The attached paper is an update report for the Committee on the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on homelessness and rough sleeping.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Other	X

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

- Discuss the attached paper

Background Papers: [Sheffield Council Constitution](#)

Category of Report: OPEN

Report to Safer Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee

February 2021

Author – Zoe Young Housing Options and Advice Service Manager

Homelessness and Response to Covid 19 and Rough Sleeping Update

1. Purpose of Report

The report provides a briefing for the Safer Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee on the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic and actions that have been put in place to deal with it. The report provides information about homelessness and rough sleeping in Sheffield overall and explains the arrangements that have been made to respond to the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns in March and November.

In summary:

- Since March 2020, there has been a significant increase in presentations from households owed a legal duty to Temporary Accommodation and there is a higher use of hotels/B+B and SCC properties.
- The increased use of TA is caused by an increased number of people who cannot stay in their current accommodation whilst we work with them to try and prevent homelessness, fewer move on options being available and reduced service capacity to pro-actively progress cases
- SCC and partners have worked collaboratively to provide emergency accommodation and wraparound support to people at risk of or found to be rough sleeping in response to the Covid19 requirement from Government
- The number of people rough sleeping has increased and to date SCC have placed 196 individuals into emergency accommodation and secured move on housing for the majority. Seventeen people remain in hotels as part of the initial COVID response. Nine of these are people with No Recourse to Public Funds.
- SCC introduced a winter plan in December 2020 which replaces the weather watch provision. We will now place anyone who is rough sleeping in an emergency bed throughout the winter regardless of the weather. Currently we have 38 people placed in hotels as part of the winter plan. They are given the same support as others who were placed under the Everyone In Initiative.
- To deal with the risks of an increase in homelessness the Homelessness Prevention Strategic Steering Group and Forum are working together to

improve prevention and target activity. This is made up of statutory, voluntary, commissioned services and housing providers.

- The Covid19 Cell Group overseeing the emergency provision for rough sleepers is plugged in to the existing partnership groups and is overseeing an Exit Strategy that builds on the collaborative working that has been undertaken to date.
- SCC are working closely with MHCLG, Homes England and housing providers to plan for and deliver suitable longer term housing options and support for rough sleepers as part of the Exit Strategy.
- SCC and partners have submitted an Expression of Interest for funding from the Changing Futures Programme that will support people with the most complex needs affected by homelessness, domestic abuse, substance abuse, mental health issues and criminal justice.

2. Homelessness Overall

- The overall number of open homelessness cases has been increasing since the Homelessness Reduction Act changes required us to work with people for longer to improve the likelihood of preventing homelessness. Since the pandemic the number of preventions has decreased.
- The projected number of homeless acceptances is 600 at the end of 2020/21 in comparison with 484 at the end of 2019/20
- Being asked to leave by friends and family is still the top reason for homelessness and in the current climate it is more difficult for people to continue to stay in these situations pending a planned move.
- The number and proportion of cases where people are homeless due to domestic abuse has increased
- The number of cases where people are homeless due to the ending of a private tenancy has decreased – this is likely to be because of the temporary ban on evictions.
- The number of people who presented as they had left an institution with no accommodation arranged increased – mainly leaving prison
- The proportion of all applications from single people has increased from 71% to 75%.
- The number of people found to be rough sleeping has increased significantly following the government announcement that all rough sleepers would be offered emergency accommodation

3. Temporary Accommodation (TA)

The majority of people who apply as homeless remain in their current accommodation. When this isn't possible, they will be offered Temporary Accommodation (TA) if they may be homeless, eligible and in priority need under statutory duties. TA is provided in Council properties on schemes and dispersed units, a commissioned scheme and hotels/B+Bs.

There has been a significant increase in the demand for TA since the lockdown began and this need has mainly been met by using dispersed Council properties and hotel accommodation. A snapshot comparison between 24th March 2020 and 31st December 2020 illustrates this as follows:

Number of Households in TA

	24th March 2020	31st December 2020	Change
No of families with children in TA	46	75	+29 (+63%)
No of single people/couples with no children	112	233	+121 (+108%)
Total Nos of Households in TA owed statutory housing duties (including priority needs placements in B&B/hotels)	158	308	+ 150 (+95%)

The number of TA placements (excluding B&B) made between March and December 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 increased from 284 to 389 households.

