

Subject:	Next steps - Rough Sleeping and Accommodation during Covid 19 Pandemic and Recovery		
Date of Meeting:	20th January 2021		
Report of:	Executive Director of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

1.1 Housing Committee (18th November 2020) and then Policy and Resources Committee (3rd December 2020) considered a detailed report on the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP). This report is to provide a short update in key areas and highlight any issues arising including action to prevent homelessness and reduce overall numbers in emergency accommodation up to 31st of March 2021.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That Housing Committee note the progress to date.

2.2 That Housing Committee note the continued role of the Homeless Reduction Board in monitoring progress on meeting the conditions of NSAP funding and next steps.

2.3 That Housing Committee agrees that for the Covid 2 “risk of rough sleeping group” that the Homeless Reduction Board should monitor the maximisation of prevention by all means; identifying resources needed to achieve faster move on; and maximising recovery of Housing Benefit (as outlined in para 7.3)

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The previous NSAP Report considered at Housing Committee on 18th November set out in detail the specifics relating to the amount of grant awarded and the conditions associated with that grant. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have been clear that the grant funding is ringfenced to meet the needs of people accommodated as at 30th September 2020 and for those who are subsequently verified as rough sleepers as set out in the report to Housing Committee on 18th November 2020. For ease we have termed this project Covid 1.

3.2 As a reminder the NSAP bid proposal included funding for:

- Ensuring current provision to safeguard rough sleepers and those assessed as at risk of rough sleeping can continue for an appropriate length of time;
- Reconnection where safe to do so;
- Expand Homeless Prevention and Resolution Officers (Brighton & Hove City Council);
- Expanding Housing First coupled with expanded Home Purchase Policy.
- Expand provision of supported move on accommodation and increasing Private Sector Leasing via partners to provide additional supported accommodation;
- Expanding use of private rented sector accommodation;
- Provision of specialist resource to work to secure the settled status of individuals who are EEA nationals without settled status;
- Access to Employment;
- Return Home reconciliation work with young people where this is a safe option.

As reported in November, the Council received the largest single allocation of NSAP funding nationally, however not all the required work was funded. Whilst this funding was significant it amounted to 70% of the needs identified, leaving the council short of resources. We are working to overachieve on benefit recovery to help address this shortfall.

Policy and Resources Committee on 3rd December 2020 agreed to the continuation of the accommodation offer for those people assessed as at risk of rough sleeping who present after 30th September 2020 until 31st March 2021. To distinguish between the projects relating to the group who were assisted before 30th September (Covid 1) and those after that date which are funded separately, we have termed this project Covid 2.

In the 3 months to 31st December taking Covid 1 and Covid 2 together approximately 186 people have moved on but approximately 178 (23 verified rough sleepers and 155 assessed as at risk of rough sleeping) have moved in. Over the next 3 months there will be a continued focus on work to improve homelessness prevention through early intervention and engagement.

3.3 The Housing Committee's Homelessness Reduction Board meets regularly and oversees this work. There are several work streams under development and being delivered as follows:

- Identify the move on requirements of those people accommodated as at 30th September 2020 and timelines to achieve 40% move on by 31st December 2020.
- Supply of accommodation to enable 40% to move on before 31st December 2020 and then remainder to move on for 31st March 2021. Move on will also need to be identified for rough sleepers accommodated after 30th September 2020.
- Commissioning strategy to move away from congregate accommodation for rough sleepers.
- Monitor and identify the resources and support the actions needed to ensure that more people are prevented from becoming homeless.

The move on requirements and timelines for achieving the 40% move on by 31 December 2020 has been achieved. As at 28th December 2020 we had moved on 186 people which equates to just over 50% and so has exceeded the 40% target. This means that we will receive the 30% of grant funding that was conditional on this being achieved. Full details of the various moves are contained in the weekly data spreadsheet (as at week commencing 21st December 2020) contained in Appendix 1.

The highlights are as follows:

Under Covid 1 we were accommodating 369 as at 30th September and as at 28th December we had 225 people. 186 people had moved on although there were also some moves in of 23 verified rough sleepers.

