

Cabinet Meeting

29 November 2017

Report title	Homelessness Reduction Bill and Rough Sleepers	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Peter Bilson Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing	
Corporate Plan priority	Place - Stronger Economy	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	(All Wards);	
Accountable Director	Lesley Roberts (Strategic Director: City Housing)	
Originating service	City Housing	
Accountable employee	Anthony Walker	Strategy Implementation and Monitoring Officer
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Report to be/has been considered by	Directorate Leadership Team	30 October 2017
	Strategic Executive Board	07 November 2017

Recommendation for decision:

The Cabinet Member Briefing - City Housing is recommended to:

Endorse the actions by which the City implements the Homeless Reduction Act.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on the Homelessness Reduction Act and the increase in homelessness, in particular rough sleeping, and how this will be addressed in Wolverhampton.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Nationally, homelessness is on the increase, across the last recorded quarter (March - June 2017) nearly 15,000 households were accepted as homeless in England, the highest number since 2008.
- 2.2 The total number of households living in temporary accommodation whilst awaiting placement in a settled home is measured on the last day of each quarter. On 30 June 2017, there were 68,560 households in temporary accommodation, 13% higher than at the same date in 2014.
- 2.3 The table below shows the main reasons for homelessness are:

Reason for homelessness	Percentage of all homelessness June 2017	Percentage of all homelessness June 2016
End of Assured Short-hold Tenancy	34%	44%
Family Unwilling to accommodate	27%	22%
Friends Unwilling to accommodate	19%	12%
Violence and Abuse	10%	6%
Other	10%	16%

- 2.4 The number of people sleeping rough in England has risen for the sixth year in a row, per the latest official figures.
- 2.5 An estimated 4,134 people bedded down outside in 2016, an increase of 16% on the previous year's figure of 3,569, and more than double the 2010 figure.
- 2.6 London accounted for 23% of the England total (960), down slightly from 26% in 2015, with the borough of Westminster (260 cases) recording the highest number of rough sleepers in both the capital and the country.
- 2.7 After Westminster, the highest incidences of rough sleeping were recorded in Brighton and Hove (144), Cornwall (99), Manchester (78), Luton (76), Bristol (74), Croydon (68), Redbridge (60), Bedford (59), Birmingham (55) with Wolverhampton low down the list with a figure of 18.

- 2.8 However, these numbers are widely disputed, homeless charity Crisis claim that 16,000 people could be sleeping on the streets by 2026 across England, Scotland and Wales, in comparison to their figures of 9,100 people in 2016.
- 2.9 The figures are often disputed due to the formula by which the data is collected, which is based on a pre- determined day and people being bedded down (not sofa surfing, lodging or squatting).
- 2.10 Therefore, the national picture is of an increase of unprecedented levels of homelessness.
- 2.11 Wolverhampton have also experienced a similar increase in all aspects of homelessness, however not at the same national level.
- 2.12 The table below compares Homelessness data across the last two years and shows an increase, however not at the same rate of some authorities.

	2015-2016	2016-2017
Homeless Presentations	2667	2851
Homeless Applications	1326	1700
Rough Sleeping	18	23

- 2.13 However, there is concern related to the increasing number of households being made homeless from the private sector rented.

Reason for homelessness	Percentage of all homelessness June 2017	Percentage of all homelessness June 2016
End of Assured Short-hold Tenancy	45%	30%
Family Unwilling to accommodate	20%	26%
Friends Unwilling to accommodate	17%	19%
Violence and Abuse	11%	9%
Other	7%	6%

- 2.14 The increase in people sleeping rough has also had a substantial impact on homelessness in the City.
- 2.15 Rough sleepers are defined for as "people sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters; people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats)" and are often small in number but are the most visible to the public.

- 2.16 Wolverhampton has up until recently had a small rough sleeper cohort (under eight people in 2014) who are assisted by several specialist organisations (P3 Navigator outreach, St Georges Hub day centre, Good Shepherd Ministry etc.). However, over the last 12 months the numbers of rough sleepers have slowly begun to increase to between 18 and 23 individuals.
- 2.17 Initial enquiries have highlighted the reasons for the increase are:
- An increase in people arriving from out of area due to the closure, reduction and exclusion from their local provision. six clients have arrived from surrounding areas due to this.
 - Exclusion from local services:
Three clients had been excluded from all local accommodation services due to serious violent and aggressive behaviour often related to drug and alcohol issues
 - People not willing to engage this is linked to addiction issues:
Eight of the clients have issues related to either drugs or alcohol or both, of which even with offers of accommodation they have refused to engage. The added addition of new drugs such as Spice and Mamba have added extra risk due to unknown nature of how the individuals react whilst under the influence and its toxic nature (three deaths have been recorded in Wolverhampton in the last six months)
 - A lack of access to public funding due to immigration status:
50% of all people sleeping rough in Wolverhampton have no access to public funds, overall 80% of all long term and continual rough sleepers have no access to public funds. These individuals are often Eastern / Central European, male, between 30-50 years of age, have basic levels of English language These individuals have arrived to access employment mainly labouring/ building work but had only located short term employment, had no access to benefits and therefore no ability to access accommodation.
- 2.18 Over the last 12 months' multi- agency counts, (Local Authority, Police, Drug services ASB team and Homeless Services) where rough sleepers are supported and offered accommodation, have been undertaken. This has not addressed the issue even though 15 people who were sleeping rough were accommodated. Unfortunately, the 15 individuals were then replaced by new rough sleepers.
- 2.19 The reasons for the unsuccessful nature of the counts have been people being unwilling to take up the options of accommodation and/or support available or individuals being unable to due to access services due to inability to claim benefits.
- 2.20 The increase in homelessness nationally and locally has now led to Central Government making amendments to legislation and a request that authorities work differently to prevent and reduce homelessness, with reference to those living in the private sector and single homeless people including rough sleepers.

