

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel

**DATE:** 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020

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**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I**

#### **FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION**

#### **ROUGH SLEEPER WORKSHOP**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

The Governments “All in” Covid19 request to Local Authorities (Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020) saw SBC place rough sleepers into hotels, guest houses and other accommodation. In addition to satisfying the need to get this group off of the streets, this has enabled our Outreach Team to get close access to these individuals to assist with addressing health care issues and to encourage / facilitate their return to a “mainstream” way of life. This report sets out our proposed strategy to get as many individuals as possible from this cohort into long term accommodation rather than seeing them have to return to rough sleeping.

##### **2. Recommendations**

The Panel is requested to consider and endorse the following Lead Members and Directors recommendations before they go to Cabinet:-

- a) Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs)/ licences be obtained from private sector landlords for each consenting individual currently in “All In” rough sleeper accommodation where practicable
- b) Serena Hall and the Mallards (or similar/alternatives) be adapted to provide interim day and night accommodation for British Rough Sleepers while we get them ready to be able to be placed in an AST
- c) A number of Council voids be made habitable (rather than lettable) to house European Nationals currently unable to demonstrate their right to public funds (NRPF – No recourse to public funds) and
- d) A Support Worker be funded by the Council to work, together with Voluntary Sector colleagues, to assist NRPF individuals in getting together the documents needed for them to demonstrate their right to public funds, which, once obtained allows us to assist them into ASTs and also into work so that they can become self sufficient.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

3a. **Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

Every reduction in the number of rough sleepers brings health benefits and opportunities to those individuals

1. *Increasing life expectancy by focusing on inequalities*
2. *Improving mental health and wellbeing*
3. *Housing*

3b. **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Every reduction in the number of rough sleepers brings health benefits and opportunities to those individuals

- *Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs*
- *Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay*
- *Our residents will live in good quality homes*

4. **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

All extra money to provide “interim homeless accommodation” and homeless schemes is unbudgeted and will draw on any Covid19 funding received from the Government and then the Councils reserves.

(b) Risk Management

Recommendation from section 2 above	Risks/Threats/ Opportunities	Current Controls	Using the Risk Management Matrix Score the risk	Future Controls
Assured Short-term Tenancies (ASTs) be obtained from private sector landlords for each consenting individual currently in “All In” rough sleeper accommodation where practicable.	Obtaining sufficient properties	Confirmed funding to pay for ASTs	2	Current accommodation may have to remain in place
Serena Hall and the Mallards be adapted to provide interim day and night accommodation	Permission to use in this way from Facilities	Need to negotiate with Facilities to use these buildings in this way	12	Long term agreement

for British Rough Sleepers while we get them ready to be able to be placed in an AST				
A number of Council voids be made habitable (rather than lettable) to house European Nationals currently unable to demonstrate their right to public funds (NRPF – No recourse to public funds).	Identify suitable properties	Properties are Housing assets	2	Properties remain in Housing ownership
A Support Worker be funded by the Council to work, together with Voluntary Sector colleagues, to assist NRPF individuals in getting together the documents needed for them to demonstrate their right to public funds, which, once obtained allows us to assist them into ASTs and also into work so that they can become self sufficient	Identify funding	Business case	6	Government funding

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

*There are no human right implications arising from this report.*

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

An equality impact assessment is not necessary for this report.

(e) Workforce

We wish to employ an additional Support Worker for a period of 6 months to join our Outreach Team

5. **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 On Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the government issued a request to English local authorities to house all single homeless vulnerable people and rough sleepers within 48 hours. This has required that we find and pay for “interim homeless accommodation” for a group of people who under business as usual we would not previously have provided for.
- 5.2 This was a clear departure from homeless legislation which states that in order to be a priority for housing, five tests have to be satisfied:-
- Is the applicant homeless?
    - They have no accommodation that is available and reasonable to occupy
    - They cannot enter it
  - Is the applicant eligible for assistance?
    - Those ineligible are:
      - Asylum seekers
      - People who are leaving the country
      - People who have returned after living a long period abroad
      - Those with ‘no recourse to public funds’
  - Is the applicant in ‘Priority Need’ – examples are
    - Women who are pregnant
    - People with dependent children
    - People between 18 and 20 who have spent time in care
    - Those who are vulnerable
  - Intentionality
    - Whether they have deliberately engaged in activity, which has made them homeless
  - Local Connection
    - Whether they have lived in the borough 6 out of the past 12 months, 3 out of the last 5 years or have family or work in the borough
- 5.3 Rough sleepers and the single homeless described in the government’s request, generally will not pass these 5 tests and therefore would not usually be provided with housing by a local authority. They can be broadly categorised as:-

