

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIROMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	14 NOVEMBER 2018		
TITLE:	WINTER PROVISION FOR ROUGH SLEEPERS		
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SERVICE:	HOUSING NEEDS	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the ongoing provisions and new interventions under the Ministry for Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) Rough Sleeping Initiative for those sleeping rough in the Reading borough over the cold weather/winter period.
- 1.2 Reading Borough Council implements a humanitarian response under best practice guidance from Homeless Link during times of cold and severe weather nationally recognised as Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) provision. SWEP operates alongside newly commissioned Homelessness Support Services which operate all year round and new Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) interventions which have been commissioned following an award of £316,500 for 2018/19 from the MHCLG and a provisional award of £335,000 for 2019/20 under the same initiative.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 **Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee to note winter provisions for those people sleeping rough in the Reading borough.**

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Homeless Link and the MHCLG advise that every Local Authority should have a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) which is used when severe weather is forecast. They recommend that each area agrees a flexible process and humanitarian response for triggering and coordinating SWEP, based on empathy for people sleeping rough in severe weather, rather than sticking to a fixed approach. The protocol should be implemented (i.e. accommodation made available) on the first night of the forecast. Historically, the minimum SWEP response from Local Authorities was to open provision when there was a forecast of zero degrees, or below zero, for three consecutive nights. The three-night guideline was an attempt to define 'severe weather', but a

common sense approach is now widely adopted as standard practice, where SWEP triggers take into account weather warnings, near-freezing temperatures, rain, snow, wind chill, gales or heat. An adequate policy will ensure that your Local Authority can provide suitable accommodation quickly to prevent harm and death due to severe weather conditions, should the need arise.

3.2 In February 2017, Reading Borough Council began consultation with Members, partners and the public on recommissioning Homelessness Support Services for those who were rough sleeping, single/part of a couple and homeless and those households at risk of homelessness. From 1st September 2018, new services have been operational and include:

- A Rough Sleeper Outreach Service to engage with rough sleepers and support them into accommodation; as well as providing intensive support for Housing First clients¹
- Intensive and Engaging Support Services: Hub and accommodation; including emergency bed space provision and options for couples and dog owners
- Working Towards Independence accommodation: which includes 100 bed spaces within shared houses for those who require support attached to their housing before accessing independent rented accommodation
- A floating support service for tenancy sustainment, resettlement and homelessness prevention through early intervention

3.3 At the end of March 2018, MHCLG announced their plans under their Rough Sleeping Initiative and overall commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it by 2027. Their new package of measures included:

- a new Rough Sleeping Team made up of rough sleeping and homelessness experts, drawn from, and funded by government departments and agencies with specialist knowledge across a wide-range of areas from housing, mental health to addiction
- a £30 million fund for 2018/19 with further funding agreed for 2019/2020 targeted at local authorities with high numbers of people sleeping rough; the Rough Sleeping Team will work with these areas to support them to develop tailored local interventions to reduce the number of people sleeping on the streets
- £100,000 funding to support frontline Rough Sleeping workers across the country to make sure they have the right skills and knowledge to work with vulnerable rough sleepers.

Funds were awarded to successful local authorities at the end of June 2018. Reading was one of the successful local authorities. The local mobilisation period for interventions is intended to lead up to and have a significant impact on rough sleeping numbers by the MHCLG's mandatory autumn/winter annual Rough Sleeping Count/Estimate which takes place within all local authority areas between 1 October and 30 November each year.

¹ Housing First is an internationally evidence-based approach, which uses independent, stable housing as a platform to enable individuals with multiple and complex needs to begin recovery and move away from homelessness <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/principles-housing-first>

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position

4.1.1 Since 2010 Reading has operated a SWEP when temperatures fall to zero degrees or lower for three consecutive nights according to the Met Office weather forecast. In accordance with best practice and advice from Homeless Link, Reading uses its discretion regarding 'feels like' temperatures, extreme weather (snow, rain, wind) and co-ordinating services/responses during heat waves to mirror responses from Public Health England. SWEP responses are funded as part of commissioned Homelessness Support Services, alongside voluntary sector partners, where the 20 additional bed spaces are provided by The Salvation Army and food, bedding and other provisions are provided by donations from The Salvation Army and Launchpad Reading.

For the past two years, Reading has featured in Homeless Link's best practice case examples report regarding its flexible approach to access and for those with dogs <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/SWEP%20case%20studies%202018.pdf>

4.1.2 The Council recommissioned Homelessness Support Services from 1st September 2018 with a focus on innovative and emergency responses including: continuation of the rough sleeper outreach service; 10 all-year round emergency, fold-out beds for those with or without a local connection for up to 14 days; 8 emergency and assessment bed spaces for up to 28 days; and continued funding of five Housing First placements which provide an unconditional offer of secure tenure and intensive support for complex rough sleepers for whom traditional interventions have been unsuccessful in enabling them to move from the streets.

4.1.3 FAITH Christian Group also operates emergency winter provision on a seven churches model basis in Reading throughout January and February called Bed for the Night (B4N). With extra funding from the RSI Unit, this has been extended into March 2018 and funding has been awarded for an all-night supervisor for the three month period. Additional resourcing within the St Mungo's Rough Sleeping Outreach Service will ensure immediate engagement with verified rough sleepers throughout FAITH's operational period to explore housing options with them and prevent a return to rough sleeping. The additional support resourcing has enabled FAITH and St Mungo's to include enabling those without a local connection to access B4N for the first time

4.1.4 RSI funds from MHCLG of £316,500 were awarded to Reading for 2018/19 to implement new interventions to reduce rough sleeping numbers in the borough. Provisionally a further £335,000 has been awarded to extend these interventions for a further year for 2019/20. Additional interventions to support rough sleepers this winter are as follows:

- A Rough Sleeping Interventions Co-ordinator to facilitate the initiative/interventions and develop a Rough Sleeping Strategy for the borough that will be closely linked to Reading's Homelessness Strategy
- Additional posts within the Rough Sleeper Outreach Service team that will double the team's capacity and enable more flexible and assertive work patterns and a focus on reconnecting rough sleepers
- 10 immediately available bed spaces, regardless of local connection, under a Housing Led model; these will be offered to people who are rough sleeping for up to six months (where required) whilst suitable housing options are explored and facilitated. Intensive support will be offered alongside these placements to enable throughput and consistency of availability

- Extension of FAITH Christian Group’s Bed for the Night emergency bed spaces provision as detailed in section 4.1.3.
- A funding pot dedicated to reconnecting rough sleepers to their area or country of origin including costs of travel for existing and new rough sleepers and being able to offer deposits and rent in advance to up to 10 individuals
- Additional move-on worker roles, managed by Launchpad Reading, to work intensively with a small group of individuals who are finding their move-on options particularly limited or difficult to increase throughput across all Homelessness Support Services.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 These responses, commissioned services and interventions contribute to the strategic aim *“To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all”* by ensuring that appropriate services and support are made available for rough sleepers and vulnerable homeless adults.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 Partner, Service User and public consultation and engagement informed the recommissioning of the Council’s Homelessness Support Services.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Not applicable to this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The combined annual value of contracts for Homelessness Support Services commissioned by the Council is £1.25m. In addition, as detailed above, the Council has secured additional funding in 2018/19 (£316,500) and provisionally for 2019/20 (£335,000) through MHCLG’s Rough Sleeper Initiative programme. The latter funds are ring-fenced for specific, defined interventions agreed with the RSI Unit and are time limited.