

# ***Information / Discussion Paper***

## **Cheltenham Borough Council**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 7 June 2021**

#### **SOLACE**

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

#### **1. Why has this come to scrutiny?**

The committee wanted to understand how Solace is performing generally (include any benchmarking) and how it has been impacted by Covid – also understand the process for housing rough sleepers in Cheltenham, from initial engagement by Solace to being rehoused (by CBC/CBH) and identify opportunities for improvement.

#### **2. Overview of performance by Solace**

##### Background (for existing and new Members):

To provide a little background information on the team for existing and new members, Solace are a multi-agency team operating across Cheltenham and Gloucester. In each team there is a Case Officer, (employed by either Cheltenham Borough Council or Gloucester City Council depending on which team they are in), a PC and a PCSCO (both seconded into Solace from Gloucestershire Constabulary). There is an overarching Team Leader, (employed by Gloucester City Council) who oversees both teams and links in with management at each agency.

Previously Solace was based only in Gloucester and was made urban wide to include Cheltenham from February 2018.

Each partner involved in setting up Solace across both areas agreed that teams were in place to be:

- A council and police partnership to **tackle anti-social behaviour** through partner agency working;
- It **supports people** to take responsibility for their actions, and challenges those who don't;
- To **improve outcomes** for victims, offenders, communities and agencies.

It was also agreed that the Solace team would accept cases on the following priorities:

- Anti-social behaviour assessed as high risk to the victim and/or having a high impact upon the community
- Partnership priorities as agreed between Gloucestershire Constabulary, Gloucester City Council and Cheltenham Borough Council, which require a multi-agency response
- Support for cases where urgent civil action is required (e.g. closure orders)
- Anti-social behaviour assessed as medium risk that would:
  - Benefit from a multi-agency response, and/or
  - Has a significant potential to escalate
- Support for all other cases where civil enforcement action is being considered (e.g. criminal behaviour orders and civil injunction)

If the team receive complaints of ASB which do not meet the priorities for Solace, as set above, we would undertake one of the following where appropriate:

- Provided with advice from a member of the team and the complaint record for information only
- Passed to another team to investigate e.g. other council teams e.g. Community Protection Officers (CBC), enviro-crime/environmental health team at CBC or GCC Cheltenham Borough Homes, Gloucester City Homes, Police or another housing provider

### Key figures:

Since Solace became urban wide across both Gloucester and Cheltenham, the following are a range of figures to demonstrate our performance since February 2018. Unless stated otherwise, each of the below are linked to the Cheltenham team only:

- February 2018 – April 2021 = Cheltenham Solace team have dealt with 166 separate cases
  - These are broken down by priority as follows:
    - ASB high risk to victim/community = 26
    - Partnership case – agreed multi-agency response = 16
    - Urgent civil action required = 3
    - ASB medium risk – multi-agency response needed or risk of escalation = 60
    - Support other civil enforcement = 9
    - ASB public space = 35
    - Un-classified = 17 (NB – our case management system HUB has been refined over time, so initially cases were recorded not as un-classified until we amended it with the software company to have them recorded as the breakdown above)
- KPI – reduce repeat victims of ASB: since February 2018 we have had 22 repeat victims (this is an average of 7.3 per year equalling to an average of 0.6 repeat victims in each month)
- KPIs of: provide an holistic approach to resolving ASB, increase public confidence and to provide sustainable long-term solutions to resolving ASB can be evidenced by the following:
  - Since February 2018 – April 2021 = 252 cases have been closed with no need for legal action (NB – this is for Gloucester and Cheltenham teams combined)
- There are times where enforcement is necessary, the following provides an overview of our enforcement in Cheltenham from February 2018 – April 2021:
  - Civil injunctions = 25 granted
  - Closure orders:
    - 4 full closure orders
    - 3 partial closure orders

