

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**UPDATE FROM CABINET TO
HEALTH, WELLBEING & PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Submitted by: Cabinet

Portfolios: All

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To provide a response to the Scrutiny Committee on items previously raised by Committee Members at the last meeting on 14th September 2020.

Recommendation

That the response from Cabinet be received and noted.

1. **Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Temporary Accommodation update**

The Committee asked for an update on how the services are managing post lockdown, the current position, managing during the winter months and in sub-zero temperatures.

Response from Cabinet:

- General homelessness updates

The Council have established internal Working Group to manage the transition of the Newcastle Housing Advice (NHA) service back in house from the incumbent provider Midland Heart and TUPE of 9 staff.

Council has recruited a Housing and Partnerships Policy Officer to pick up the work from the vacant Housing strategy post – highlighting emphasis on Partnership working to assist the Council in meeting statutory requirements for homelessness.

The Newcastle Housing Advice (NHA) service have recruited a Rough Sleepers Navigator position, to engage directly with and case manage, those rough sleeping and with complex needs to ensure that they are supported into treatment services and pathways to accommodation. This role commenced in May 2020 and works closely with the Rough Sleepers Team at Brighter Futures, who are commissioned jointly by the Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

- Newcastle Housing Advice (NHA) and demand for service

NHA have experienced high levels of increased demand to the service during the period of the pandemic, in particular during quarter 2. Comparisons between this year figures and last years can be seen below

NHA Demand snapshot	Q1 20/21	Q1 19/20	Q2 20/21	Q2 - 19/20
Telephone calls to service received	3789	4551	6017	4575
Total on Housing Register / Waiting List	1372	1280	1413	1310
Emergency homeless presentations	87	61	110	63
Emergency out of hours calls	41	14	26	21
Emails received to administrator inbox	688	804	1127	791
Emails received to NHA inbox	1866	793	1908	809
All appointments attended	240	295	368	252
Navigator visits made	29	N/A*	50	N/A*
Total in TA as at end of the period	16	N/A*	15	N/A*

* not monitored during 2019/20

Of note:

- There are no face-to-face appointments currently available / operational due to COVID – appointments are undertaken by telephone.
- Increase in telephone calls (linked to above)
- Considerable increase in emergency presentations and out of hours calls.
- The emergency presentations are more complex by nature adding to the workload of the service.
- Rough Sleeping

The Rough Sleepers Team, delivered by Brighter Futures and commissioned by the Council with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, advise that they are continuing to operate as normal, whilst using social distancing good practice and have full capacity. There has been an increase in demand for the service across North Staffordshire but it is unclear how much this has increased specifically in Newcastle because of the transient nature of the cohort.

Annual Estimate Rough Sleeping figures

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Figures	1	4	1	4	3	7	0	5	4	6	9

The annual rough sleeping figures for Newcastle-under-Lyme have always been below 10. However, in the last couple of years we have seen an increase in these figures. There are varying factors why our figures have increased in the last year. Recruiting a Rough Sleeping Co-ordinator in 2019 and a Rough Sleeping Navigator in 2020 has meant more robust and accurate data is gathered and shared. Developing good links and partnership working with varying agencies has meant more accurate information sharing and more effective service delivery to those in need. Local Charity Open Door are also delivering outreach weekly in the town.

Monthly Rough Sleeping Figures

2019

Month	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Figures	9	5	2	6	8	6	11	4	7	4	1	8

2020

Month	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Figures	3	8	2	1	1	5	7	13	4	TBC	TBC	TBC

Challenges of the COVID pandemic have been a general lack of housing options for homeless households, limited face-to-face services, many services / partners working with skeleton staff, closure of B&Bs and hotels. A reduced tolerance from some providers has meant that there are more evictions and less temporary and supported accommodation options for high risk and complex need individuals. These are also indicative of some of the factors that are believed to be contributing to the increase of rough sleepers in the Borough.

- Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

In Newcastle-under-Lyme, the SWEP has been developed with partners at Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Brighter Futures, who deliver the Council's Rough Sleeper Team (RST) service as an emergency response for people sleeping rough and to encourage engagement with support services. It is for those who would genuinely be sleeping rough were the SWEP provision not in place.

SWEP is instigated from the 1st November to 31st March when the temperature is forecast to drop to zero degrees (or below) on a single night. It can also be triggered by severe weather such as wind, rain and snow. The RST and Housing and partnerships Policy Officer at NBC will be monitoring weather forecasts to determine when SWEP will be active.

In previous years, the SWEP provision has been made available in local Bed and Breakfasts and as upright spaces in Hostels. However, due to the COVID pandemic many Bed and Breakfasts have closed and Hostels have been restricted in their capacity of emergency accommodation because of the social distancing requirements.

To ensure that an emergency provision is available over this winter period, the Council have identified a former office building that can be brought into use for this purpose at short notice on Merrial Street, as and when required. The property has no immediate neighbours and is located in a non-residential part of town. It is ideally located for the cohort to access, being in the town centre and local businesses have been consulted via the BID Board and confirmed that they are supportive.

A local charity partner Open Door, will ensure that an 'on call' team of specialist support staff and volunteers is available to respond to the instigation of SWEP at short notice, including the management and supervision of occupants at the unit. The SWEP provision comprises of up to 3 bed spaces and these will be accessible between the hours of 6pm – 10am.

