

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM’S REPORT TO THE
ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE COMMITTEE**

Date 20TH June 2019

REPORT TITLE **Rough Sleeping in Newcastle under Lyme**
Submitted by: **Head of Housing, Regeneration and Assets – Joanne Halliday**

Portfolio: **Well Being and Community Safety**

Ward(s) affected: **All**

Purpose of the Report

Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny have asked for a report to their June meeting to review the situation with Rough Sleepers and our service provision. This report discusses the issue of Rough Sleeping in Newcastle and the provision available to support those people who are sleeping rough on the streets. It also acknowledges options available to assist and deter individuals begging in the Town Centre who are perceived to be Rough Sleepers.

Recommendations

For Scrutiny to note the contents of this report.
For Scrutiny to provide views and recommendations on the Council’s approach to working with Rough Sleepers and Beggars in the future.

Reasons

Addressing rough sleeping and begging in Newcastle is a priority for the borough and its partners. Although most people who become homeless will not sleep rough, it is the most visible form of homelessness. It is unsafe and has serious consequences on a person’s health and wellbeing. There are many reasons why people end up on the streets and these are often complicated and confounded by substance abuse, mental health and offending.

1. **Background - Rough Sleeping in Newcastle under Lyme**

- 1.1 The Borough Council is working with partners in the area to co-ordinate services to ensure that anyone on the streets or at risk of rough sleeping is able to access advice and support.
- 1.2 The level of rough sleeping in the Borough has always been relatively low, however over the past couple of years activities associated with rough sleeping has become more visible especially in the Town Centre.
- 1.3 Each year Local Authorities are required to submit either an annual estimate or count for a single night in November. The annual estimate for Newcastle-under-Lyme which is independently verified by Homeless Link found 4 people in November 2018. In 2017 the Council submitted an estimate of 5 rough sleepers following the same process.
- 1.4 In addition to the estimate, the Rough Sleeper Outreach Team collates data on verified rough sleepers in the Borough. Over the past year (between the 2nd April 2018 and 31st March 2019), the team have verified a total of 53 people sleeping rough in Newcastle-under-Lyme. Verification means the individual has been seen by outreach staff actually bedded

down on the streets. Please note the same person can be verified more than once if there has been a break in the rough sleeping or at a different location than previously.

- 1.5 Individual outreach sessions usually identify between 3 and 6 people but not all are willing to engage and those that are often known to services, having already been evicted from local accommodation services across North Staffordshire due to past behaviours. The individuals seen on outreach are not always the same people each time. Individuals do move around, not only between locations within the Borough but also there is quite a lot of movement of rough sleepers between us and our neighbouring authority areas, particularly Stoke-on-Trent.
- 1.6 In Newcastle, based upon outreach data, on average there are 4 male rough sleepers for each female found sleeping rough. The age of those sleeping rough usually falls into the following age categories 25-34, 35-44 and 45-54 with the 25-34 age group being the highest. An individual's ethnicity status is nearly always White British. Their economic status is usually described as long term sick or not job seeking. The types of disabilities recorded are mobility, progressive disabilities or chronic illness and mental health issues. Very few are ever in receipt of services from social care or secondary mental health services (none in the current year of monitoring quarters). It is also very rare that individuals who sleep rough in the borough are ex armed forces (again none recorded in the current year of monitoring quarters). Just over a quarter of those officially verified by the rough sleeper's team in the past year of monitoring are under a community rehabilitation company (13).
- 1.7 The outreach team receives referrals from members of the public who see people sleeping rough, from partner agencies or self-referrals when people approach the team directly for assistance. A Freephone number (0800 970 2304) is available along with the opportunity for people to report rough sleepers online via the Streetlink website (www.streetlink.org.uk).
- 1.8 Staff from the outreach team work closely with Newcastle Housing Advice (NHA) to identify and work with everyone found rough sleeping to help to support them into services. During the past year the Rough Sleepers Team successfully helped 14 new rough sleepers off the streets before they slept out for a second night. However there is a cohort of around 16 people who sleep rough on a regular basis either in Newcastle or Stoke in between staying with friends and stays in prison and hospital. These are identified as either returning or entrenched rough sleepers. The team continues to work with them to offer accommodation and support including recovery to address any substance misuse issues as well as access to health care and specialist services.

2. **Issues - Supporting and identifying rough sleepers in Newcastle**

- 2.1 A person sleeping rough or at risk of doing so can access a range of services in Newcastle. This includes advice, assistance and access to housing through our statutory services, as well as information and support from a range of services, alongside help with food and clothing from voluntary and charitable people and groups. People can also access advice, support and a meal at a weekly drop in held at the Salvation Army known as the Open Door project. The Open Door project has a number of partner agencies in attendance who can offer support and assistance to rough sleepers.
- 2.2 The Council has an emergency out of hours helpline number which anyone who is homeless and has nowhere else to stay can call. They will be assessed and offered advice and assistance, which may include temporary accommodation.