### **3. Impact of Covid on the work of the team**

In line with many other teams from Cheltenham Borough Council and partner agencies, as a result of working during the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Our Case Officer and Team Leader have been predominantly working from home (for our Team Leader this has been for health related reasons). This has been undertaken under the H&S criteria as set out for home working
- Our PCSO and PC have in line with the strict H&S assessments and requirements as set out by Gloucestershire Constabulary, been able to continue to work from the police station
- We have been able to continue all of our multi-agency meetings we took part in before the pandemic by moving them online to Microsoft Teams. This has been hugely beneficial as it has allowed us to maintain our team working as well as keeping in touch with vital partners
- We have also been able to, once the rules permitted and in a Covid secure way, utilise the Municipal Offices for further joint working with, for example, the Cheltenham Borough Council Neighbourhood Team. This has been a great benefit.
- We have continued to take on all cases we would have done before the pandemic, just with alterations in e.g. not being able to visit people at home perhaps, but we have overcome this by phone/Teams/Skype
- We have been able to continue to make all necessary referrals we would have done before for any person who needed one as well as link in with partners on a one to one basis for updates on engagement on cases
- We have been able to take all legal actions we would have before the pandemic, this has meant taking statements from witnesses, (whether they be members of the public or partner agencies), over the phone. All our applications have gone ahead through One Legal as per usual, with many court hearings being made over the internet on Teams/Skype
- If we have needed to serve legal or court paperwork on individuals, this has been done by following our bespoke risk assessment with all appropriate PPE or by working in conjunction with our team who have been located in the Gloucestershire Constabulary stations

#### **4. Process for housing rough sleepers in Cheltenham, from initial engagement by Solace to being rehoused (by CBC/CBH)**

##### Input from Solace:

One element of our work is engaging with people in our borough who are causing ASB through their activities which is heavily linked to them being either homelessness, rough sleeping or begging.

Solace work on an “engage – support – enforce” model. We must stress that the later part of the enforcement side is only made where there is persistent and continuing ASB and where a person has refused to engage with all offers of support to address the root cause of their behaviour. The enforcement is not undertaken where the person is not causing any ASB through their actions.

The steps we take are as follows: (this links to pre-Covid where most of our work for engagement was face to face):

- As a team, via colleagues or partners, we become aware of a person rough sleeping, presenting as homeless or begging in the borough
- We aim to engage face to face with them to ascertain as much information about them as they are willing to give at that time
- We work directly out in the borough with P3 outreach team early mornings and later at night, these visits may be as a result of a Streelink referral (references to this are made later in the document). Again, this is to initially engage with the person
  - At this first stage, an initial letter of concern is given to them, this explains how they can gain help, where they can go to for support day to day for e.g. food or

clothes as well as for housing options/to make a homelessness application and if needed for substance misuse support. It also serves as an initial warning of ASB and that we are asking them to engage with the services they require:

- At this stage we would also make initial checks with partners of “Change, Grow, Live (CGL), Housing Options and START meeting leads (meeting to discuss partnership agency referrals for placements in supported accommodation) to check if the person is already in receipt of any support
- If they are not on the notes for each agency, we can make them aware of them and that they are in need of support
- We will also raise the person at our monthly meeting where all partners discuss those causing ASB in the borough and at what stage their engagement is at
- If we continue to see a person in the borough we will regularly speak with them and remind them of the offers of support/referrals made and that we would ask them to engage with these
- If we then continue to see them committing ASB and there is a confirmation of no engagement from them, we will again speak to them face to face to explain this and issue a final warning letter
- A fully sufficient period of time is granted to give people every opportunity to engage and if we know they are making a pathway to engaging, we view this as a positive step and would place any plans for taking a case further, on pause to allow for full engagement
- Should the ASB have continued and been persistent in nature over a period of time, with no meaningful engagement with support agencies to address the root cause of the ASB, we will gather statements from the necessary partners. The lead officer from Solace will also write an overarching statement detailing all offers of support and referrals made. This is then submitted to our solicitor at One Legal who then presents the case to a Judge in Gloucester County Court
  - It is worth noting that in order to apply for an injunction – we must demonstrate that alarm, harassment or distress is being caused by the person and their actions
  - The burden of proof at the application stage is the civil standard of “on balance of probability”
  - We must also be able to link any condition we request to evidence of activity/behaviour
  - The overall decision on the granting of an order is made by a County Court Judge
  - Any breaches must be proven to the criminal standard of “beyond all reasonable doubt” and we are not able to present breaches with anonymous statements, all statements must be from a named person and signed

During the pandemic, the entire County convened a “homelessness cell” which the Solace Team Leader was part of each week. In response to the governments “Everyone In” programme a CEAP (Covid-19 Emergency Accommodation Protocol) was set up to ensure that rough sleepers were accommodated and protected during this time. This involved the provision of accommodation, food and on call support for hotel staff. Following this an ongoing commitment was also made to find housing solutions for all the people housed as part of the CEAP protocol.

Through the extremely hard work of all partners involved, CEAP housed people in line with lockdown rules in a number of different locations. This meant there were so few people out either begging or rough sleeping. Our aim shifted to making referrals and assisting people to get accommodation under CEAP.

Overall, a lot of people who we engage with will have very complex needs and lifestyles, they may have had these complexities for many years e.g. substance misuse, mental health issues from time in the forces or from trauma for example. As a result, engagement from them is not

always immediate, it takes time and there is no way of predicting how long a person will take to meaningfully engage with services who are in place to help them.

As well as all of the complexities, people always have the option to refuse offers of help/accommodation, but we along with partners will continue to work with them and make offers or referrals.

*Input from Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer at Cheltenham Borough Council and Housing Options team at Cheltenham Borough Homes:*

In terms of assessing people, options surrounding accommodation and housing people who are homeless, this is covered below by the team mentioned in italics above:

- Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is a key priority of Cheltenham Borough Council and a key outcome of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023 and Cheltenham Borough Council have a range of measures in place to help support people who are homeless and sleeping rough.
- Along with the 5 other districts within Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire County Council, The Clinical Commissioning Group and the Police and Crime Commissioner Cheltenham Borough Council jointly commission an assertive outreach service which is provided by the charity P3.
- This service works with some of the county's most vulnerable individuals and will respond to streetlink referrals for people who are new to sleeping on the streets as well as supporting longer term rough sleepers with complex needs and will support people into the homeless pathway as quickly as possible.
- Streetlink is an extremely quick and effective action that anyone can take to refer a street homeless individual to the team, who will then quickly find, verify, and build relationships with clients to enable people to access appropriate accommodation, support, and healthcare, and to begin their journey into longer term sustained housing. People can contact the outreach team by visiting [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk), downloading the Street link app, or calling 0300 500 0914.
- There are two somewhere safe to stay hubs in central Gloucester and central Cheltenham which are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week which provides a safe environment away for people to stay from the street. On arrival to the hub, staff rapidly assess a person's needs and design a personal housing plan to explore suitable housing options and pathways for the client.
- Individuals are fully assessed at the hubs including identifying specialist support for complex needs such as mental health problems and substance misuse. This service brings together all relevant partners so that whatever the solution is, it can be designed based on an individual's needs
- Alongside accessing the hubs when someone has been verified as rough sleeping the outreach team will also refer the client to Cheltenham Borough Home's Housing Options team via the 'duty to refer' process for a Personal Housing Plan to be put in place.
- The Housing options team have specialist intervention officers who work with a range of partners to explore a range of suitable housing options for people rough sleeping and ensure the support needs of people rough sleeping are being addressed. Housing options can include the provision of emergency accommodation (based on individual circumstances), referrals to accommodation based support services (including the assessment centre), assistance regarding accessing social housing via the choice based lettings system Homeseeker Plus and advice and assistance to access accommodation in the private rented sector.
- The Housing Options Team also exercise a power to accommodate which is for rough sleepers with little or no support needs where clients can be placed directly into temporary accommodation, regardless of whether or not they have a priority need. This ensures that rough sleepers who have become homeless through no fault of their own

in Cheltenham, and who are able to live independently because they have few or no support needs, are not precluded from accommodation.

