

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 On 25 February 2013, the Council agreed to form a task and finish group to:

- Investigate the need for a night shelter or similar in New Forest District Council's area, with particular emphasis on the plight of males over 24 years of age;
- Examine the various ways this could be achieved with the co-operation of other bodies; and
- Investigate the release of funds from the 'No Second Night Out' budget.

1.2 The Task and Finish Group has held a number of meetings under the chairmanship of Cllr Chris Harrison. This report provides a progress report on the Task and Finish Group for the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**2. DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOMELESSNESS LEGISLATION AND THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF ROUGH SLEEPING IN THE DISTRICT**

2.1 In order to obtain a better idea of local authority duties and responsibilities to homeless people it was necessary for the group to develop a greater understanding of the legislation which underpins work on homelessness. This was achieved by discussion around a briefing paper on the homelessness legislation from housing officers.

2.2 The Group then went on to consider the available evidence of rough sleeping in the New Forest district.

2.3 The Group heard that traditional headcounts are not relevant to the New Forest district and so it is likely that there will only ever be a partial understanding of the extent of rough sleeping in the local area. There is persistent anecdotal evidence of rough sleeping in the district, but numbers are thought to be low in comparison to problems faced in inner-city areas.

2.4 It is estimated from officer knowledge of the local housing conditions that there are typically between 3 and 5 rough sleepers in the district every night. However, the district is large and mainly rural in nature so there may be other rough sleepers 'below the radar'.

2.5 There is a national reporting tool for rough sleepers called Streetlink. There were 9 reports of rough sleeping in the district made to Streetlink in the 6 months from October 2012. However, it is not known how many of these are multiple-referrals of the same individuals.

2.6 Housing advisers in the homelessness team have started to collect data on rough sleeping in a more systematic way and it will be possible in future to provide data on reported rough sleeping. However, this does rely on the applicant providing accurate factual information.

- 2.7 One of the best indicators currently available of the comparative extent of rough sleeping is the deployment of severe weather assistance.
- 2.8 All Councils are encouraged to provide accommodation for rough sleepers in severe weather even if there is no legal duty. New Forest District Council housing advice staff are under instructions to offer B&B placements during severe weather to any applicant who may need respite from sleeping rough.
- 2.9 Due to the harsh winter conditions in the winter of 2012 / 2013, severe weather provision was operational in the district for several months from November 2012. In total, 5 individuals were offered severe weather assistance in the New Forest. Only two individuals accepted the offer of B&B.
- 2.10 In Southampton, the exact number of individuals who were offered severe weather assistance is not known. However, there was an average of 17 individuals accommodated each night for a 57 day period (a total of nearly 1000 bednights.) In Winchester, 40 different individuals were accommodated under severe weather provision. The number of bednights is unknown.

### **3 PROVISION FOR ROUGH SLEEPERS**

- 3.1 The Group considered the provision for rough sleepers in the district and made the following findings set out in 3.2 to 3.6 of this report.
- 3.2 There has never been any form of direct access hostel accommodation in the district for rough sleepers. Whilst there is a network of supported housing projects in the district which are allocated through the Supported Housing Panel, most of these are for young people or people with a mental health problems. Due to the ending of Hampshire County Council's Supporting People programme there may be cuts to these services in the future.
- 3.3 The Council helped to develop the very successful Night Stop scheme which has been operational for many years and provides a network of host-householders for homeless young people (aged 16 to 24 years old.) The scheme has provided hundreds of bednights of accommodation and prevented rough sleeping in many instances.
- 3.4 The Council has taken other measures to increase the supply of accommodation which would benefit single people who are in non-priority groups (and are therefore vulnerable to rough sleeping when homeless).

These actions include:

- Discretionary offers of loans for deposits to rent in the private sector
  - Decommissioning of sheltered housing schemes to significantly increase the supply of accommodation for people over the age of 45
  - Purchasing of one bedroom properties under the house purchase scheme.
- 3.5 The Council is also now working in partnership with other local authorities in South Hampshire (the Sub-Regional Rough-Sleeping Consortium) to identify measures for a sub-regional approach to tackling rough sleeping. This group has been awarded the sum of £377,000 to be used for sub-regional homelessness work. Whilst this would appear to be a substantial amount of money, it is a one-off payment and is for

spending over a very wide geographical area (Southampton City Council, Portsmouth City Council, New Forest District Council, Isle of Wight Council, Gosport Borough Council, Havant Borough Council and Fareham Borough Council.)