As well as an increase in the number of cases where TA is needed, the capacity to undertake prevention work has been limited. This is due to the reduction in available staff and restrictions on work practices in response to the lockdown provisions in both in-house and partner organisations.

We are required to work with people for up to 56 days before homelessness occurs to prevent homelessness and 56 days after homelessness does occur under the relief duty before we decide whether to accept a fully housing duty. The number of cases

that remain open for this whole period have increased from the usual number of 700 to currently more than 1000.

To help mitigate against the increase in demand people in TA are being prioritised for moves to general needs housing and more dispersed units are being used to help reduce the number and length of stay in hotels.

4. Covid19 Response and Rough Sleepers

On the 26th March all Councils were asked to undertake several actions by Government to support rough sleepers with immediate effect and this section of the report provides an update on the Sheffield response to dealing with rough sleepers throughout the pandemic.

4.1 Local Co-ordination ‘Cell’

- Government asked all Local Authorities to set up a ‘cell’ group to oversee the cities activities to support rough sleepers throughout the pandemic.
- The cell group is chaired by the Head of City Wide Housing and includes senior managers from Housing, Care, Health and Public Health. We also have representatives from community safety and commissioning (SYP, SCC and CCG). The group has developed an action plan to oversee the emergency arrangements and has developed an exit strategy to help people to move on to sustainable housing with wrap-around support.
- The cell has a number of sub-groups dealing specifically with Health and Community Safety and an operational group that implements the action plan.
- The Cell Group works very closely with the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Steering Group that is also chaired by the Head of Citywide Housing Service and is made up of the wider partnership across statutory, voluntary, and commissioned services and housing providers.
- It reports into the wider Covid19 response and there is a regular meeting with the MHCLG specialist advisers on Rough Sleeping and Homelessness, and the chair meets with the homelessness leads for

Doncaster, Barnsley and Rotherham. There is also contact with the other Core Cities.

4.2 Support for rough sleepers

- All day centres, soup runs and other support systems for rough sleepers have had to change the way they run during the pandemic. The day centres were totally closed to rough sleepers until they could find innovative ways of supporting people whilst keeping themselves and their service users safe.
- SCC have worked closely with our partners and these services have been offering practical help on the streets with people, have run a meals on wheels service for people who do not have access to food and basic essentials and have been working closely with SCC to support people placed in emergency accommodation with laundry services and meaningful activity.
- Community safety partners have taken the lead on dealing with any issues in relation to persistent begging and congregating on the streets through advice to individuals and enforcement when necessary. Local policing teams have been fully engaged in managing any issues in the localities where the emergency accommodation is located.

4.3 Council procurement of accommodation for people on the streets

- Councils were asked to provide accommodation immediately in March 2020 as soon as the lockdown was announced. Our existing emergency provision did not have capacity to deal with this. The accommodation was required to have single en-suite rooms with catering facilities or provide food and be accessible for people with disabilities.
- SCC block booked hotels which are managed by the providers, but SCC housing staff attend the schemes daily to provide housing support and additional security has been funded.

- The government estimated nationally the scheme would help 6000 people. In fact, over 20,000 people were placed in this type of emergency accommodation across the country. The number of people found rough sleeping on our official snapshot count in October 2020 was 24 – down from the 29 found in November 2019. However, in Sheffield, similarly to elsewhere, the number of people found to be rough sleeping overall has significantly increased and the numbers out on anyone night are reduced by the hotel provision we still have in place.

- Since enacting the ‘Everyone In’ and the Winter Plan the number of people found out on the streets varies from around 1 to 20 people. Some of these have been offered accommodation on numerous occasions but refuse to accept it or do not stay there consistently.

- All service users have been provided with public health advice, staff have been trained and PPE provided. In addition, we have supported hostel providers with training, PPE provision and reducing the number of occupied units in schemes to enable self-isolation where appropriate in commissioned services. We have only had one positive COVID case in the hotels since March 2020.