- (A) **British rough sleepers** – often these have once been tenants and have been evicted through deliberate acts, deeming them intentionally homeless;
- (B) **Single homeless people** - will generally have no priority need, some will be rough sleepers others would normally be “sofa surfers” and
- (C') **Rough sleepers with No Recourse to Public Funds** – these are EU Nationals who have not exercised their treaty rights and as a consequence can not access benefits. Although local authorities have the power to pay to house these people, in practice, where these people are supported, it tends to be by the voluntary sector.
- 5.4 Additional funding is available to local authorities to deal with costs resulting from Government intervention to control the spread of Covid19. In the case of rough sleepers and single homeless:-
- The Government direction to local authorities of 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020 required that effort be made to accommodate all rough sleepers and single homeless people
- 5.5 It follows that our Covid19 response is incurring additional new costs for our business as usual cohort as well as new costs for our new cohort.
- 5.6 We secured 40 rooms at the Manor Hotel, Datchet on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The initial period of 2 months has been extended until the end of June. We also secured a further 39 rooms across the borough in a variety of rooms/studios, so a capacity of 79 in total. At the time of writing we have 60 people in “interim homeless accommodation” of which:-
- 36 are “A” or “B” (British Rough Sleepers / Sofa Surfers)
  - 24 are “C” (No Recourse to Public Funds - mostly Polish)
- 5.7 The Government have yet to advise when the new Covid19 interim arrangements for homeless people will stop or be amended. Until this happens then we need to make appropriate provisions for them.
- 5.8 Rough sleepers are a complex cohort who for a variety of reasons, often including an element of choosing not to accept support, find themselves without a place to live.
- 5.9 There is an opportunity to positively use the new relationships, which we have developed with this “captive” cohort to bring about better future outcomes for them rather than simply turning them back out onto the street once the government reverts to the pre-covid housing legislation.
- 5.10 Under business as usual, SBC has a team of Grant Funded Outreach Workers who work directly with homeless people to support them while they are rough sleeping and also to try to assist / persuade them into emergency

accommodation and then onto more permanent accommodation and a return to a more “mainstream life”. The voluntary sector also work to do this and our Outreach Team liaise closely with a number of local voluntary groups. A number of rough sleepers do all that they can to not engage preferring to continue with their lifestyles.

5.11 Where a rough sleeper is an EU national with No Recourse to Public Funds (‘C’) then we are prevented by law (housing legislation) from receiving housing benefit to fund their accommodation. We have the power to use our own money to help such cases but this has previously been considered to be low priority. The current requirement to provide interim accommodation for this group provides us with the opportunity to work closely with individuals in this group to get them off the streets permanently. To do this we have two main options:-

- Get them to a position where they can claim benefits in this Country – exercise their treaty rights and gain paperwork allowing them to work in this Country and claim benefits
- Persuade, facilitate and pay for them to return to their Country of origin

5.12 A number of voluntary organisations work with this cohort to persuade them and enable them to exercise their treaty rights. However, this involves them being accommodated for a period of time and working with them for 3 to 6 months to complete paperwork / provide evidence etc. Once they have treaty rights then they can get to a position where they can get employment and pay their own way.

5.13 In order to create a stable environment to work with individuals to get them qualified for treaty rights we could use a number of Council void properties which are uneconomic to repair to our Tenant Lettable Standard (over £100k of repairs to bring them to a lettable standard for a Council Tenant) but are of otherwise adequate standard to live in with a few minor repairs. These properties could be provided to the Voluntary sector at a peppercorn rent. The voluntary sector would manage the properties and the people housed in the properties in order to work effectively with them to get them qualified for treaty rights. The Council could also run the scheme but the voluntary sector are more organised to deliver this type of work.

5.14 Once an individual has treaty rights then Officers will continue to support them by helping them find work (including farms requiring ‘Pickers’) and private sector accommodation which the individual will then pay for and be self sufficient.

5.15 The scheme is still being worked up but will cost the Council money that it does not currently spend. The scheme will only be suitable for those who are ready to engage and who possibly at some point will return to their home country. Many want to stay hidden, earn cash in hand and carry on with their lifestyles. Many do not want to return to their home countries because, if they have fallen on hard times and cannot support their families back home, this reflects poorly on them. At the moment we feel that we have 12 cases that we are able to support. This would need three uneconomical to repair void properties to be made available.

5.16 Where British Rough Sleepers / Sofa Surfers ('A' or 'B') will cooperate with us, then we are able to support them into private sector accommodation often using Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs). We have already managed to do this with a number of individuals. To continue this work we need to retain this cohort in "interim homeless accommodation" including somewhere to stay during the day while we get them into the right mind set to adopt a more mainstream lifestyle and while we identify and set up accommodation on their behalf. Options include:-

- Use of Serena Hall: The upstairs could be turned into a dormitory for approximately 8 people and the downstairs could be used as a day time area
- The Mallards: This could be used to house 11 people

5.17 Where Sofa Surfers ('B') are unable to persuade friends to allow them to sleep on their sofa or are unable to return to their families then they will become British Rough Sleepers ('A')

## 6. **Comments of Other Committees**

Subject to Cabinet approval it has been suggested at LMDs that £100k of CIF revenue and £30k of CIF capital be used to bring about better long term outcomes for rough sleepers.

## 7. **Conclusion**

7.1 To use funding for the "All in" provision of interim homeless accommodation for rough sleepers, wherever we can, to fund activity and accommodation schemes which will result in homeless people becoming self sufficient rather than returning to rough sleeping once "Covid lock down" is lifted. Schemes to include:-

- (A) British Rough Sleepers - step up efforts to engage with this group and move them into the private sector through deposits/incentive payments to landlords and through assistance in claiming benefits. Move them into Serena Hall, Mallards or similar as a first step
- (B) Single Homeless (non-priority) people will be moved into the private sector through deposits/incentive payments to landlords and through assistance in claiming benefits. Move them into Serena Hall, Mallards or similar as a first step where they can not be persuaded to return to friends or family
- (C) No Recourse to Public Fund cases will be encouraged / helped to exercise their Treaty rights in order that they can claim benefits and be assisted into private sector housing. This to secure 2 or more Council voids which are fit for habitation but are uneconomic to return to Tenant Lettable Standard, to be managed by the voluntary sector in return for a peppercorn rent and used as stable accommodation for approximately 12 people while they are supported to gain Treaty status and the associated paper work

## 8. **Background Papers**

None