- 39 moves to private rented accommodation
- 22 moves to supported housing
- 5 moves to The Circle (Somewhere Safe to Stay) and
- 3 moves to Safehaven, which is intensive managed accommodation
- 9 people have been reconnected with friends or family
- 14 have made their own accommodation arrangements.
- 10 have been referred to areas they had a local connection
- 44 have moved without us knowing and we are trying to contact them to establish their housing outcome

3.6 We are continuing to identify supply to enable the remaining 50% of Covid 1 to move on before 31st March 2021 as follows:

Private rented accommodation

- We are working with landlords and agents to obtain enough supply. Intensive support for the first three months of the tenancy is offered to both landlord and tenant to ensure the accommodation is sustained. Thereafter support is provided if risks arise with the tenancy to resolve them at the earliest opportunity.
- We have also piloted using Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and have worked with a landlord to accept a carefully chosen group of people, providing sustainment support. We have a second HMO with partner YMCA Downlink which will provide low support for young people. We will continue to explore this option and the support required to sustain this type of accommodation for vulnerable people who have not lived in a successful house share previously. As this is a fairly specialist area, we are investigating procuring an accommodation and management service that is experienced in acquiring and managing such accommodation for this client group.

Housing First

- Home Purchase Policy is expanded to purchase an additional 30 properties to be used as Housing first. As at 29th December 2020 we have a pipeline of purchases in place as follows: 5 completed purchases currently under refurbishment/repair to be ready for letting; 23 properties have offers accepted and are progressing towards completion; 3 are under offer and awaiting acceptance by the owners; 1 is under assessment for viable purchase.

Supported accommodation

- We are obtaining an average of 3 units a week. We are assisting those who are ready to move on from supported accommodation to facilitate this pathway. As at 28th December 2020 we have enabled 13 people to move from supported accommodation into private rented accommodation which has freed up spaces for people to move into.
- Clarion/St Mungos 20 units of supported accommodation which was part of the NSAP grant is coming online and the first 8 people will move in on 11th January 2021 with the remaining 12 moving in by 25th January 2021,

Referrals and Reconnections

We have achieved a total of 10 reconnections and referrals. There are challenges with this as we must ensure there is suitable accommodation for the person to be referred into and the receiving local authority require evidence that the person has a local connection with them. This can be difficult to prove and if people do not want to be reconnected, they will be reluctant to co-operate with us in providing the information necessary.

- Safe reconnections for verified rough sleepers without a local connection to Brighton and Hove are achieved through St Mungo's Street Outreach team. Our single service offer provides supported reconnection to the home area who can then provide accommodation and ongoing support. As at 28th December 6 people have been reconnected.
 - In addition, there are statutory referrals for those where a formal decision is needed. This is a legal transfer of the accommodation duty to the home authority who will then be responsible for providing accommodation and making appropriate arrangements. With a considerable number of people dispersed and accommodated during the pandemic, there are a lot of formal referrals being made to authorities under considerable pressure. This leads to some delays and challenges to local connection criteria. We are having discussions with our advisors at MHCLG and are developing protocols with neighbouring authorities with respect to these cases. As at 28th December 2020, 4 people have been referred through the statutory route.
- 3.7 With regard to continuing to provide accommodation to those assessed as at risk of rough sleeping (which we have termed Covid 2), between 30th September and 28th December 2020, we have accommodated 155 people. The priority is to move on those under Covid 1 because of the link to NSAP grant funding which has time limiting conditions attached. We will focus resources on moving people accommodated under Covid 2 following that, in addition to looking at how best to move on those placed out of area and those who need supported accommodation.
- 3.8 As part of the move on planning, Housing Committee agreed on 18th November to instigate a single offer, which had to be suitable for the individual. If this offer is rejected, the short-term accommodation is longer available. We have safeguards

in place by ensuring there is a review process for when people do not agree with the suitability of the accommodation offered and that they are aware they can request a review. Following rejection of a suitable offer and ending short-term accommodation we will continue to engage with the person to find a solution for their housing situation, but no further short-term accommodation will be made available.