- 2.3 As discussed earlier in this report, the Council co-commissions a Rough Sleeper's Outreach Service with Stoke on Trent City Council and run by Brighter Futures. The service focuses on identifying rough sleepers and then supporting them off the streets into accommodation. Every week the team undertakes a number of early morning outreach sessions to identify, verify and support people sleeping rough. The Service Manager chairs a Rough Sleeper's Action Group every fortnight where individual rough sleepers are discussed and actions put in place for each person with an aim to getting them off the streets and into services. Members of this group include housing options services, accommodation providers. Health, Police, support services, drug and alcohol services and the voluntary and faith sector.
- 2.4 In addition to the commissioned outreach service, staff from The Lyme Trust, deliver two further morning outreach sessions around locations within the town centre. Information on individuals identified is shared between services.
- 2.5 Many people who sleep rough or at risk of sleeping rough have high and complex needs and are not engaged with other services. In addition to the Rough Sleepers Action Group, within Castle House (Police Station) there is a daily hub meeting. The hub discusses any people of concern where a single agency response is not going to work in order to develop solutions. In addition to the daily hub there is also a weekly hub, which deals with more complex cases or the cases that the daily hub is unable to resolve, to ensure that multi-agency solutions are in place.
- 2.6 There is a humanitarian obligation on all Local Authorities to prevent deaths on the streets caused by severe winter weather; this is known as Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP). The Borough Council's responsibilities towards those households who are owed a duty under the homeless legislation are not affected by severe weather. As part of the commissioned outreach service, the Outreach Team in partnership with Newcastle Housing Advice and other services operate SWEP. SWEP is activated when the Met Office weather forecast is forecast to drop to zero degrees or below for three consecutive nights. SWEP will be implemented on day one of the three day forecast. Once SWEP provision is in place anyone who finds themselves in a position where they have to sleep rough are placed in accommodation. This can include upright spaces in hostel communal areas and bed and breakfasts, often for the Council this means the accommodation is out of the area. The Rough Sleeper Outreach Team will also use the cold weather provision as an opportunity to try an engage with people who may have not been willing to engage before.
- 2.7 Rough sleeping is often associated with nuisance activities such as begging, street drinking and anti-social behaviour and Newcastle Town Centre has experienced levels of anti-social behaviour. As this report highlights, homelessness is a complex issue and entrenched homelessness presents particular difficulties; addictions and criminal and offending behaviour may be a symptom of homelessness as well as an underlying cause.
- 2.8 There are individuals in Newcastle who present themselves as Rough Sleepers when many in fact have accommodation and are in receipt of benefits. These individuals are using locations specifically to beg for money and food. Some members of the public feel intimidated and frightened when approached by beggars and this can have a negative impact on our local communities. There are a range of powers available to both the Council and the Police to tackle these activities. When outreach and engagement opportunities have either been exhausted or intelligence demonstrates that individuals are not legitimate rough sleepers, the Council working with the Police, are able to employ a range of interventions designed to address problematic behaviours which impacts on our community. These steps include (but are not limited to);
- Issuing section 35 dispersal notices to individuals causing issues for up to 48 hours.

- Issuing Community Protection Warning Notices (CPNWs) to persistent offenders and if breached applying for Community Behaviour Orders (CBO's) or Injunctions which stipulate a list of conditions enforced by the Courts.
- Implementing a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) which stipulates a range of conditions which if breached can result in on the spot Fixed Penalty Notices for persistent and/or aggressive begging.

2.9 The Council's Partnership Team leads on addressing nuisance behaviour within our Town Centre and work closely with a range of agencies who offer services to rough sleepers, in particular NHA, Brighter Futures and the Lyme Trust who operate outreach services in the Borough. This enable profiles of people to be developed, which identifies whether individuals are simply causing a nuisance or are vulnerable and in the town centre. This information is shared and assistance is given / referrals are made to those in need.

2.10 The team also lead on a number of town centre initiatives which aim to enhance and improve our town centre, whilst addressing and preventing episodes of Anti-Social Behaviour. These include:

- Leading the Partnership Town Centre Working Group to co-ordinate partners' operational activity in the town.
- Reviewing the existing CCTV provision to inform future commissioning and implementation. This includes seeking financial contributions from partners to enhance current provision.
- The introduction of PSPO's for the Town Centre and Queen Elizabeth Park which will address anti-social behaviour by using the Council's civil powers.
- Developing Business Information packs, which will be distributed personally by the team to encourage dialogue with local businesses and provide reassurance that the Council are taking the concerns of the business community seriously.
- Attendance and contribution to PABCIS and Pubwatch forums, which covers variety of topics including the Behave Or Be Banned' scheme and Store Net (radio) service.
- Assisting the Business Improvement District (BID) to co-ordinate the Purple Flag application for accreditation.
- Co-ordinating a variety of youth interventions and enforcement mechanisms within the Town Centre – for example the issuing of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, providing diversionary activities and identifying and monitoring youth hotspots (for example Vue and McDonalds).
- The creation and development of the 'Make it Count' scheme, which is an assisted / diverted giving scheme that enables members of the public to contribute to services that offer support in assisting individuals off the streets rather than giving cash directly to individuals who are begging. Collection boxes have been situated in several town centre businesses and also in public buildings such as Castle House, J2 Leisure Centre and the Guildhall. There are also plans to develop the scheme further by exploring contactless donation points and a mobile device application.