- CBC along with the 5 other districts in Gloucestershire also have a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol to support people off the streets during periods of extreme weather and ensures that during periods where the temperature is extremely cold (0 or below for 3 consecutive nights or minus 3 for one night) or when there is an amber weather warning which would detrimentally affect anyone rough sleeping such as high winds, snow, ice etc. everyone rough sleeping is offered to be referred into accommodation.
- Please see the Homeless Infographic at Appendix 1, which gives further information on the range of support available for people rough sleeping across the county

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**Background Papers**

n/a

**Contact Officer**

Louise Boyle, Solace Team Leader

**Accountability**

Councillor Collins, Cabinet Member Housing

# There is help out there

Have you noticed someone sleeping rough?

Yes

No

You can get in touch with...

That may be because...



StreetLink offers the public a means to act when they see someone sleeping rough, and is the first step someone can take to ensure rough sleepers are connected to the local services and support available to them.

Download the app | [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk) | 0300 500 0914

**P3 Outreach Team**  
Respond to Streetlink referrals from the public as well as actively finding, and working with, people who are sleeping rough.

## Community based support



**P3 Community Support**  
Promoting independent living, and helping people in crisis  
0800 168 2443  
(Cheltenham, Cotswolds, Stroud)



**Greensquare**  
Community support, for 'sofa surfers' and people at risk of homelessness.  
01452 726950  
(Gloucester, Forest of Dean, Tewkesbury)

## Somewhere safe to stay hubs



**Cheltenham homeless hub**



**Gloucester homeless hub**

## Council Housing Teams

**Gloucester** • 01452 396396 • [homeless.team@gloucester.gov.uk](mailto:homeless.team@gloucester.gov.uk)  
Gloucester City Council, The Gateway, 92-96 Westgate Street, Gloucester GL1 2PE

**Cheltenham** • 01242 387615 • [housingoptions@cbh.org](mailto:housingoptions@cbh.org)  
Cheltenham Borough Council, Municipal Offices, Promenade, Cheltenham GL50 9SA

**Forest of Dean** • 01594 812309 • [housing.advice@fdean.gov.uk](mailto:housing.advice@fdean.gov.uk)  
Forest of Dean District Council, High Street, Coleford GL16 8HG

**Tewkesbury** • 01684 272212 • [housingadvice@tewkesbury.gov.uk](mailto:housingadvice@tewkesbury.gov.uk)  
Tewkesbury Borough Council, Public Services Centre, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury GL20 5TT

**Cotswold** • 01285 623301 • [housingadvice@cotswold.gov.uk](mailto:housingadvice@cotswold.gov.uk)  
Cotswold District Council, Trinity Road, Cirencester GL7 1PX

**Stroud** • 01453 754078 • [housing.advice@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:housing.advice@stroud.gov.uk)  
Stroud District Council, Ebley Wharf, Ebley Mill, Stroud GL5 4UB



**Change Grow Live (CGL)**  
Substance misuse service, with dedicated outreach worker.  
01452 223014



**P3 Drop-ins and assessment centres**  
Drop-in advice and help for homeless.  
P3 hub: 01452 221698/01242 576002  
P3 centre 08081 786003



**Homeless Healthcare**  
specialist physical and mental healthcare for homeless people  
01452 521898



**Time To Heal**  
works with homeless people in Hospital, preventing people being discharged to the street



**Emergency Duty Team**  
On hand evenings and weekends  
01452 614194



**Established local volunteer groups and homeless charities**



**START Supported housing**  
Accommodation with on-site support



**ACTION Glos (SIB service)**  
working with long-term homeless people with complex needs



**Severe Weather Protocol**  
Partnership providing extra emergency accommodation to keep people safe in severe weather

