

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date **07 March 2019**

Report of: **Managing Director of Fareham Housing**

Subject: **CHANGES TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL FUNDED SOCIAL INCLUSION SERVICES IN FAREHAM**

SUMMARY

Social Inclusion services are the services currently funded by Hampshire County Council for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This report sets out the findings of the County's 'Transformation to 2019 Review', the implications to provision of Social Inclusion services in Fareham, and work being undertaken by Fareham Borough Council to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Housing Scrutiny Panel:

- (a) consider the contents of this report and make any comments or raise any questions for clarification; and
- (b) recommends to the Executive that the Flexible Homeless Support Grant is used to fund the commissioning of Social Inclusion Services in partnership with Hampshire County Council from 1 August 2019.

INTRODUCTION

1. In December 2018, Hampshire County Council (HCC) agreed a £1.8 million reduction in the Adult's Health and Care budget for Social Inclusion services. These services, also known as Homelessness Support Services, provide support for homeless people living in supported housing schemes across the county together with community support to vulnerable individuals or families requiring help to access or maintain accommodation.
2. The decision by HCC to reduce funding for these services from 2019 was part of a set of broader savings options (known as Transformation to 2019 Programme) to reduce spending.
3. Although HCC has no direct statutory responsibilities to deliver homelessness support services, they accept that as these services are relied upon by some of the most vulnerable in society, they will continue to invest, albeit at a much-reduced rate.

CURRENT PROVISION OF SERVICES IN FAREHAM

4. Two Saints, the not-for-profit organisation who run the hostel at 101 Gosport Road, are currently under contract to HCC to provide Social Inclusion services across Fareham and Gosport. The contract, which commenced in April 2016 and ends 31 July 2019, includes the following provision:
 - **Street Outreach:** support for people sleeping rough
 - **Stage 1 accommodation:** 24/7 support at 101 Gosport Road, Fareham for single homeless people (18 units plus fluctuating number of emergency beds)
 - **Stage 2 accommodation:** short-term supported accommodation at Acton Lodge, West Street, Fareham with a lower level of support for single homeless people (10 units)
 - **Community Support:** short-term housing related support which is not attached to accommodation and available to any person who is homeless or at risk of homelessness regardless of their current housing status

CHANGES TO SERVICES IN FAREHAM

5. Senior officers have been working in partnership with HCC over the last 18 months to establish a mutually acceptable "core service" offer for the provision of HCC funded social inclusion services in Fareham. The current HCC contract with Two Saints will be modified and extended to 31 March 2021. HCC have included an option to extend this contract for a further 12 months which would be exercised if more time is needed to fully explore all the potential opportunities for recommissioning services after 31 March 2021.
6. **Stage 1 accommodation and Street Outreach:** HCC have agreed and approved sufficient funding which will ensure the Stage 1 accommodation at 101 Gosport Road and the Street Outreach service are retained. These services are critically important and the commitment from HCC to continue to fund these core services is extremely positive.

7. **Stage 2 accommodation:** To achieve the level of savings required within the Transformation to 2019 programme, HCC will cease funding Stage 2 accommodation in areas where Stage 1 accommodation is being retained. Therefore, the support services currently attached to Acton Lodge will end however residents will be able to access the revised Community Support service detailed below.
8. **Community Support:** Community Support will only be available to people who are moving on from 101 Gosport Road, living in Acton Lodge or are sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough and have complex support needs which mean they are unable to access support from other sources. Therefore, people who do not fall into these categories who currently use community support services will be directed to alternative support services.

PROPOSALS

9. It is vital that supported move-on opportunities remain to ensure there is an effective pathway out of rough sleeping and into independent living. Therefore, it is proposed that we supplement HCC's "core service" funding and co-commission the support services at Acton Lodge with HCC and Gosport Borough Council. It is also proposed that additional funding is also provided by both boroughs to double the Street Outreach resource.
10. The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant received from Central Government (payable over three years to support the implementation of the new Homelessness Reduction Act) still has sufficient reserves to fund these proposals which total £42,000 per annum (£70,000 for the period 1 August 2019 to 31 March 2021) and will secure the provision of homelessness support services for those in greatest need.
11. Analysis of the Community Support service users who will be unable to access this under the new arrangements indicates there has been a steady reduction in numbers over the last 12 months and the snapshot data (November 18) shows the number of individuals accessing this support in Fareham was 31. The majority of these people were also receiving support from one or more of the other services listed below.
12. HCC are now working with service providers, the Council and voluntary sector partners to implement the changes and ensure that people who may be affected are provided with clear information regarding alternative support services and how to get help to prevent homelessness in the future.
13. Alternative provision for existing Community Support service users include:
 - Homeless Prevention and Relief services provided by Fareham Borough Council's Housing Options Team.
 - HCC's Family Support Services and Wellbeing Centres
 - Universal Support Services funded by Central Government to support the roll out of Universal Credit
 - Citizens Advice who provide independent advice covering a wide range of problems which is available to all residents.
 - Tenancy Support Services provided by Fareham Borough Council and Registered Providers of social housing.

