

CABINET



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| Report subject | Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Action Plan |
| Meeting date | 13 November 2019 |
| Status | Public Report |
| Executive summary | <p>Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole have separate legacy homelessness & rough sleeping strategies which require alignment, as per the statutory orders set out when the new Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council was created.</p> <p>By winter 2019, all local authorities are required to update their action plans online for the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.</p> <p>The common objectives detailed within each of the preceding council strategies have provided a framework to align current activity in each area into a single action plan, found at Appendix 1. The attached report sets out the Action Plan in line with current work and priorities across BCP. It consolidates current priorities and actions from across BCP and will form the basis of a comprehensive review during 2020 in order to publish a new BCP Homelessness Strategy.</p> <p>Plans have been developed to provide robust future governance arrangements of this activity through the introduction of a new multi-agency BCP Homelessness Partnership and Homelessness Reduction Board which will monitor the action plan and develop the new strategy.</p> |
| Recommendations | <p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>Cabinet notes and approves the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Action Plan.</p> <p>Cabinet supports the development of a new Homelessness Strategy in 2020, to be brought forward for consideration to Cabinet following a full review and consultation period.</p> |
| Reason for recommendations | <p>All Councils are required to update and publish their Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Action plans by Winter 2019. To highlight to Cabinet the proposed development of a new Homelessness Strategy, including review and consultation process that will take place.</p> |

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| Portfolio Holder(s): | Councillor Kieron Wilson (Portfolio Holder for Housing) |
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| Wards | N/A |
| Classification | For Information |

Background

The National & Local Context

1. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) implemented in April 2018, was the single biggest change in homelessness law in 40 years. The Act introduced a number of changes including:
 - A strengthened duty for Councils to provide advisory services
 - An extension to the period during which an applicant is considered 'threatened with homelessness' from 28 to 56 days
 - New duties for Councils to assess all applicants and to take reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness
 - These steps will be set out in a personalised housing plan that, wherever possible, must be agreed between the local authority and the customer
2. Households who are statutorily homeless are owed legal duties that fall into three main categories:

Prevention duties include any activities aimed at preventing a household threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. This would involve activities to enable an applicant to remain in their current home or find alternative accommodation in order to prevent them from becoming homeless. The duty lasts for 56 days, but may be extended if the local authority is continuing with efforts to prevent homelessness.

Relief duties are owed to households that are already homeless and require help to secure settled accommodation. The duty lasts 56 days, and can only be extended by a local authority if the households would not be owed the main homelessness duty.

Main homelessness duty describes the duty a local authority has towards an applicant who is unintentionally homeless, eligible for assistance and has priority need. This definition has not been changed by the 2017 HRA. However, these households are now only owed a main duty if their homelessness has not been successfully prevented or relieved.

The legislation complimented much of the activity identified with the respective Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Homelessness strategies.

3. Government are currently reviewing the impact of the Act, with particular focus on resident outcomes, the changing approach of local authorities and partners to tackling homelessness, the experiences of those customers who approach local authorities for assistance and the additional burden on resources of implementing the new duties.
4. Further to the HRA, 2018 saw the launch of the **National Rough Sleeping Strategy**. This detailed government plan aims to help people who are sleeping rough now and to put in place the structures to end rough sleeping for good. Specifically, halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eradicating rough sleeping by 2027.
5. A number of opportunities to successfully apply for short-term grant funding to enhance the local offer for Rough Sleepers across Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole has seen a range of positive moves for rough sleepers into accommodation with support.
6. The national strategy provided local authorities with specific direction on the provision of local Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategies. By winter 2019, all local authorities are required to update their action plans online to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.
7. Whilst the homelessness sector including a range of partners develop plans to support these changes, there has been local acknowledgement that BCP Council and its partners have a unique opportunity to ensure there are effective non-statutory and statutory local accountability and partnership structures in homelessness services in place. Particularly focusing upon improving local accountability and partnership working in homelessness services.