3. **National Rough Sleeping Strategy and Government Funding**

3.1 The Government is committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. On 15th August 2018 it published a new Rough Sleeping strategy which announced a range of cross-government initiatives. The strategy sets out the Government's vision to support every person who sleeps rough, off the streets and into a home. The 2027 vision is to Prevent, Intervene and Recover; this vision is supported by £100 million of funding over the next two years.

3.2 The Council had the opportunity to apply for one of the above funding pots known as Rough Sleeper Initiative funding (RSI). Based upon the bid criteria and the current gaps in provision the Council's proposal consisted of two elements:

- A Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator
- Emergency Accommodation Units

3.3 Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator.

Within the bid criteria was the opportunity to apply for funding which would enhance the co-ordination of rough sleeping. This role would be based within the Local Authority and essentially have the strategic overview for rough sleeping.

We envisaged that the role would have a wider remit and work with all who have an interest in rough sleeping, ranging from council staff & members, partners who already provide services that support rough sleepers and also to develop working relationships, develop initiatives, promote services and reach out to all areas of our communities. The responsibility of the role would be to ensure rough sleeping issues are understood more widely and to work with all areas to collectively deliver a joined up approach on the rough sleeping aims within the Council's Homelessness Strategy. This role would also be the future lead on any rough sleeping funding opportunities, business cases and to also work with the MHCLG to share best practice and provide monitoring.

3.4 Emergency Accommodation Units.

The bid prospectus encouraged Local Authorities to establish a businesscase for funding in areas where there was little or no current provision. In Newcastle, we currently have no emergency accommodation available in the Borough specifically designed for Rough Sleepers. Therefore the second element to our bid was to request funding to enable us to develop a scheme with a Provider who would be willing to lease a four bed or cluster units across the Newcastle area. The units would offer short term in reach accommodation offering rough sleepers support after leaving the streets. Once accommodated and in receipt of that support, we anticipated that it would increase the options and access for Rough Sleepers to move on to longer term suitable accommodation across Newcastle and Stoke whilst reducing the risk of the individual returning to the streets.

3.5 Total amount of funding applied for £200,500.

3.6 Outcome of the bid.

On the 22nd of March, the Council was informed it had been partially successful with their proposal and has been allocated £45,000 to cover the costs of the Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator post for 19/20. This funding is expected to be paid to the Council by the end of May 2019.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The recruitment process has commenced for the Co-ordinator role.
- 4.2 **Emergency Provision.**
Despite being unsuccessful with our recent bid, Officers are keen to explore alternative options and potential models of meeting the current need for temporary emergency accommodation which will be suitable for Rough Sleepers with our partner agencies. The objective being to support Rough Sleepers off the streets into short term accommodation with support which will enable individuals' access increased move on options to longer term housing solutions with ongoing but decreasing floating tenancy support.
- 4.3 **Make it Count Scheme.**
Whilst the foundations have been developed for the Make it Count scheme, Officers wish to enhance the scheme further and are currently looking at best practice models which will provide information, raise awareness and encourage responsible giving amongst members of the public.
- 4.4 Partnership activity continues with enforcement action when all offers of support and assistance have been exhausted. For example if any of the conditions associated with the PSPO's are breached further action will be taken in the form of FPN's and possible referral to courts.
5. **Outcomes Linked to Corporate Priorities**
- 5.1 Providing support to Rough Sleepers supports all the Council's corporate priorities:
- Local services that work for local people
 - Growing our people and places
 - A healthy, active and safe borough
 - A Town Centre for all
6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**
- 6.1 Local Authorities' duties towards homeless people are contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). Local Authorities have a duty to secure permanent accommodation for unintentionally homeless people in priority need. Thus the safety net operated by local authorities does not extend to securing accommodation for homeless people who are deemed not to be in priority need.
- 6.2 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) introduced additional duties which apply to all eligible applicants irrespective of whether they fall into a priority need category. Authorities now have:
- A duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness;
- and
- A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants.
- 6.3 Housing Authorities have a duty to provide or secure the provision of advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, free of charge.
7. **Equality Impact Assessment**
- 7.1 N/A.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 There are no financial implications arising as a direct result of this report.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1 Homelessness is a complex issue with a range of different agencies involved in supporting rough sleepers. Although there are services available to support rough sleepers and invoke change, individuals need to be in a position in their lives where they are willing to engage and work with those services.

10. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

10.1 None.

11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 The National Rough Sleeping Strategy has made the commitment that all Local Authorities update their Homelessness Strategies and rebadge them as homelessness and rough sleeping strategies by winter 2019.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 None.

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 None.

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 The National Rough Sleeping Strategy.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf