



# Report to Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee

**Date:** 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020

**Title:** Update on the long term plan for rough sleepers.

**Relevant councillor(s):** Isobel Darby – Housing & Homelessness

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**Recommendations:** For the Select Committee to note the update of the long term plan for rough sleepers in the Buckinghamshire Council area.

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The long term plan for rough sleepers is working well at present, with only a small number of people currently sleeping rough in the County.
- 1.2 Officers are currently working with providers and partners to enable this small group to access accommodation for the winter period whilst longer term plans are enacted.
- 1.3 The Council recently received notification of grant funding awards totalling over £1.8m following proposals submitted by officers to continue to 'keep everyone in' and to enable those who have returned to rough sleeping to access accommodation in the short and long term.
- 1.4 These funding awards follow a successful funding award of £576,500 announced in January, resulting from officer proposals to enable the Council to continue its work in helping rough sleepers obtain accommodation and support.
- 1.5 We have provided accommodation to over 170 single people and couples since lock down and have had long periods where no one was sleeping rough in the County.
- 1.6 Further funding opportunities have recently been announced, including a repeat of previous years Cold Weather Fund, which officers will look to utilise.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 In August 2018, the Government published its national Rough Sleeping Strategy which sets out its vision to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it all together by 2027.
- 2.2 The legacy Councils have been working together, in partnership with a large number of agencies for a number of years with the aim of reducing incidences of rough sleeping and to eradicate the need for anyone to do so altogether.
- 2.3 As a result of this partnership working, various grants have been awarded by MHCLG for this purpose, including £576,000 announced in January 2020, with further awards under the Next Steps Accommodation Programme, totalling over £1.8m in October 2020.
- 2.4 The introduction of a national lockdown came with a directive to “get everyone in” which meant local authorities were required to accommodate anyone rough sleeping in their area.
- 2.5 This directive was met in March and will continue to be met until at least the end of March 2021 with over 170 persons accommodated in this period, many of whom have moved on successfully.

## **3. Long Term Plan for Rough Sleepers**

- 3.1 The long term aim of the Council’s housing service is to eliminate the need for anyone to have to sleep rough in the County as per the Government’s strategy.
- 3.2 The housing service has previously met this aim in large areas of the County pre and post the first lock down, with periods in which no one was sleeping rough. This is as a result of partnership working. Officers continue to work with partners to ensure no one is left outside during the current lockdown and during the winter period.
- 3.3 The housing service has successfully applied for a number of funding opportunities from MHCLG, with awards of £576,500 from the rough sleeper initiative (RSI3) and a further £1.8m from the next steps accommodation programme (NSAP) in this financial year alone.
- 3.4 These two funding streams provide an overview of the Council’s short and long term plans for rough sleepers.
- 3.5 The initiatives contained a number of actions and initiatives which are shown below.

### **RSI3**

- 3.6 RSI3 is the third year of funding from MHCLG, with awards made to the former districts in the two previous years. RSI3 includes an extension of a number of

initiatives that have been funded in RSI1 and RSI2, as well as others that have been ongoing since at least 2012.

3.7 RSI3 comprised of the following:

- 1) A Rough Sleeping Coordinator, one full time post – officer to help coordinate the rough sleeper projects across Buckinghamshire
- 2) Substance Misuse Outreach Workers - Continuation through partners, of an RSI funded post to provide substance misuse support to those sleeping rough, and/or in rough sleeper accommodation.
- 3) Mental Health Outreach Officers provided through partners, in the north and south of the County, continuing a RSI funded post in Aylesbury and creating a new post in south of county.
- 4) 19 Emergency beds across Bucks, increasing the previously funded 8 emergency beds for rough sleepers enabling outreach officers to offer placements to anyone found to be sleeping rough in a short time period.
- 5) Five full time supported lettings officers through Connection Support, (increased from 3 officers) to provide tenancy sustainment support to former rough sleepers to help them to manage, and sustain accommodation when placed.
- 6) One full time homeless prevention officer with Aylesbury Homeless Action Group (AHAG). This post is for homeless prevention and low intensive support in the Aylesbury area.
- 7) A small fund through Connection Support (£30,000) to provide personal budgets to rough sleepers/former rough sleepers to assist them when moving to, or attempting to move to accommodation. Examples include, mobile phones to access internet based services, rent in advance and personal items.

**NSAP**

3.8 The next steps accommodation programme (NSAP) award follows a successful bid for funding by the housing service for a number of initiatives outlined below:

Short term Funding- £485,000

- i) £400,438 for emergency accommodation for those sleeping rough (the application was for £504,000)
- ii) £60,037 to assist and prevent the cohort of EEA/EU nationals and those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), from returning to the streets.
- iii) £25,000 for the payment of rent deposits for former rough sleepers to assist them obtain private rented accommodation.

3.9 Work has commenced on assisting the EEA/EU and NRPF individuals, with accommodation continuing to be provided to the remainder.