Local Context

8. During the first year of the new homelessness duties, the preceding councils for the BCP area assessed over 2700 households who were either homeless or threatened with homelessness.
9. Significant numbers of households were assisted and supported in a range of ways and often as part of a wider multi-agency support partnership to remain in their homes or to quickly find alternatives. Over 1100 households often including vulnerable adults and families were supported in this way.
10. Where prevention efforts are not successful the Council may be required to provide interim temporary accommodation. 261 homes are used for this purpose across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. The Council does not have

sufficient supply of suitable temporary homes to meet demand. Bed & Breakfast accommodation is regularly used. The use of B&B has slightly decreased over the last year. At the end of September 2019, 73 households were living in B&B, the significant majority being single people rather than families. The new action plan recognises the continued need to reduce B&B and provide alternative quality temporary housing.

11. Although homelessness comparative data is not yet fully reliable due to the implementation of new regulation and familiarisation with statutory reporting guidelines, indications suggest that the BCP area has been effective at supporting the enhanced homelessness prevention agenda and ensuring households receive the assistance and support they need at the right time to enable them to stay in their homes, or find suitable alternatives.
12. The number of rough sleepers across the BCP area, and in Bournemouth specifically remains relatively high. Like many other areas, the numbers of rough sleepers or those having street lifestyles has unfortunately increased over recent years. The rough sleeper outreach team alongside a wide range of other committed services continue to work every day to find and offer support to rough sleepers. Some accept help and manage to rebuild their lives, others choose not to accept help or accommodation. Substance misuse and mental health problems are a big barrier to getting people off the streets. We know that some people beg in our towns, and sleep rough, because of these problems, even when they actually have somewhere to stay. It is important to highlight that not all of those who beg are homeless. A number of high priority actions and activities (reflected in the action plan) continue to be employed by a number of statutory and non-statutory partners. Additional government grant funding received is being used across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole by partner agencies to support Rough Sleepers into accommodation and to help maintain their accommodation.
13. There remains a significant demand from households who are often living in precarious housing circumstances, often referred to as 'hidden homeless', moving frequently from one temporary housing arrangement to another, where seeking settled housing, retaining employment or education and / or maintaining individual health and wellbeing is a daily challenge.
14. The Council is responsible for working together to ensure it meets the housing and support needs of homeless 16 & 17 year olds and provides young people leaving care with somewhere safe and suitable to live to help them make a positive transition into adulthood. Providing suitable housing for this group underpins success in other areas of life. It is essential therefore the approach taken recognises where to prioritise activity which adequately provides young people with the right accommodation and support options, including preparation and planning for the reality of local housing provision. Where housing crisis or

emergencies occur, that the right housing and support is immediately available to keep young people safe and that accessible long term settled housing is available which best suits individual needs. The future housing and homelessness strategy will ensure key links are made with the Councils Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

15. A great number of successes have been achieved, however there is acknowledgement that even greater efforts to coordinate support and employ strategies to reduce numbers is needed. The introduction of the new BCP Homelessness Partnership represents a key opportunity to strengthen efforts to reduce the need for people to rough sleep in our towns. The new partnership, launched on World Homeless Day, 10 October 2019, brings together local voluntary and statutory organisations to join up local efforts and projects all working together to avoid duplication and ensuring a common targeted approach to addressing homelessness is in place across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.
16. The role of voluntary sector organisations is key to assisting in the prevention of homelessness and the launch of the BCP Homelessness Partnership will help ensure all partners are working together to achieve the best outcomes.

