

# Information / Discussion Paper

## Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023

### Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

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

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

Overview & Scrutiny Committee have asked for an update on Cheltenham Borough Council's approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping across the town. Specifically, more information has been requested on the following:

- What is the approach in Cheltenham for tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, including how we work with partners?
- What is the current level of homelessness in Cheltenham?
- What support is being provided, how are you performing and how is success being measured?

#### 2. Summary of the Issue

Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is a key priority for Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) as set out in our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028. CBC has a range of measures in place to help tackle homelessness and reduce rough sleeping; and we are working on a number of initiatives to help strengthen our position further. A link to our strategy is provided here: [housing homelessness and rough sleeping strategy 2023 28.pdf](#)

##### 2.1 Tackling Homelessness

**2.1.1** Preventing homelessness is a key focus of the Housing Options Service. In the event that it does occur, our aim is to keep it brief, minimise any stays in temporary or bed and breakfast accommodation, and work to prevent repeat homelessness.

**2.1.2** The Housing Options Service undertakes a wide range of functions to prevent and alleviate homelessness. These include:

- ✓ Contact and negotiation or mediation with landlord, family, or friends.
- ✓ Timely arrangement of additional housing-related support to help overcome difficulties that may be threatening homelessness.

- ✓ Liaison and working alongside County Council and Accommodation Support Providers to provide supported housing.
- ✓ Collaborating with providers of Intensive Housing Management providers to provide appropriate accommodation.
- ✓ Working with private landlords to help secure accommodation, and assistance towards deposit and/or rent in advance.
- ✓ Referral for target hardening or sanctuary measures to keep victims of domestic abuse safe in their properties (we provide funding for this service).
- ✓ Referral and liaison with social landlords in the resolution of issues that might otherwise lead to the loss a tenant's accommodation.
- ✓ Successful outcomes from housing applications (i.e. they are accommodated in social housing via our allocations scheme).
- ✓ Resolution of benefit issues through advice or referral to another agency, such as Citizens Advice - as part of our commissioned arrangements to provide debt, benefits, and housing rights advice.
- ✓ Liaison with Homes for Ukraine scheme to assist in negotiation for assistance from accommodation sponsors.

**2.1.3** Within the Housing Options Service, there is a Housing Solutions Officer (HSO). Their role is to oversee applications and support for those impacted by international resettlement, whilst also looking at accommodation solutions outside of social housing. We collaborate closely with private landlords, the Homes for Ukraine Team at Gloucestershire County Council, and within Cheltenham Borough Homes (with regards to the delivery of 21 additional affordable homes that are currently being acquired as part of our £2.3m grant funding received from the government's Local Authority Housing Fund). This officer also works with private landlords in order to secure suitable options from shared accommodation to self-contained family homes.

**2.1.4** Our Housing Options Service also includes a number of specialist Interventions Officers who work with partners agencies to explore a range of suitable housing options for the more vulnerable households and people rough sleeping, with a view to ensuring support needs are met. Housing Options include:

- Emergency accommodation,
- Referrals into accommodation-based support services (including the assessment centre or accommodation on the homeless pathway);
- Assistance regarding social housing, and
- Advice and assistance to access accommodation in the private rented sector.

**2.1.5** Our Service also includes two county-funded Domestic Abuse Interventions Officers, who provide services across Gloucestershire, working with partner agencies to help identify at an early stage those who are at risk of homelessness, with a view to helping resolve the issue.

**2.1.6** We work in partnership with several statutory and non-statutory agencies including:

the county-wide partnership team, commissioned service providers whose focus is on tackling rough sleeping, as well as with Youth Support and Care leaving teams, mental health providers and social care providers, Citizens Advice, P3, Cheltenham Housing Aid, and multiple teams within CBC.

- 2.1.7** The Housing Options Service faces several emerging issues and homelessness services have continued to be under significant pressure post Covid, and the subsequent challenges related to cost of living, housing crisis, and international resettlement. Homelessness levels are increasingly linked to the cost of living and ancillary factors, placing an additional burden on the Housing Options Service to prevent and relieve homelessness with reduced options for support.
- 2.1.8** On the back of the Covid pandemic and increased support available to rough sleepers, challenges have increased, with partner services struggling to meet demands on their services, i.e., mental health, social care and leaving care teams. The knock-on impact has been that housing has become the focal point, adding additional pressure on the Service, when clients' other needs are unable to be met.
- 2.1.9** The private rented sector is seeing significant challenges with fewer properties as landlords leave the market. This has created additional homelessness as properties are sold, residents asked to leave, and fewer properties available to move to. This has also resulted in increasingly unaffordable properties, with those on low incomes who rely on the Local Housing Allowance to support their rent, effectively being priced out of the private rented market.
- 2.1.10** The demand and pressures, and lack of supply is seen across all household types and accommodation sizes. The team are more reliant on less suitable accommodation, with increased numbers of emergency accommodation placements. We continue to work on plans to increase the number and quality of emergency accommodation options.