- 3.9 To meet the challenging timescales we have set targets and adopted a whole service approach which will become more essential going forward and moving on those in Covid 2. As part of this, we have identified a specific team (NSAP team) consisting of Homeless Prevention Officers to work jointly with partners in St Mungos.

Working closely with other services to achieve private rented accommodation through our "Direct Lets" scheme this approach will join up referral and statutory decision making processes and enabling people to move on to identified private rented properties; supported housing or to other accommodation solutions to meet the individual's assessed housing needs.

The team has been able to develop a streamline but legally compliant approach to the statutory requirements of this work and this has included the enforcement of offers as indicated under the single offer approach. As at 18th November the team has issued enforcement notices alongside all offers but has acted on only two. To our knowledge, in neither case did the people return to rough sleeping.

- 3.10 Officers have worked very hard to reach our end of December target early and this is a significant achievement we must also acknowledge the considerable work ahead of us. Moving people on the scale necessary puts a pressure on resources both in terms of the accommodation needed initially and to move people into but also for the staffing to support such moves.

There are 225 people accommodated under the NSAP funding in short term accommodation as at 28th December 2020 (Covid 1) and we are aiming to complete the move on for most of these people by 31 March 2021. This will be challenging as the remaining group include a greater proportion of people with multiple and complex needs and proportionately less who are able to manage general needs accommodation. In addition, we are still seeing new people being verified as rough sleepers who are being added to this group which totals 23 as of the 28th December 2020.

- 3.10.1 We are expanding the Housing First model to meet the needs for some of these people through our Home Purchase scheme, which will deliver 30 units of accommodation by 31st March 2021. However, there will be additional people who also require more intensive help and support and we are collaborating with partners in making offers of accommodation; enabling moves and in supporting the sustainment of accommodation offered.

- 3.10.2 To assist with the move away from congregate accommodation, we successfully bid for grant for Cold Weather Funding, which enables 12 units of accommodation to be available to verified rough sleepers from 21st December to 31st March 2021. The accommodation we have secured will also consider accepting dogs on a case by case basis which otherwise presents a barrier to

people coming into accommodation. This will relieve pressure for when the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) must operate.

3.10.3 In addition we successfully bid for “Protect” funding jointly with Health partners. We are addressing barriers to mobilisation at present and are hopeful we will shortly be able to mobilise;

- A Preventing Admissions Worker to be based at A&E to work with rough sleeping people
- A 5 bed unit Step Down from hospital service to enable patients who are ready to be discharged but are of no fixed abode and require clinical support to be safely discharged
- An expanded peripatetic Protect team to offer clinical support to medically vulnerable people in emergency accommodation and supported accommodation

3.11 Future planning will continue to emphasise the prevention of homelessness through early intervention. The current pause in evictions from private rented accommodation; the expectation that landlords will engage with tenants having difficulty paying rent and the 6-month notice period for ending private rented tenancies provides more opportunity for prevention work to have successful outcomes.

3.12 Taking our statutory “business as usual” temporary accommodation placements in addition to people we have accommodated under NSAP and Covid 2, our numbers in emergency accommodation has increased significantly from approximately 500 to 800, of which approximately 300 are out of the city due to lack of capacity in the city. This presents many challenges for both the people placed as they are away from support networks and familiar areas, but also for staff and services to provide support.

While our outreach teams including Welfare Officers and some of our Homeless Persons Officers have been going out to see people in their emergency short-term accommodation, this has only been possible where it has been assessed as safe to do so. There have been challenges where there has not been a safe space within a building to facilitate this. Returning to a safe office environment for face to face contact with customers will be a major step forward in creating a new normal and assessing which ways of working to incorporate going forwards to build on changes he had to rapidly adopt that will improve the customer experience. However, we need to prioritise the health and safety of staff and service users so cannot commit to a timetable for this although this will be kept under review.

SWEP – Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

Although not part of Next Steps Accommodation Programme, there have been implications for how SWEP is delivered following Covid 19.

The trigger for us to open SWEP is the same this year as it has been for the previous two years: a predicated “feels like” temperature of 0 degrees Celsius or

below or an Amber Weather warning. We also always open across the Christmas period regardless of weather.

Due to the current pandemic and advice from Public Health England, local Public Health colleagues and the MHCLG SWEP could not be delivered as it has been in previous years. We are unable to use congregate sleep space arrangements or offer open access to a single hub.

Instead we have acquired 14 units of self-contained accommodation to meet the needs of people who would otherwise rough sleep. Referrals are made by the Street Outreach Service who are carrying out outreach shifts 7 days a week including bank holidays and over the full Christmas period. We do not turn people away and if the 14 units are full, colleagues in Housing Options and St Mungo's No Second Night Out Service work together to ensure that everyone in need is offered safe accommodation during periods of severe weather.

Anyone seen rough sleeping by a member of the public can be referred to the SOS team via Streetlink or can be supported to access housing by calling the Housing Options duty line (available 24 hours 7 days a week including Bank Holidays).

Information on how to support people to access SWEP has been shared in local media, via social media and is on our website. All organisations working with homeless people have had this information shared with them through the VCS and Operational Forums.

This winter so far as at 8th January 2021, we have been open on 21 separate occasions including being open every day from the 24 December 2020 to date (8 January 2021). We offer hot meals, snacks, drinks and support.

We have provided 173 units of accommodation with an average of 8 people each night we have been open. We are ensuring that where someone will accept engagement, we have a clear onward accommodation offer in place and nobody needs to return to rough sleeping.

This Christmas all attendees were offered a hot Christmas meal, Christmas snacks, unlimited hot drinks and breakfast and lunch. There was a Christmas tree, and everyone was provided with gifts.

4 ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

none

5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

5.1 None at this time but we will be seeking feedback from customer, partners and providers next year as part of a review of the service going forwards.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 We have met the challenging target of moving on 40% of those accommodated under the NSAP provision necessary to secure the withheld 30% of the awarded grant.
- 6.2 We are focusing on the remaining 50% to move on by the end of March 2021. While we are reducing the amount of people in this cohort placed into the short term accommodation acquired under Covid 19, we are making a high level of placements following the decision at Policy and Resources Committee to continue to provide accommodation to those assessed as at risk of rough sleeping.
- 6.3 As well as achieving move on for those under the NSAP programme we will need increasingly to focus resources on moving on those we are continuing to accommodate following the decision at Policy and Resources Committee on 3rd December.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 Housing General Fund Temporary Accommodation (TA) Budgets are forecast to overspend by £2.873m for 2020/21. This is net of the NSAP grant award. The overspend is largely caused by more people accessing TA and includes the costs of hotels used for the 'everyone in' initiative.
- 7.2 Currently, the vacancies being made by those housed in hotels for 'everyone in' (COVID 1) are then being replaced by new homeless people – those at risk of rough sleeping (COVID 2) or by other statutory homeless people. Therefore, it is likely that some of these hotels will be needed longer term into 2021/22. For example, Appendix 1 shows that by 28th December, 186 people had moved on but it also shows further down the table that 178 had moved in.
- 7.3 Additional service pressures are likely for 2021/22 as the numbers in TA are unlikely to reduce to pre-covid levels by then. It is therefore imperative to reduce costs by enhancing homelessness prevention work, maximising Housing Benefit income where applicable and ensuring that stays in TA are minimised by moving clients to more sustainable accommodation that suits their needs and engaging early on with covid 2 people who have been housed in temporary accommodation
- 7.4 Extra staffing resources will be required in the short term to enable this required reduction. These costs and the extra accommodation costs will need to be reflected in the budget setting report to Budget P&R and Budget Council in February.
- 7.5 As the 40% move on requirement by 31 December has been met, the council will not have to hand back 30% of the NSAP grant which equated to £1.029m.

Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks

Date: 22/12/20

Legal Implications:

7.6 As this is a for note report there are no legal implications.

Lawyer Consulted: Simon Court Date: 22nd December 2020

Equalities Implications:

7.7 An equalities impact assessment has been carried out

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

Weekly data report