Existing Homelessness Strategies

17. The strategic approach taken to homelessness by each of the preceding Councils differs and will remain until a new BCP strategy is developed. Bournemouth has a Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2021, the Christchurch approach remains detailed within the Dorset Homelessness Strategy 2015-19 and in Poole, Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping is a key priority of the Housing Strategy Update 2018 – 2021.
18. The project plan, consultation plan and timeline for developing a new BCP Homelessness Strategy is currently being worked up, with the expectation that a proposed Strategy will be recommended to Cabinet in 2020 for approval.
19. The action plans supporting each existing Strategy have been aligned into one, with key themes of the preceding Strategy action plans summarised across the following 6 key objectives:
 1. **Prevent homelessness and minimise the use of temporary accommodation**
 2. **Reduce homelessness and rough sleeping to as close to zero as possible**
 3. **Develop a range of sustainable housing options and pathways**

- 4. Develop partnership work and wider communications to ensure efficient and effective use of resources**
- 5. Key improvements to health, wellbeing and awareness**
- 6. Update key partnerships, policies, process and protocols following Local Government Reorganisation**

20. Each of these objectives have been approved as key priorities within the respective strategies and will form the basis of the combined action plan until a new BCP Homelessness strategy is developed. The new aligned action plan can be found at Appendix 1.

Local Performance and Achievements

21. Since the inception of the new homelessness duties in April 2018, statutory data returns and benchmark evaluations indicate BCP performs well in comparison to both regional and national averages in Homelessness prevention activity. Where services are working together to prevent homelessness, a positive outcome or move is achieved for 79% of those requesting assistance, compared to 71% in the South West and 66% nationally.
22. There is evidence that the changes in service approach brought about by the Act, to those homeless and threatened with homelessness have been embedded effectively into local practice, with more residents benefiting from timely intervention and support in the prevention of homelessness.
23. A number of effective local partnerships have been and are being developed to improve the timeliness of Early Help interventions where support and advice are delivered collaboratively. Examples include new partnerships between Housing Options and Jobcentre plus, private landlords and services for children and families. The voluntary sector have developed good ways of working and services such as Sleepsafe continue to have a positive impact. The development of further arrangements in pursuit of the Council's aligned action plan objectives can be found at Appendix 1.
24. There remain significant challenges to identifying suitable accommodation alternatives for those who become homeless, particularly for those with complex needs. You don't have to be living on the street to be homeless, households living in temporary accommodation arrangements, with friends or family, threatened with eviction, unable to afford their home or those unable to return to their home because it isn't safe or suitable for their needs for health or safety reasons could all be affected. Demand for services for those threatened with homelessness and those unfortunate to have become homeless has remained at a consistently high level for the past 12 months and is not currently forecast to

reduce. This is the case both nationally and locally. This includes both access to the accommodation and access to the support services that households also often need to maintain independent living.

25. Despite a high demand, there have been a range of successes and achievements across Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole in recent preceding years of the respective strategies. The Council and its partners have worked hard to coordinate activity, collaborate and focus efforts on preventing homelessness and improving services for homeless people, including those who are threatened with homelessness.

26. Some examples of those achievements include:

- A commissioned Rough Sleeper outreach service, coordinated Severe Weather Emergency Provision, continued targeted advice & support
- Successful bid and mobilised staffing to provide enhanced services for Rough Sleepers provision of Rough Sleeper Initiative Grant
- Launch of the Street Support website, continued Sleepsafe provision and much collaborative work across the faith and voluntary sector.
- Introduction of Early Intervention Support Service for private rented tenants
- Private Rented Access Scheme supporting local landlords and tenants
- Re-commissioning of Housing 1st Services providing accommodation and support to those with the most complex needs and work underway to consolidate and ideally scale up an approach for BCP
- Significant developments in homelessness prevention outcomes in partnership with a range of agencies, including targeted welfare benefits, debt and financial advice and targeted support to for family breakdown
- Re-commissioning of housing related supported services and joined-up pathways for homeless adults with mental ill-health and other complex needs to help successful move on into settled accommodation
- Improved homelessness and accommodation pathway introduced for 16/17-year olds and care leavers at risk of homelessness, with a greater focus on young people staying at home if safe to do so with innovative education
- The development of an offer to local private landlords and support service to both private landlords and their tenants
- Housing Options services presented with Bronze and Silver Standard awards in recognition of the quality and comprehensive approach to homelessness prevention activities

