

**NOTICE OF MOTION****GREEN GROUP****HOMELESSNESS AND THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC****Notion of Motion**

On 29 April 2020 a notice of motion was presented at Housing Committee which stated the following:

“Subject to available funding that Committee:

- declares its intention to consider how to provide appropriate move-on accommodation and support for all rough sleepers currently housed and supported in hotels/other accommodation in time to avoid them returning to rough-sleeping.
- requests a report to its June meeting setting out needs assessments and an action plan, costings + timetable to provide suitable move-on accommodation and support that would avoid a return to the streets; such report also to consider how the current unconditional offer of accommodation to rough sleepers can continue once the hotel/other accommodation provided during the coronavirus outbreak is no longer available.
- declares its commitment to explore ways of continuing the unconditional offer of shelter currently being offered to rough sleepers during the crisis.

Committee requests that the Chief Executive write to Robert Jenrick (MHCLG) urging the Government to provide the additional resources needed to ensure that the needs of those currently temporarily housed in hotels/other accommodation can be adequately met (once their needs for accommodation and support have been established) following the removal of the current restrictions associated with the pandemic.”

**Executive Summary Response**

The Council is intending to provide appropriate move on support and accommodation for all rough sleepers currently accommodated. However, we currently do not have sufficient resources to meet all of the needs, and therefore have requested additional support from Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) if we are to avoid people returning to the streets.

The initial focus of work was to procure all the accommodation and enable people to be moved in within a very short timeframe. In total we acquired 379 rooms in various hotels, guest houses and the Youth Hostel Association (YHA). Those contracts are subject to 7 days' notice, and some of the hotels indicated they would return to commercial use as soon as restrictions were lifted. To offset the risk of losing accommodation at short notice, we subsequently acquired 222 units of student accommodation from the University of Brighton which will be available until September along with the YHA and two of the hotels.

We are now starting to plan the recovery for how those people move on from this short term accommodation. This involves assessing all people accommodated in terms of their needs and developing Personal Housing Plans. There are several plans being developed into an overarching plan which are broadly:

- Assessment of around 400 people currently accommodated
- Move on requirements
- Supply of accommodation
- Commissioning strategy to move away from congregate accommodation.

This is a good opportunity to work with all people who were sleeping rough or about to sleep rough and to develop an alternative model going forwards taking into account the impact of Covid-19 for accommodation with shared facilities.

It is likely that most people will broadly require one of the following types of accommodation to move on to:

- Reconnection where safe to do so
- Housing First
- Supported accommodation
- Private rented accommodation
- Social housing.

We are working in partnership with St Mungo's, Arch Healthcare and Public Health to assess and support people accommodated. So far 200 people have been assessed from which we will develop Personal Housing Plans. Of the assessments undertaken:

- 34% are extremely clinically vulnerable or have significant underlying health needs which mean they will require self-contained accommodation.
- 67% have support needs which will require some form of support when they are placed in accommodation.

- At our last estimate around 21 individuals being supported have No Recourse to Public Funds meaning that their options for move on accommodation are extremely limited or non-existent.

The actions undertaken to date in response to the Pandemic and our response to Government around proposed next steps are set out in the remainder of the document. We propose to keep members updated on progress through the member led Homelessness Reduction Board (subject to approval of Homeless & Rough Sleeper Strategy recommendations) and future reports to Housing Committee.

## 1. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION

1.1 Providing accommodation for all rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping was challenging and made possible only because hotels were no longer able to continue with regular business. It was therefore possible within a short space of time to procure 379 units of accommodation in 12 hotels and guest houses. The funding Government made available contributed to this and also provided for the support that was essential to persuade hotels to provide accommodation e.g. on site 24/7 security; cleaning to prevent infection; provision of food. Community support was also co—ordinated to provide goods for entertainment (e.g. kindles, books and jigsaws) to try and keep people in the accommodation; and regular check- in was provided by St Mungo's.