## **2.2 Tackling Rough Sleeping**

- 2.2.1** 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.
- 2.2.2** 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.
- 2.2.3** Streetlink is an extremely quick and effective action that anyone can take to refer a rough sleeper to the team, who will then quickly find, verify, and build relationships with clients to enable individuals to access appropriate accommodation, support, and healthcare, and to begin their journey into longer term sustained housing. A new Streetlink platform has just been launched - one of the main changes is that all Streetlink referrals will now have to be done via the online portal. Members of the public can share information by visiting [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk).
- 2.2.4** 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 working with the housing options team design a

personal housing plan to explore suitable housing options and pathways for the client.

- 2.2.5** Individuals are fully assessed at the hubs, with the presence of a multi-disciplinary team with 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
- 2.2.6** All services now link in with the new Multi-Disciplinary Team to support people experiencing complex needs and mental health. CBC supported the county-wide partnership to develop this new service, being led by Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust. The CHPSS – Complex Homelessness Partnership Support Services (Formerly Homeless Mental Health Team) delivers a flexible person-centred service with a range of professionals who can deliver specialist mental health, care and support in the community.
- 2.2.7** This team works with our 'target priority cohort' (i.e. rough sleepers who have a history of long term rough sleeping owing to their complex needs). They are then supported and where appropriate, referred into CBC's Housing Led scheme which provides enhanced support to help them work towards long term tenancy sustainment. Our Housing Led scheme currently has 9 active cases involving 6 living in one bed housing led units in Cheltenham (all managed by CBH), 3 move-on support cases. Following the recent award of RSI 5 funding, CBC will continue to expand this provision to 12 units in Cheltenham (20 across the county). CBH will continue to provide the additional properties to support this scheme.
- 2.2.8** Wider support to our Housing Led initiative is provided by the Enhanced Housing Support (EHS) service delivered by the charity P3, who are commissioned to provide this work on our behalf.
- 2.2.9** CBC, along with the 5 other districts in Gloucestershire, also undertake the following partnership work:
- ✓ Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) - to support people off the streets during periods of extreme weather i.e. where there is an amber weather warning which would detrimentally affect anyone rough sleeping then SWEP will be activated. During SWEP, everyone rough sleeping is contacted and offered to be referred into emergency accommodation. CBC is currently working with the County Partnership Team, Local Authorities, CBH, CCP, YMCA and the Faith Sector to help identify additional buildings along with a team of staff and volunteers to manage the SWEP process during extreme weather.
  - ✓ Annual Rough Sleeping Count - conducted annually between 1st October and 30th November. This is coordinated by the County Partnership Team. Cheltenham supports this county initiative with officers from CBC, CBH, County Partnership Team and P3 by undertaking a visit during the night-time to identify the number of rough sleepers bedded down. The methodology for the Spotlight Count uses a combination of an Evidence Based Count along with an Estimate Based Count to identify all known rough sleepers. Each Local Authority completes and submits its own individual rough sleeper count for government statistics.
  - ✓ SOLACE – multi-agency team operating across Cheltenham and Gloucester. In each district team there is a Case Officer, a PC, a PCSCO. They are managed by an overarching Team Leader. One element of SOLACE work is engaging with people who are causing ASB through their activities which is heavily linked to them being

either homeless, rough sleeping or begging. Solace work on an “engage – support – enforce” model with enforcement only considered 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. CBC has recently worked with SOLACE to agree a new protocol for safely removing and temporarily storing belongings abandoned in public places.

**2.2.10** Please see the Rough Sleeping Infographic in Appendix 1, which gives further information on the range of support available for people rough sleeping across the county.

### **3. Summary of evidence/information:**

The Housing Options Service continues to experience high numbers of homeless households approaching the service, and an increase in those registering on Homeseeker Plus. Significant interventions work continues alongside our partners, and, as of the end of September 2023, the first two Ukrainian households were accommodated as part of our programme to acquire 21 homes following our successful bid for £2.3m funding via the government’s Local Authority Housing Fund initiative.

For more detailed information on targets, performance and trends, please refer to Appendix 2.

### **4. Next Steps:**

- 4.1 Cheltenham Borough Council has recently undertaken a review of homelessness and developed a Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This strategy was approved by Cabinet in July 2023, and sets out our priorities for the next five years to 2028.
- 4.2 Included within our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is an Action Plan. This Action Plan sets out in more detail the range of initiatives we are looking to implement. Our Action Plan will be updated each year to enable CBC to take account of any new, emerging opportunities and challenges. Cabinet will approve our updated Action Plan, and CBC will use this reporting mechanism as an opportunity to set out our key achievements over the previous year in supporting the implementation of our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 4.3 CBC runs a Housing & Support Forum. This forum is made up of key partners across Cheltenham. We will continue to use this forum to share knowledge, and allow opportunities for scrutiny and challenge by our peers across the range of our services.
- 4.4 CBC will also continue to lobby the relevant government departments to support national changes that might alleviate homelessness pressures locally. This includes, for example, the raising of Local Housing Allowance to enable low income households to access the private rented sector more easily.

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## **Background Papers**

CBC's Housing, Homelessness  
& Rough Sleeping Strategy  
2023-28

### **Contact Officer**

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### **Accountability**

Councillor Victoria Atherstone; Cabinet Member  
for Housing