BCP Homelessness Partnership and Homelessness Reduction Board

27. The Council, with its key partners have launched a new BCP Homelessness Partnership which will include a governance board and a number of focussed sub-groups ensuring delivery of the aligned Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan. The partnership will ensure a comprehensive review of homelessness is delivered in readiness for consultation and development of a new co-produced BCP Homelessness Strategy.
28. The Homelessness Reduction Board is responsible for tackling Homelessness across Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole where local partners work together to end Homelessness.
The board will agree the local strategic direction and vision required in order to support the prevention of homelessness and to tackle rough sleeping, particularly where issues require an integrated response across a range of organisations and agendas.
29. The Board will provide an innovative and critical focus on the local delivery of homelessness and rough sleeping services, ensuring the range of stakeholders who provide and deliver local homelessness services with often differing priorities and various service offers, can come together within a single vision and accountability framework.
30. The Council is responsible for publishing a Homelessness Strategy and coordinating local resources, but homeless prevention requires a collective effort of many public, private and voluntary sector partners. There are many collaborative efforts across the BCP area which can be further build upon with the newly launched Homelessness Partnership.
31. The new BCP Homelessness Reduction Board will oversee the delivery of this new combined Action Plan on a quarterly basis using RAG ratings. Importantly, this will evolve into a refreshed Action Plan as a new BCP Homelessness Strategy is developed over the next year.

Summary

32. No one is predestined to become homeless and everybody deserves a stable, safe and secure home, however, many households in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole still face the harmful consequences of becoming homeless. Homelessness including rough sleeping is extremely complex. Addressing the challenges can only develop effectively through collaboration of Council services with local communities, businesses, charities and other statutory and non-statutory partners.
33. The Homelessness Reduction Act saw a significant change in approach which aims to ensure all stakeholders work together to address and break the cycle of homelessness.
34. Timely housing advice & information for residents, preventing recurring homelessness through a range of support and swiftly assisting those are unfortunate to become homeless are key aspirations of the action plan.

35. BCP Council is in a unique position with its partners to seize this opportunity to review its approach and services to residents affected by homelessness & rough sleeping, build on existing excellent practice, co-produce a new Homelessness Strategy for public consultation and approval which seeks to address Homelessness & Rough Sleeping through innovation, partnership working and development of shared a vision.

Summary of financial implications

36. The Council receives a number of short-term ring-fenced grants which provide additional funding alongside base budgets to support the activity of the aligned homelessness and rough sleeping action plan.

Summary of legal implications

37. There is a legal requirement for Local Authorities to have a five-year homelessness and rough sleeping strategy that sets out information about:
- The scale and causes of homelessness and rough sleeping in their area
 - How they will prevent and tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.
38. BCP council will be developing a new strategy as our current plan aligns 3 different strategies ending in 2021. The Councils new strategy must reflect current issues and priorities for tackling high levels of homelessness and rough sleeping across the conurbation. Wide consultation on the issues and solutions will be key to getting this right for the area.
39. Further to the statutory requirement to publish a strategy, the statutory order pertaining to BCP council requires an aligned strategy to be developed with 2 years and therefore by 31 March 2021.

Summary of human resources implications

N/A

Summary of environmental impact

N/A

Summary of public health implications

40. The combined action plan integrates a range of positive activities which benefit health and wellbeing through housing.

Summary of equality implications

41. Each legacy Homelessness Strategy has an Equality Impact Needs Assessment which remains relevant for the lifetime of the strategy and action plan.

Summary of risk assessment

N/A

Background papers

[Bournemouth Homelessness Strategy 2016-2021](#)

[Poole Housing Strategy Refresh 2018 - 2020](#)

[Dorset Homelessness Strategy 2015-2019](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Combined Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Action Plan 2019/20