

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Date of meeting: 14 January 2021

**Portfolio: Housing and Community Services
Councillor H Whitbread**

Subject: Rough Sleeping Update

Responsible Officer: Jennifer Gould (01992 564703)

Democratic Services: R Perrin (01992 564532)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To note the update with regards to the Council's response to rough sleeping throughout the pandemic; the additional funding secured from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG); the robust prevention and relief services that have subsequently been developed and the outcomes to date of that service delivery.

Report:

1. At the start of the pandemic in March 2020 government introduced several policy changes within the homelessness arena to support national lockdown. These policy changes included:
 - Everyone In: accommodating all verified rough sleepers on a temporary basis for the lockdown duration; and
 - Measures to abate activities that lead to homelessness with a moratorium on evictions initially until June and latterly extended until September 2020.
2. Tenants received further protection through the Coronavirus Act 2020 which meant that from 29th August, with the exception of the most serious cases¹, landlords are not able to start possession proceedings unless they have given their tenant six months' notice.
3. While these measures eased the threat of homelessness for many renters, EFDC, like other districts across the County, experienced an increase in clients presenting as rough sleepers.
4. Traditionally, EFDC has only reported very small numbers of rough sleepers² but between 1st April and 23rd December 2020, a total of **27** clients presented as rough sleepers³.

¹ Serious cases include those in relation to anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, false statement and where a tenant has accrued rent arrears to the value of over six months' rent.

² Traditionally EFDC has reported just 1 rough sleeper in the annual estimate.

³ The figure of 27 will include both those verified as rough sleepers and those who, following enquiries, we are satisfied are at risk of rough sleeping.

5. Although pinpointing the exact cause of this increase is difficult, we can reasonably confidently attribute this increase in rough sleeper presentations to increased unavailability of places to stay for entrenched sofa surfers as households were prevented from mixing during pandemic restrictions. The barriers to sofa surfing, together with the temporary change in local authority responsibility to accommodate all rough sleepers (regardless of priority need) via the Everyone In directive and the widespread communication of this responsibility would go some way to explaining this increase in rough sleeper presentations.
6. Of the **27** rough sleepers who presented between April and 23rd December, **3** were found to have a priority need and have been accommodated in line with our responsibilities under Part VII Housing Act 1996 (as amended); **4** were made offers of accommodation but failed to engage and so contact was lost and the remaining **20** were accommodated in emergency, nightly paid accommodation.
7. Of the **20** accommodated, **15** clients were accommodated in response to the Everyone In directive, the remaining **5** have been accommodated post October via the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) which saw EFDC secure additional funding from MHCLG for the purposes of accommodating rough sleepers.
8. The gross cost of accommodating **15** clients through Everyone In totals **£64,868** to 23rd December 2020. This is the figure we have returned to government as part of EFDC's additional Covid-19 spending strain.
9. Of those **15**, **8** have been moved on to long-term, affordable accommodation in the private rented sector, **4** have been reconnected with friends/family and **1** received a custodial sentence for a prior conviction leaving just **2** in nightly paid emergency accommodation.
10. The **5** clients accommodated post October through NSAP are still in emergency, nightly paid accommodation albeit a long-term housing solution for those clients is progressing at pace.

Funding

Rough Sleeper Initiative Grant (RSIG)

11. As part of a consortium led by Essex County Council **£460,459** rough sleeper initiative grant funding was secured for 2020/21. This funding is shared between Braintree, Maldon, Rochford and Epping Forest District Councils and Chelmsford City Council.

Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP)

12. Across England approximately 15,000 people who were sleeping rough, in unsafe communal settings or at imminent risk of rough sleeping were placed into emergency accommodation as part of the Everyone In initiative. Government subsequently made available the financial resources to prevent these people from returning to the streets through NSAP.
13. EFDC was successful in securing **£121,190** of NSAP funding broken down as follows:
 - 6 emergency bed spaces for 15 weeks £23,190⁴
 - 6 bed spaces for additional winter provision £34,000⁵

⁴ Based on our estimate of need

⁵ This money will be drawn down if needed. There may be an opportunity to re-purpose at a later date if unused for this purpose

- 0.5 FTE post (homelessness team resource) £16,000⁶
- 1 FTE Epping Forest Rough Sleeper Lead £48,000⁷

Rough Sleeper Service Delivery and Housing Solutions (EFDC)

14. A specialist link worker with particular expertise in assisting rough sleepers has been established in the homelessness team and acts as the specific point of contact for all agencies and, in particular our commissioned rough sleeper service, supporting rough sleepers in the Epping Forest District. This enables a faster and more comprehensive response and strengthens the value of our partnership work.
15. Progress is currently being made to secure a dedicated mental health specialist to work alongside the homelessness team supporting all clients that present with mental health issues. Mental health issues are particularly prevalent within the rough sleeping community.
16. A six-bed house of multiple occupation has been secured at affordable local housing allowance rent with a private landlord to provide long-term accommodation for single homeless clients on an assured shorthold tenancy basis.
17. A unit of EFDC's own housing stock is being leased to Chess (our commissioned rough sleeper service) to provide next step, supported accommodation to rough sleepers. Chess will support residents with a range of skills ready for them to move on into independent accommodation at an appropriate time. This provision will support clients who have multiple needs and complex problems ensuring that when a long-term housing solution is secured they will be able to manage it successfully.

Future

18. Government has made a commitment to continue Rough Sleeper Initiative Grant funding into 2021/22, details of which are to be made available at the beginning of 2021. We will continue to work as part of our current partnership to secure a share of this funding stream.
19. Government have also announced a further funding stream in relation to rough sleeping – Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme – for 2021/22. Details of which are to follow. This funding stream will align with the Rough Sleeper Initiative Grant and we will work to secure a share so that we can build on the longer-term housing solutions we have already started to put in place for this cohort of clients.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To note the update in regard to rough sleeping and the Council's response in the Epping Forest District and, particularly, within the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic.

⁶ We are currently exploring the potential of a specialist mental health worker embed within the homelessness team – 1 year funding only

⁷ This post will sit with Chess, our commissioned rough sleeper service, and is funded for a period of 3 years

Resource Implications:

None – all activity to be completed within existing budgets together with ringfenced additional RSIG and NSAP funding

Legal and Governance Implications:

Due regard is given to all relevant legislation including (but not limited to) Housing Act 1996 (as amended); Homelessness Reduction Act 2017; Coronavirus Act 2020.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The Council has a statutory responsibility to prevent and relieve homelessness latterly strengthened by the additional funding received as part of NSAP. EFDC's response to rough sleeping will continue to be robust to minimise any further/ongoing risk to public health.

Consultation Undertaken:

Ongoing consultation is undertaken with the Housing and Communities Portfolio Holder.

Background Papers:

None

Risk Management:

Risk is managed through a risk register and updated quarterly or at any other appropriate time.