- 3.6 Work with this group is ongoing and a number of small allocations of funds (up to £5,000) have been made to housing organisations. New Forest District Council has also proposed that Night Stop places in the New Forest are made available (when there is capacity) for applicants from outside of the New Forest. This would be on the basis of a reciprocal arrangement whereby Southampton may make direct access accommodation available to New Forest residents and that the original authority retains any housing duty to homeless applicants moving across the district boundaries for emergency housing.

#### **4. POSSIBLE FUTURE PROVISION**

- 4.1 The Group has given consideration to future provision of accommodation for rough sleepers in the district. There are a number of reasons why some districts currently have direct access hostels and others do not. Often, current provision is dictated by historical provision. For example, the Winchester hostel was initially set-up as a charitable churches project and only received significant City and County Council funding at a much later date. There are also geographical reasons for provision, with large rural districts being less likely to find that direct access hostels cater for the needs of communities which are not nucleated, as in city areas. It is also certainly the case that the demand for direct-access hostels in city centres such as Southampton, Bournemouth and Winchester, is much higher than in rural areas and this is supported by the available data.
- 4.2 The Council could consider the provision of a direct access hostel in the district. However, whilst supported housing has been funded by Hampshire County Council (through the Supporting People programme), there are no funds available from Hampshire County Council and so New Forest District Council would have to provide funding for the scheme.
- 4.3 The capital funding requirement for a hostel would be high and would depend upon whether a scheme was purpose-built or utilised existing accommodation. However, a more significant issue would be revenue funding for any hostel which is likely to place a significant additional burden on Council general fund resources.
- 4.4 Hampshire County Council revenue funding for the Winchester Night Shelter is known to be around £61,000. However, additional funding is provided by Winchester Churches and the City Council so the full cost is not known. In Andover, the Dene court hostel is funded at approximately £300,000 (18 places.) In Southampton, funding is £560,000 a year which works out at a unit cost of approximately £190 a week per client (for 57 clients.)
- 4.5 Any hostel in the New Forest is likely to be smaller and income can be generated to cover some costs from housing benefit claims. However, there would still be fixed term staffing costs (including night cover) and the revenue cost to the Council is likely to be substantial.
- 4.6 Another option considered by the Task and Finish Group is the extension of Night Stop provision into older age groups. Whilst Night Stop schemes across the UK have always focused on the needs of younger people, one Night Stop scheme in England is experimenting with such provision. This would be a significantly cheaper option than a night shelter and would have the advantage of being operational in more than

one area of the district, but would not be able to provide accommodation for applicants with significant alcohol or other difficult problems.

- 4.7 The Group met with Jude Todd, the New Forest Night Stop co-ordinator to explore the prospects of extending Night Stop provision into the older age groups. Night Stop agreed with the principle that a local pilot of a 'Night Stop Plus' scheme would be of interest to Night Stop New Forest subject to funding.
- 4.8 It was agreed that Night Stop would put in a bid for funding to the Sub-Regional Rough-Sleeping Consortium to enable a pilot of a Night Stop scheme for older people.
- 4.9 The bid was considered at the November meeting of the Sub-Regional Rough-Sleeping Consortium and Night Stop was awarded £25,000. Night Stop is now working on developing the pilot which should be operational for a period of one year. If successful, there will be a need to identify alternative revenue funding after the pilot period.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 There are problems with rough sleeping in the New Forest and there is no direct access provision for rough sleepers over the age of 25. However, whilst the numbers are not well understood, it is unlikely that they are high enough to warrant the costly provision of a direct access hostel.
- 5.2 The Council has taken a number of measures to increase the supply of accommodation and is working with a consortium of other local authorities to seek to improve sub-regional provision.
- 5.3 Night Stop has been successful in obtaining funding to pilot a 'Night Stop Plus' scheme which may provide direct access accommodation for older rough sleepers.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 That members of the Community Overview and Scrutiny note the contents of this report.
- 6.2 That the Panel agrees that the Task and Finish Group maintains a 'watching brief' of the progress with the Night Stop pilot and reports back to the Panel at a later date.

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