This provision will only be used in an emergency and as a last resort if all other temporary accommodation options are full and have been exhausted. Obviously while the weather can't be reliably predicted for the coming months, the figures in the table below, highlight the use of the previous SWEP provision last year and give an indication of how often it may be used over the coming months;

Date - 2019	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Nights active	2	3	3	8	0	16

- Temporary Accommodation

A Temporary Accommodation (TA) Policy report is being shared with the Scrutiny Committee this evening for discussion with Officers.

Temporary accommodation numbers remain fairly static with approximately 16 households in TA at any one time. The TA used in the Borough is a mixture between Bed and Breakfast and a range of temporary accommodation units.

Officers have secured funding from MHCLG, which will be used towards the costs of a supported temporary emergency accommodation 7 bed unit for complex needs cases. Further funding has been allocated to contribute to the cold weather provision (inc SWEP as outlined above) over the coming months.

Additional temporary accommodation initiatives are being explored by Officers, with partners at the County Council and with local housing providers, which will seek to attract external funding to support the initial set up and development costs in order to provide alternative housing options for our most vulnerable and complex customers.

2. **Domestic Abuse services update**

The Committee asked for an update on services post lockdown, strategies to reduce Domestic Abuse, a review of the new service, measure to promote sources of help and support and the impact and support for young people affected by Domestic Abuse.

Response from Cabinet:

Staffordshire Police advise that the expected increased demand in relation to reporting of domestic abuse has not materialised. However, partners are expecting an increase to come through over the coming months as during the lockdown, vulnerable victims have not had access to safe spaces to make the necessary referrals and reports.

The weekly Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), at the time of writing had five cases heard at the meeting this week and although there had been a considerable peak the week previous, the numbers have otherwise remained fairly consistent. Whilst the number of cases have remained fairly consistent, we have seen a rise in more complex cases with greater risk. We have also seen an increase of abuse from adult children to parent and in repeat cases.

New Era, the County domestic abuse service commissioned by Staffordshire Commissioner's Office, advise that there has been an increase in demand for their service. The service is operating with a full complement of staff and are making preparations for potential increase in provision. They are offering telephone support, there has been no face-to-face support since the pandemic and staff are WFH. They report that there have been some front line barriers experienced with complications with accessing legal aid as self-isolation reduces the options to provide proof of identity.

GLOW, the provider of the Newcastle Children and Young Persons (CYP) service, who also own and manage the Elizabeth House Refuge, report that referrals are increased to all elements of their services. The Refuge staffing is stable and as at the time of writing it is full. They are offering predominantly telephone based support but visits will be undertaken if necessary and safe to do so.

Schools are continuing to refer children and young people to the Glow CYP service, which is commissioned by the Borough Council on behalf of the Newcastle Partnership. The Glow CYP service have continued to provide face to face support to those children and young people who need it and are risk assessing and complying with COVID guidelines to ensure this service can still be offered.

Through the first lockdown they delivered letterbox packs for all the CYP they were supporting with resources to increase their coping skills whilst they were learning from home and not attending school and therefore at greater risk. The team have targeted schools and teachers to look for

hidden victims of domestic abuse following pupils return to school. They are now providing a specific mobile number for CYP and they are promoting this via 'Teen Takeover' so that CYP have a safe avenue to communicate with Glow. Due to lockdown we have seen an increase in the number of children witnessing domestic abuse at home.

Officers are working closely with colleagues at NHA to monitor the situation closely and are working with partners to cost an additional emergency bed space for families fleeing domestic abuse out of hours via the homelessness service.

Officers have prepared and shared information around available domestic abuse services for dissemination to staff and the wider public, which has been shared by our Communications Team. Domestic Abuse campaign materials are being disseminated during Domestic Abuse week (w/c 23rd November). Staffordshire Commissioner's Office have launched a County wide domestic abuse communications programme, which Officers have been sharing alongside the more local campaigning.

3. **Work Undertaken to ensure Town Centre Visitors feel safe with the Reopening Post Lockdown**

The Committee asked for an update on work undertaken to ensure town centre visitors feel safe with reopening Town Centres post lockdown.

Response from Cabinet

In Newcastle and Kidsgrove town centres, the social distancing signage has been updated in line with the Government's 'Hands, Face, Space' message and social distancing street markers both around the market area and outside of key premises have been renewed.

A number of Council staff have voluntarily taken on the role of either Street Marshals or Business Marshals / Business Information Officers. The Street Marshals have been on site in Newcastle town centre monitoring social distancing and the size of groups in the town centre, politely reminding people of the 'rule of 6'.

For Business Marshals / Business Information Officers, their role is to visit premises that are open and provide guidance to businesses where there could be a potential breach of the Covid Secure law / guidelines and also to provide information and guidance on questions raised during the visit. Prior to second Lockdown, good progress had been made in visiting premises in Newcastle and Kidsgrove town centres and premises in smaller neighbourhood centres were starting to take place. During Lockdown 2 visits have been maintained to those premises that are able to continue trading.

Hand sanitising stations at key locations including the bus station have been maintained to ensure supplies of hand sanitiser are available to those that wish to use them.

The public toilets in both town centres have remained open with increased cleaning frequency. A small number of specialist markets were held on Sundays with social distancing measures in place including a one-way system around the market, hand sanitiser stations at the entry to the market and event marshals to ensure social distancing was maintained.

The Council's communication team has continued with social media messaging around Government guidelines and town centre messages as appropriate.