- 3.10 Officers are continuing to work with this cohort, building on successes made so far, with at least 60 persons successfully 'moved on' to date. The aim is to continue to reduce the need for emergency accommodation by identifying a suitable option for each individual, in partnership with the voluntary sector.

Long Term Funding £1.3m Capital and £362,360 (all to be paid directly to our partner Registered Providers in these projects).

- 3.11 The two successful proposals are described below:

**Move on units**

- 3.12 The housing service, in partnership with Harrow Churches Housing Association (HCHA), successfully submitted a proposal to MHCLG for the purchase of 15 x one bedroom units for use as 'move on' from the supported housing units in the County. Seven of the units will be delivered in the Wycombe area, with 8 in the Aylesbury area.
- 3.13 HCHA have confirmed that they can acquire these units and will provide nomination rights to the Council in perpetuity, for a total grant of £1.3m (£650,000 agreed by, and from MHCLG, £650,000 match funded by Buckinghamshire Council). HCHA will provide up to a further £2.2m of their own funds to enable these acquisitions.
- 3.14 The model will provide the Council with the ability to nominate former rough sleepers from supported housing units in Buckinghamshire to these properties for assured short hold tenancies, for 2 years. This will enable a pathway from rough sleeping through supported housing eventually to fully independent living, so creating space in the supported housing units for new clients to access.
- 3.15 The units will be owned and managed by HCHA at no further cost to the Council in perpetuity. MHCLG have advised that, subject to contract, they are minded to approve this proposal.

**Ardenham House, Aylesbury.**

- 3.16 This is a block of 10 self-contained flats in a central location. The block is currently privately owned and has been offered to Hightown Housing Association for use as a high support needs unit. Hightown Housing Association will provide support to 9 high needs former rough sleepers in this unit. (One flat is to be used as an office space.)
- 3.17 The agreed proposal is for MHCLG to match fund with the Council, and for Hightown to make a freehold purchase of the building from the private owners. The proposal is based on a price that has been discussed between the owners and the Council's Estates team, although a final figure has yet to be confirmed". Subject to Cabinet approval, any funding will be require a formal funding, and a nomination agreement for nomination rights in perpetuity.

- 3.18 Hightown will provide supported housing for 9 former high needs rough sleepers in return for revenue grant funding from MHCLG for 4 years, totalling £362,360. There are therefore no direct revenue implications for the Council. MHCLG have advised that they are 'minded to' approve this scheme subject to contract.
- 3.19 The purpose of these two schemes, is to provide access to high needs supported housing in Aylesbury to cover a lack of current provision, as well as the provision of additional 'move on' units to enable the flow of rough sleepers to continue.

#### **4. Other Actions**

- 4.1 The Council is not relying on the NSAP and RS13 funding alone to assist and prevent the need for anyone to sleep rough in the County.
- 4.2 Each legacy Council had strategies and plans in place for single homeless people and rough sleepers, most in partnership across Bucks and with our wider partners.
- 4.3 Connection Support's Rough Sleeper Outreach Service; the Council has continued to fund a county wide assertive outreach service for rough sleepers, since at least 2012. This service includes access to emergency beds in order for the outreach workers to be able to offer accommodation to someone sleeping rough as quickly as possible, ideally on the same night as they have been assessed.
- 4.4 Forums; a forum of agencies and services working with homeless people and rough sleepers meet regularly across the County to review the Council's actions and strategies towards homelessness and rough sleeping as well as providing a solution based approach to any issues arising.
- 4.5 Informal Partnership working; this extends beyond formal meetings with regular discussions between all partners, including the coordinating of actions when needed, for example when the first lock down was introduced, all agencies pulled together, ensuring no one was left on the street.
- 4.6 Severe Weather Provision; for at least the past 10 years, the Council has provided an annual Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) service to ensure anyone sleeping rough is provided with accommodation when the threshold is met (forecast temperature below freezing for 3 consecutive nights).
- 4.7 Protocols; we have a number of protocols and partnerships in place with statutory agencies to prevent people having to sleep rough, having left remand, prison, or hospital as well as with social care for care leavers.
- 4.8 Partnerships; we work closely with Wycombe Homeless Connection, Aylesbury Housing Action Group, Wycombe Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme, Connection Support, One Recovery Bucks, Wycombe Women's Aid, Aylesbury Women's Aid, Thames Valley Probation, Thames Valley Police and numerous other agencies to ensure anyone sleeping rough is identified and provided with support.

4.9 Bucks Home Choice; we provide access to housing through Bucks Home Choice for any eligible persons including provision for verified rough sleepers.

**Summary**

4.10 The housing service has successfully managed to practically eliminate the need for anyone to sleep rough in the Buckinghamshire Council area, and will continue to maintain this success through the winter and beyond.

4.11 The service will continue to try and meet the needs of anyone who is currently rough sleeping in the area, and to work with partners to seek long term, sustainable options for those currently accommodated.

4.12 The successes achieved in the “everyone in” initiative would not been possible in isolation and is a testament to the excellent partnerships established across the County.