1.2 Following advice of Health and MHLCG, rough sleepers who had been verified i.e. those who had been seen bedding down by St Mungo's, and those who were in congregate accommodation e.g. Somewhere Safe to Stay where accommodation was dormitory style which did not enable social distancing, were triaged into one of the following groups and placed into accommodation accordingly:

- Symptomatic
- Not symptomatic but at high risk of Covid-19
- Not symptomatic but low risk of Covid-19

(This is referred to as the Care and Protect model).

Other people who have become homeless and were at risk of sleeping rough, but have not yet been rough sleeping, have been placed into hotel accommodation outside the triage model.

1.3 The increase in Housing Benefit level has been very helpful and has enabled our charity partner, Umbrella, to access private rented sector tenancies during this period to meet the needs of former rough sleepers.

1.4 Efforts have initially been focused on getting rough sleepers triaged and into accommodation. We are now planning to undertake move-on plans for each individual.

1.5 While the action of getting all rough sleepers accommodated has been effective, there are both risks and opportunities. As we have used hotel accommodation, as soon as the restrictions are eased, the owners will want to return to commercial business and only have to provide the council with 7 days' notice to end the contract.

1.6 To mitigate this risk we have procured student accommodation which will be available until September. In having all rough sleepers off the street, we have an opportunity to gain greater insight into the real reason they became homeless and facilitate better targeting of prevention work going forwards. It will also enable us to engage with people differently whilst they are in accommodation and build trust with them in order to plan a move away from the street on a scale which we have not been able to do before. We are also able to

develop more robust and joined up working between St Mungo's outreach service and Housing Options to determine where we do have statutory housing duties and where we don't so as to develop a clear offer and personal housing plan. Finally, it will enable us to robustly reconnect people to areas they have come from where it is safe to do so using the statutory framework where possible. We are developing an overall plan to manage the assessments of an additional 400 people. We can then identify the cohorts of solutions eg being reconnected, being ready to move to private rented accommodation, or requiring supported accommodation. We are working with the MHCLG to identify where additional resources are required from central government to enable successful move on of all people accommodated under Covid-19.

- 1.7 In the event we are not able to move all existing and potentially new rough sleepers into more settled housing solutions by September, we will review remaining numbers and consider further accommodation to meet this shortfall until they can be assisted to move on.
- 1.8 In terms of the impact on private rented sector (PRS), the delay in evictions has proved effective in limiting the demands for temporary accommodation. The restrictions have meant that flow out of temporary accommodation is very difficult, and so the limited inflow from the PRS has had a positive impact. While it enables a longer period within which to try and resolve issues so that accommodation could be sustained, in reality this has proved difficult due to restrictions in staff being able to engage with people in person and build a positive relationship in line with a psychologically informed approach. The slowdown in the churn of private rented accommodation also has a negative impact in that fewer properties have been available to prevent homelessness and enable people to move on.

## **2. MOVE ON OPTIONS**

- 2.1 In order to anticipate the demand for accommodating the 400 individuals placed so far, our assessment and planning (Personal Housing Plans) for move on will be carried out with partners, St Mungo's. We anticipate the following general cohorts within the overall population so far assisted which will consist of those offered assistance:-
  - through rapid reconnection, under relief duties, to areas where people have a local connection – where it is safe to do so;
  - to return to previous accommodation (this may require support, mediation, conflict resolutions etc);
  - by providing self-contained accommodation (single flats, bedsits, studios);
  - by providing accommodation in shared housing or houses in multiple occupation (HMOs);
  - by providing accommodation in supported housing as part of the council and its partner's supported housing offer to persons with medium to high needs;
  - by providing accommodation within the Housing First model for those with very high needs;
  - by supporting those otherwise able to find accommodation for themselves;
  - using the statutory provisions refer housing duties to another local authority, where there is no local connection to Brighton & Hove and it is safe to do so;
  - by seeking solutions for those without recourse to public funds (ineligible for assistance).
- 2.2 We are exploring the use of HMOs and what support would be needed for tenants and landlords. This would be limited in application for the current group unless we had additional funding to offer on-site support or the expansion of existing sustainment

support within the Housing Options team. However there are opportunities arising from potential changes to the student accommodation market such that we could acquire HMOs for clients new to the street and with lower support needs, and to enhance the community-based support that has been developed in the City.

- 2.3 Increased access to self-contained private rented sector accommodation would enable us to move low need people on from supported housing, and provide additional resource for those in need of support. One barrier is Housing Benefit levels and it would be helpful if the Government could consider maintaining the current increase. We need to be able to create a flow through the supported housing pathway which is currently silted up because of these barriers to the PRS. We have managed to enable some people to move into private rented sector, which has been a challenge during lockdown, and we are identifying the resources needed to build on the relationships we have with local private landlords to enable more people to move into private accommodation.
- 2.4 Related to 2.3, at present, many single people under 35 are entitled to the shared room rate of Local Housing Allowance (LHA). This severely restricts access to the private rented sector and is a barrier for many homeless individuals in securing accommodation. There are exemptions to this shared room rate. A meaningful recommendation to government would be a temporary extension of these exemptions to include all persons accommodated during the Covid-19 provisions, and to run for 12 months after the ending of these provisions. This would provide a 12 month opportunity to assist these people and restrict the additional pressure on government budgets to that time period.
- 2.5 To enable accommodation to meet the needs of those most vulnerable and hardest to place, additional support is required from government to further expand the Housing First model. Resources are required for both revenue to enable support and capital to expand the supply of accommodation. We have already identified some revenue funding to support additional Housing First accommodation, and are exploring how further homes could be procured and where additional capital funding from MHCLG is required.
- 2.6 Brighton & Hove City Council has accommodated around 400 (and rising) individuals. The resources to undertake support, to assess, access support, produce move on planning and find accommodation is considerable if we are to avoid these people returning to rough sleeping. We have also seen people who had substance misuse issues struggle to acquire substances during lock down and this presents a unique opportunity to build on the work and help people to detox. Additional resources would need to be forthcoming from MHCLG to enable this scale of work to be continued. Some of this may involve a review and realignment of existing support provision, in light of what we are learning, to develop some creative solutions which might cost more but would generate better outcomes.
- 2.7 However, Brighton & Hove currently has no access to residential rehab (the rehab service we access has closed its doors due to the pandemic) for clients who now wish to engage in treatment. This is a concern, as clients who have never before engaged with treatment are currently engaging, and lack of access to rehab is inhibiting their progression.
- 2.8 Access to mental health services, Adult Social Care support and primary care is working well at present but support offers are limited as most workers are working remotely. Packages of care are not readily available due to shortages of staff in home care provision. The level of multiple and compound need in this client group is profound and this is presenting as a risk for sustainment and an increased cost pressure as additional support staffing has been put into hotel accommodation to meet these needs.

- 2.9 Brighton & Hove is a destination of choice for many people in a wide variety of circumstances such as escaping violence, domestic abuse, drug and social problems as well as being a famous resort and cultural centre which many people move to, to seek work and who arrive without accommodation planned. We have a lot of people, therefore, with no local connection, and following the relaxing of restrictions there will be significant demand for relocating/ referring households back to areas where they do have a connection and where it is safe to do so . Additional funding for further workers to meet the initial increase in demand would be required and has been raised with MHCLG in addition to strengthening legislation around response times for cases referred to local authorities.
- 2.10 A national review is needed of the enforcement powers available to local authorities and police requiring people to cooperate with a statutory referral to another local authority – where accommodation and support can be guaranteed as a result. The infringement on choice, or on principles of liberty, could be ameliorated through a requirement on the receiving authority to demonstrate a plan for moving the referred individual to an area of choice that will be sustainable and not lead to homelessness in that area.
- 2.11 The Chancellor has made provision for people who have been furloughed or unable to work during the restrictions. However, both in social housing and temporary accommodation we have seen rent arrears increasing dramatically and that will impact on overall council income required to fund new housing development and/or to minimise impact on the general fund. It is likely that arrears in private rented accommodation have also increased. While a lot of work is underway to try and enable people to claim benefit where possible, further help is needed to assist those people.
- 2.12 We are hearing increasing numbers of problems in the private rented sector relating to both landlords and tenants affected by income reduction caused by Covid-19, and some failure to pay rent. Relief is in place via the provisions laid out by the Chancellor but this will not mitigate all problems. The measures to prevent evictions are very welcome but we are concerned about the impact on private sector tenants as we come out of Covid-19 lockdown and these restrictions are relaxed. The concern is that large numbers of families and households of all types will become at risk of homelessness because of simultaneous possession action taken by landlords and their agents. This will impact on the courts and could lead to a large influx of households needing accommodation right at the time local authorities are trying to deal with the accommodation needs of large numbers of rough sleepers. We have requested that MHCLG give consideration to the planning of the removal of restrictions on evictions.
- 2.13 This is a unique opportunity to impact on rough sleeping and to use this period to understand what prevention measures would be successful going forwards. This represents a powerful moment to work together with partners to find solutions.
- 2.14 Covid-19 can enable a realignment of social and cultural values. Its impact presents an opportunity to challenge the street culture of begging, exploitation, modern slavery and enforced begging, drug use – to eliminate this within the meaning of governmental target and to challenge the normalisation of rough sleeping that we have seen in recent years.

### **3. FINANCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 The costs of placing people in “Care and Protect” accommodation and other hotels, and providing food and support to all of Brighton & Hove’s rough sleepers and people formerly in congregate accommodation is estimated to be £3.901m to early September (379 accommodation units across 12 hotels and guest houses). There is a small amount of funding (up to £0.066m for Brighton & Hove) available in the form of the original Covid-19 Contingency Funding announced by MHCLG in March to meet the immediate needs of rough sleepers needing to self-isolate. The council has also so far received £16.205m in emergency response funding from the Government. This funding is to cover all services of the council not just housing. A recent report to Special P&R Committee suggests that this will be insufficient to meet all of the extra costs, and income shortfalls across the authority with an estimated funding gap of £51.6m for the year 2020/21. Further announcements have been made by Robert Jenrick, the Minister for Housing Communities and Local Government on homelessness and rough sleeping, and the council has recently requested more resources for this purpose from the MHCLG and is waiting to hear the results of this.

Officer: Monica Brooks                      date: 05/06/20

#### **4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 In order to avoid legal challenge, the council will need to ensure that the future allocation of accommodation is compatible with its Allocation and Homelessness duties under the Housing Act 1996.

Officer: Liz Woodley                      Date: 08/06/2020

#### **5. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF PARLIAMENTARY SUBMISSION - Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's inquiry, Impact of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) on homelessness and the private rented sector.**

Response to the crisis and government provisions

Comment on PRS eviction provisions

Concerns and recommendations for the ending of Covid-19 provisions including:

- exploration of HMO type accommodation as a solution for some rough sleepers
- recommendations regarding barriers to accessing the PRS
- recommendation relating to exemptions to under 35 LHA rates to assist access to PRS
- expansion of Housing First
- concerns relating to closure of rehabilitation/detox, and recognition of complex needs and related support from primary care and mental health services
- resourcing for “local connection” provisions
- recommendation for review of enforcement of local connection provisions
- concerns about impact on rental income for the council
- concerns and recommendations for planning removal of eviction provisions
- concerns and recommendations relating to the opportunity the current Covid-19 provisions have inadvertently presented for dealing with rough sleeping
- Comment on realignment of social and cultural values resulting from current crisis with respect to challenging the societal normalisation of rough sleeping in our communities over recent years.