- Throughout the pandemic we have provided face to face support with people in hotels and continue to provide a street outreach service 7 days a week.

- Wrap around support is available at the hotels from drug and alcohol services, mental health services and medical care . All staff have been vaccinated who are working in the hotels and on the streets with rough sleepers and a vaccination clinic is being held at the Archer Project so that vulnerable rough sleepers can be vaccinated.

- Other services that are provided include practical help with shopping for essentials, and two hot meals a day. Voluntary services are also giving support and information to residents to provide meaningful activity and address social isolation.

5. Housing First

- SCC has repurposed some MCHLG Rough Sleeper Initiative funding which was originally allocated for a safe space project. Due to the communal nature of safe space, we could no longer set this up and the money has been used to set up a Housing First Service.
- Housing First is an internationally renowned model that is designed to provide firstly a home and also open-ended support to long term and recurrently homeless people who have high and complex support needs.
- Sheffield has taken a multi-agency approach which is essential to help individuals become more independent. It was clear after recent consultation with service users that individuals engage more when the support is flexible and bespoke to them.
- SCC are using our own properties to provide a new home with intensive key worker support as well as coordinating wrap-around support from agencies in the city such as drugs and alcohol, health and mental health, DWP and support so people can engage in meaningful activity. The service has a dedicated mental health nurse who visits people in their own home.
- SCC has committed to 30 units and started moving people into the properties in November 2020. The effectiveness of this will be reviewed with a view to expanding the scheme with both council and other housing providers.

6. Winter Plan

- The Winter Plan is a scheme to offer people sleeping rough safe accommodation over the winter months. The plan was put in place in December 2020 and will continue up until March 2021.
- Funded by MCGLG and replaces the usual emergency cold weather provision that operates each year. It is not possible to use the usual provision due to its communal nature and the health risks associated with COVID19. It was also felt that as day centres are not able to operate in the same way it would not be

sufficient just to provide a bed for the night for short periods of time when the temperatures hit zero.

- The plan uses existing hotel accommodation and provides each person placed with a key worker, meals and basic essentials and multi-agency wrap around support. There are currently 34 people placed as part of this provision.

7. Exit Strategy and Next Steps

- All local partners agree that hotel type accommodation is not a suitable setting for longer term housing and there is also a significant risk that as the lockdown is eased, the providers will not wish to continue with these arrangements.
- We are working with the people placed in emergency accommodation, local partners and the MHCLG on the plans for move on and an exit strategy from emergency accommodation.
- We have established a new pathway for new rough sleepers to reduce the number of accommodation moves and ensure that everyone receives a bespoke offer of accommodation and appropriate support.
- We have established a multi-agency panel to agree the housing and wrap around support plan for each person. Options agreed include general needs social housing with support, supported housing and private tenancies with support.
- The Cell Group have committed to continue overseeing the existing emergency provision and the Exit Strategy and have all agreed that this is an opportunity to make transformative changes based on our learning that will positively improve the experience and outcomes for service users.
- We have an established Homelessness Prevention Strategy Steering Group, and Homelessness Prevention Forum to ensure that all partners are linked in and involved in Sheffield's strategic vision of early intervention and the prevention of homelessness. This delivers on the 6 strategic objectives of increasing prevention, supporting the most vulnerable, tackling rough sleeping,

improving health, improving housing options and accessing employment, education and training.

- The work is being co-ordinated alongside other transformative work including a review of Housing Related Support, work looking at how we accommodate and support people Severe and Multiple Disadvantage, the review of the Housing + model of housing management and establishment of more intensive support for our own tenants who have complex circumstances. This will ensure a coherent approach and the best use of resources.

8. Conclusion

People at risk of homelessness in Sheffield face extremely challenging circumstances. There are very strong partnership arrangements in place to respond to homelessness overall and rough sleeping specifically. However, there is a significant risk that the number of cases will increase as a consequence of the pandemic and services will find it difficult to improve prevention work and outcomes because of the pressures on resources. We are continuing to work closely with our partners to ensure we can continue to improve the outcomes for people in the City affected by homelessness.