

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Darren Sanders, at his meeting held on Tuesday, 11 September 2018 at 2.00 pm at the Executive Meeting Room - The Guildhall

Present

Councillor Darren Sanders (in the chair)

Councillor Tom Coles
Councillor Luke Stubbs

15. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Councillor Coles had apologised for arriving just after the start of the meeting.

16. Declaration of Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of members' interests.

17. Street Homeless and Rough Sleepers Partnership Strategy 2018 - 2020 (AI 3)

James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services, introduced the report which presented the Street Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy in draft form. An endorsement of the strategy by the Cabinet Member would mark the start of partnership working to develop the delivery model and a recognition that it will only succeed if a genuine partnership is formed between all those that need to work better together. The local authority, for example the Housing Service, has a part to play in supporting this strategy but without health services, community safety teams, voluntary sector organisations engaged in the model going forward the strategy will only go so far. The Homelessness Working Group (HWG as suggested in recommendation 3) would have an essential role to provide oversight of the strategy and co-ordinate its delivery. The group would need to have the right attendees representing the partnership organisations that need to work differently together to support those that are street homeless as well as preventing homelessness is the first place (section 4 of the report set out suggested membership).

The HWG would consider how to best make the links between its work and the formal partnerships in the City. The National Rough Sleeping Strategy published in August 2018 suggests links to Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB), which James advocated as the HWB oversees much of the commissioned support services. The Safer Portsmouth Partnership will also be keen to remain connected to the work. All of those links will help ensure that the focus on prevention across the wider system is not lost.

James Hill explained the strategy's approach and model (in recommendation 2) of 'accommodation first not accommodation only' with the desire to take the current 'accommodation only' model, for example providing night beds (winter shelter) to one where accommodation and support are linked. There is also a licensed approach and model called 'Housing First' being piloted in a number of local authorities and there will be opportunities to learn from those pilots as the model develops. He stressed that the terminology for the model here is not fixed. What was clear from discussions with partners is agreement that there can be better join up accommodation and support, so the Homelessness Working Group would be well placed to build on the current learning and develop the model that best suits the needs in Portsmouth.

James Hill endorsed Councillor Sanders' introduction in the strategy in thanking all of those that have been involved to date. He thanked the Salvation Army and the Society of St James', both of whom set up and provided the winter shelter at relatively short notice and supported the extension early this year so that there is now a night bed scheme all year round in Portsmouth.

Tackling street homelessness and rough sleeping is an area where there is cross party support and it was evident that there is a real desire in the voluntary sector and statutory agencies in the City to support those that are street homeless. The work to date has made a positive impact but the strategy sets that challenge for all partners to go forward to take that next step.

James Hill was accompanied by Sharon George, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategic Programme Manager, who had brought together the report and strategy and Elaine Bastable as Head of Housing Options who oversees the local authority's statutory homelessness responsibilities.

Deputations are not minuted in full as these are recorded as part of the web-cast of this meeting which can be viewed here:

<https://livestream.com/accounts/14063785/Cabinet-Housing-11Sep2018>

Deputations were made by:

- i) Cal Corkery who referred to the need for appropriate support for care leavers and the reluctance by many rough sleepers to engage with support as a condition of housing, referring to the approach taken in Poole in targeting the most problematic rough sleepers, advocating a 'housing first' approach.
- ii) Councillor Claire Udy who welcomed the report and expanded on her own involvement in Charles Dickens ward in undertaking fieldwork and her own experiences of contact with individuals and groups working to assist the homeless. She did not advocate a hard line approach to combat begging, as there were complex needs that required support, and she was grateful to Helping Hands for their work on the streets. Councillor Udy was also concerned about vulnerable women being assaulted and not feeling able to report this.

In response to the issues raised by the deputations James Hill explained that the local authority has a statutory responsibility for the homeless and under the Homeless Reduction Act there is a need to publish a homeless strategy that would be published in due course. The homeless strategy will largely focus on the local authorities statutory responsibilities but would reference the Street Homeless and Rough Sleeper Partnership Strategy. It was also acknowledged that care leavers are a statutory responsibility for the council (both Housing and Social Care). Sharon George reported that it was acknowledged that there is an over-representation of care leavers in the rough sleeping community and work was taking place to look at how this can be addressed and the strategy sought support for individuals.

James reiterated that a Housing First approach was not being rejected through the adoption of Accommodation First Not Accommodation Only model. He explained that Housing First is a licensed programme being piloted elsewhere. The suggested model incorporated the housing first principles and could evolve as learning emerged from the housing first pilots. The Homelessness Working Group will be able to use the learning to date and find out more about what the street homeless require, then there would be the opportunity to consider re-branding of the policy. He clarified that the shelter had no barriers to entry with a 'no strings' approach and the proposed model would operate on the same basis.

Elaine Bastable responded to the query raised on the use of housing association properties to house the homeless. The demand for social housing is high and if homeless people were only offered council properties it would have an impact on waiting times. The issue of affordability of some housing association properties is being challenged with the providers (such as rent deposits and the payment of rent in advance).

Sharon George explained the role of the CCG and stressed that support was given on an individual and modelled basis in partnership with colleagues across agencies.

Councillor Luke Stubbs, Conservative Opposition Spokesperson, then raised questions, including:

- Whether a higher proportion of ex-servicemen were becoming homeless - Sharon George responded that this is not reflected locally but that support was always planned on an individual basis. Elaine Bastable reported that this had also been investigated on the waiting list and more information on this needed to be recorded in the future.
- The seasonal use of the shelter - it was reported 45 beds were available and during the winter an average of 33 were used, and when the scheme was extended in the summer months on a couple of occasions the shelter had been fully occupied.
- Use of a street support App. Sharon George responded that work was taking place with external agencies to understand the level and nature of its use.

- Tackling begging - he was aware that some people begging in Portsmouth were not homeless and some used this for drugs which was a police matter.
- The future funding arrangements for the extension of the winter shelter and timing of the bids; Councillor Sanders responded on the bid process to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, with £350k provisionally approved in addition to £384k received.

Councillor Tom Coles, Labour Opposition Spokesperson, was satisfied that his areas of concern had already been covered by previous speakers.

Maria Coles, as a Residents Consortium representative, gave ideas that she was aware of to help the homeless elsewhere (such as voucher systems) and asked about church interventions and what had happened to the bus at St. Agatha's church which had now gone.

Councillor Sanders then summed up - the rise in the numbers of rough sleepers was evident whilst there were many agencies working to address this, so co-ordination of this was needed to take forward the good work. There was the need to listen to those who do sleep rough and build up relationships and consider new ways of assisting them with a partnership approach between statutory and voluntary groups.

The Homelessness Working Group would comprise not only councillors but voluntary and statutory agency partners. Councillor Sanders would like to invite the Cabinet Members with responsibility for Adult Social Care and Community Safety to be on the group and he would be contacting the group leaders and independent councillors to seek members to attend the HWG. He stressed that the approval of the strategy was the start of an on-going process and dialogue. It was important to treat people as individuals and find out why people were begging (and deal with those who are not homeless but beg). Alternative ways of giving to help those on the streets would be considered. He thanked everyone for their input and hoped that they would continue to engage as this was taken forward.

DECISIONS:

- (1) The Street Homelessness & Rough Sleepers Partnership Strategy 2018 - 2020 was endorsed;**
- (2) That consultation commences on piloting the Accommodation First not Accommodation only model piloted in Portsmouth;**
- (3) That a Homelessness Working Group is implemented.**

The meeting concluded at 3.05 pm.

Councillor Darren Sanders, Cabinet Member for Housing