

**MEETING:** Stockport Health and Wellbeing Board

**DATE:** 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**REPORT OF:** Strategic Housing Lead – Place

**REPORT TITLE:** Health and Wellbeing of our Residents and addressing inequalities: Homelessness

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## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 The effect of the Covid Crisis upon homeless people has been of significant concern at a local, Greater Manchester (GM) and national level. Its ramifications are also likely to be felt for a long time to come when its' social and economic impacts are fully realised.

## **2.0 Local Response**

2.1 When the nature and scale of the situation became clear in March, the initial focus was upon minimising infection risk within the Borough's temporary accommodation schemes and seeking to place as many rough sleepers as possible.

2.2 This was followed by a national requirement for local authorities to make an offer of accommodation to all street homeless people wherever possible, accompanied by funding to lease hotels in Manchester to increase the supply of emergency placements.

2.3 Within Stockport, the homelessness and housing options service, together with the Council's three temporary accommodation schemes, are operated by Stockport Homes Group (the Council's Arms Length Management Organisation) on behalf of the Council. Unlike many other local authorities, Stockport has retained and upgraded/maintained its own temporary accommodation and has not, therefore, needed to use private bed & breakfast accommodation for homeless individuals/families. The small number of emergency shared rooms within these temporary accommodation schemes were immediately closed, with additional short-term flats taken on (from the existing 'general let' Council housing) within the Borough to increase capacity. Social distancing measures were put in place with communal areas closed, regular deep cleans arranged and microwaves and meal provision organised to limit social engagement.

2.4 Where people had significant health issues, self-contained accommodation was arranged, and numerous efforts made to reinforce the standard advice such as handwashing and not mixing with other residents.

- 2.5 Stockport Homes Group (SHG) arranged for staff to help provide support and manage the four hotels procured by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), which provided over 300 additional bed spaces. A range of health interventions in the hotels were also put in place through GM, from dealing with substance misuse issues to mental health and psychological services.
- 2.6 Funding for these hotels ceases at the end of June, and the key issue now is to ensure there is alternative accommodation available for all those still in placements.
- 2.7 In Stockport, the temporary accommodation was expanded as previously described to increase supply within the Borough. In addition the majority of newly void general let properties have been offered to homeless people to increase the rate of move-on from temporary accommodation. As a result of these actions, officers have been gradually moving those placed by Stockport in the GM hotels back into accommodation within the borough, and have reduced the number from a high of 9 to 3 individuals at the time of writing. It is anticipated that these last 3 people will be accommodated within Stockport by the middle of June.
- 2.8 The Stockport based homelessness charity, the Wellspring, has been working closely with the Council and Stockport Homes to support the work to accommodate the rough sleepers. As a result of Covid, they have however had to change their model and no longer offer the full range of help and support from within their facility in the town centre, and have focussed on an expanded food parcel provision, whilst still providing hot food on a 'take away basis' for the small number of individuals that remain rough sleeping despite all the offers of support and accommodation.

### **3.0 Next Steps**

- 3.1 There have been some very positive outcomes from the Manchester placements, including one person who had been rough sleeping for almost a year before agreeing to engage, who has significantly reduced his drug and alcohol use and is now in a self-contained flat.
- 3.2 Efforts have been made to ensure that any support needs identified while at the hotels continue to be met while back in the Borough, for example one resident who has engaged well with psychological interventions.
- 3.3 Outreach work to engage with rough sleepers within the Borough continues, with current numbers estimated to be around 8-10. The Housing First programme will be restarting shortly for 2020/21, and a number of these

individuals will be referred, as they have been street homeless for some time and other accommodation options have not proved sustainable. Housing First offers direct housing into a tenancy with very intensive support, but does still require some commitment to work with available services.

- 3.4 Agreement has been reached with Greater Manchester Combined Authority in relation to funding phase 3 for the A Bed Every Night (ABEN) programme. This will enable the Council to provide 10 bedspaces for people who are rough sleeping or perceived to be at risk of being so alongside dedicated support for them once they come inside.
- 3.5 Beyond responding to rough sleeping and managing risk in temporary accommodation, there has been real concern that there will be a significant upsurge in domestic abuse and related homelessness. As yet, there has been no noticeable increase, however Stockport Homes and Strategic Housing are part of the bi weekly Domestic Abuse Covid Group chaired by Safeguarding to monitor developments, publicise available help and ensure services are as accessible as possible.
- 3.6 The economic impact of the Crisis in the longer term is a further consideration, although at present this is hard to assess and will depend to a large extent upon the Government's approach towards discouraging mortgage and private sector repossessions.
- 3.7 Away from the Covid Crisis, addressing the underlying health and wellbeing issues affecting homeless people remains a key objective over the coming year for the Local Authority and its partners. Building on a number of workshops earlier in the year, a review of the Council's Homelessness Strategy will look at how services and interventions can be targeted and developed to meet the needs of this highly excluded group with some of the worst health outcomes in the Borough.

### **Further information**

To discuss this report or for further information please contact Andy Kippax telephone number 0161 474 4319 or by e-mail on [andy.kippax@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:andy.kippax@stockport.gov.uk)