3.0 Update

- 3.1 The Homeless Reduction Act is being introduced in April 2018 and will require authorities to provide earlier intervention to prevent homelessness.
- 3.2 The act will require councils to start assessing someone at risk of being made homeless 56 days before losing their home. Currently, the threat of homelessness is defined as starting 28 days before the person loses their home.
- 3.3 Authorities will be required to act on a valid notice that has been given to the person under Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 (orders for possession on expiry or termination of assured shorthold tenancy) in respect of the only accommodation the person has that is available for the person's occupation. This involves assisting anyone approaching for homelessness assistance who has been given legal notice by their private landlord earlier.
- 3.4 Authorities will have a duty to agree and assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a plan rather than process of a statutory homeless application.
- 3.5 The Government's aim via the Act is to reduce the amount of homelessness via an increase in homelessness prevention by making homelessness prevention a legal duty.
- 3.6 For Wolverhampton this could mean an estimated increase of over 500 cases each year at a potential cost of £750,000 (based on the average cost of an application being £1,500)
- 3.7 The grant received by the Local Authority to undertake this work will be £343,000 across three years, this will therefore require a remodel of services to assist with the increasing demand.

4.0 Service remodel recommendation

- 4.1 The remodel would include:
 - Work with Wolverhampton Homes in relation to the act and how they will deliver the statutory homeless service after the transfer.
 - Increase in early intervention work with households in housing need (tenancy support, outreach work and flexible prevention funds)
 - Use current grants to increase the amount of sustainable and suitable temporary accommodation.
 - Upskill and inform organisations to assist people at risk of homelessness
 - Work on the new monitoring data 46 questions as replacement for the current 12 question P1e

- Increase in private sector offers via Rent with Confidence.
- Reconfiguration of accommodation for homeless singles and families to include delivering a Housing First model
- Working with providers to increase the amount of emergency provision.
- Working with providers to increase in temporary accommodation for people with complex needs.

4.2 The implementation of the above will mean that we will be able to reduce the amount of presentations for homelessness thus reduce the need to take an expensive homeless application and increase homelessness prevention.

5.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 5.1 The only other option would be for the service to remain unchanged which would not be an option given the potential increase to expenditure highlighted in point 3.6.
- 5.2 The reconfiguration has also been a model that has had input from both the Leader of the Council at a local level and the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority Andy Street, who have developed task groups to address the increase in rough sleeping and homelessness.

6.0 Reason for decision

- 6.1 The Local Authority will have new legal duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act and therefore will be required to deliver services differently and to more residents.
- 6.2 The reconfiguration of what is currently provided as well as the introduction of new provision will offer an effective service to those who are already homeless and prevent homelessness for those at risk will allow us to meet this new duty.

7.0 Financial implications

- 7.1 The overall cost increase for the change in service delivery will be met from grant funding. The Homelessness prevention grant allocation for 2017-2018 is £169,000, with a further £120,000 carried forward from previous years. The new Homeless Reduction Act funding has been confirmed as £343,000 over three years.
- 7.2 The remodelling of the temporary accommodation that forms part of the council's housing stock will be provided for in the HRA Business Plan. Any increase in accommodation with external providers will need to be met from existing revenue budgets.
- [JM/02112017/B]

8.0 Legal implications

- 8.1 Increasing levels of homelessness combined with a reduction in social housing and temporary accommodation have led many local authorities to find ways of preventing homelessness and exploring housing options other than through the formal route of a homelessness application. Such practices have given rise to allegations of "gatekeeping" – that councils are denying households their statutory rights under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.
- 8.2 A local authority is duty bound to not use homelessness prevention as a way of gatekeeping the applicants right to a statutory homeless application under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.
- 8.3 To prevent allegations of gatekeeping, by using policy and process to prevent homeless applications being made, the Council should use the prevention services as a housing option and not the sole alternative.
[LW/03112017/A]

9.0 Equality implications

- 9.1 An equality impact assessment will be undertaken in relation to each element of the reconfiguration.

10.0 Human resources implications

- 10.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

11.0 Corporate Landlord implications

- 11.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

12.0 Schedule of background papers

- 12.1 There are no background papers.