- Voluntary Sector Organisations such as the Money Advice Service, Step Change, Independent Age and Turn2us.
14. During this transition period, HCC will also assess individuals who may be affected and who it appears have care and support needs. Following assessment, where eligible care and support needs are identified, HCC has a duty under the Care Act 2014 to ensure these identified needs are met.
 15. There is a risk that, due to the vulnerability of some of the people who use the existing Community Support services, they may not seek or access the help they need to prevent homelessness. This could lead to an increase in homelessness and rough sleeping and subsequently an increase in demand for more intensive support services.
 16. Therefore, it is vitally important there remains an effective partnership between HCC and Fareham Borough Council to ensure access to alternative services is promoted across key stakeholders to minimise this risk.

OTHER EMERGING PRESSURES

Universal Credit

17. Universal Credit (UC) for new claimants was rolled out in Fareham in November 2018. We have undertaken a lot of work in partnership with our local Jobcentre to prepare claimants for the change, but there is still a risk that there will be an increase in homelessness, particularly amongst hard to reach groups. In January 2019, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Amber Rudd, announced a number of changes to UC, designed to ensure that the new benefit is delivered in a way “that meets the needs of claimants” and that plans to expand its further rollout nationally will only proceed with “utmost care”.
18. As a result, the planned migration of millions of existing benefit claimants to UC this year will be delayed allowing for an initial pilot of 10,000 claimants to be undertaken. Other changes announced include making it easier to access more regular UC payments and the creation of a private landlord portal – making it much easier for tenants in the private rented sector to have their rent paid directly to a landlord. This will help vulnerable tenants to better manage their money and give private landlords greater peace of mind that they will receive their rent in time, while reducing the likelihood of rent arrears. The Minister also confirmed that the four-year benefits freeze is unlikely to be continued beyond 2020. Although this won’t bridge the gap between frozen benefits and rising living costs, it should stop this gap from widening even further.
19. Citizens Advice have been provided with significant Central Government funding to provide comprehensive and practical support to Universal Credit claimants. This will include advice and assistance to help claimants manage their Universal Credit claim, with a focus on budgeting advice and digital support.
20. Whilst these reforms to UC are welcome, there is still considerable work to be done to ensure vulnerable people are provided with the financial support they need to access and maintain housing thereby preventing the risk of homelessness occurring.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

21. The Council’s statutory homelessness duties have significantly increased following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) on 3 April 2018. It

considerably extends our duties to prevent homelessness and requires us to have a sharper focus on preventing homelessness as early as possible and for all households, not just those in priority need. The HRA is the biggest change in homelessness legislation in 20 years and is a real positive change for homeless people.

22. Two additional full-time posts have been created within the team from funding provided by Central Government at a total cost of £84,300. These posts ensure the team can meet the Council's extended responsibilities and supplementary advisory commitments to any individual or family who is homeless or at risk of homelessness.
23. In addition to the new posts above, the Housing Team have recently created a new Welfare Support Officer post. This post will provide support and advice to our vulnerable tenants who are experiencing difficulties in maintaining their tenancies.
24. In October 2018, the HRA also introduced a new 'Duty to Refer' which means that specified public authorities must refer people who they have identified as homeless or threatened with homelessness to the local authority.
25. The following are public authorities with this duty to refer:
 - Prisons, youth offender institutions and youth offending teams
 - Secure training centres
 - Probation services
 - Job Centres
 - Hospitals (including A & E departments) and urgent treatment centres
 - Ministry of Defence
26. This duty will help to ensure that there is effective cross-service working to prevent homelessness as peoples' housing needs are considered when they come into contact with a range of public services.

ACHEIVEMENTS

27. People present to the Housing Options Service for advice and assistance for a variety of reasons and those reasons are not always directly attributable to housing. Whilst the housing market in Fareham is challenging, the problems are often rooted in people's financial capacity, employment, ill health, alcohol and/or drug misuse, relationship breakdown or other underlying causes.
28. Following the fundamental 'systems-thinking' review of the Housing Options service and the subsequent implementation of the HRA, our approach to preventing and tackling homelessness is now more holistic and focuses on the individual circumstances of each person.
29. Everyone who approaches the service for assistance (or who are referred to us) receives a comprehensive "strengths based" interview, where we look at all the housing options available to them and the strengths they have to ensure appropriate housing is secured. A personal housing plan is agreed, setting out the actions they will take and the support they need from us to resolve their housing problem. We bring in other agencies who have specialist skills and knowledge to help in this

process.

30. Between April 2018 and January 2019, just over 1000 people approached the Housing Options Service for assistance. The majority of these can be categorised as follows:

- Can I go onto the Housing Waiting List?
- I am on the Housing Waiting List, but my circumstances have changed
- I am on the Housing Waiting List, when will I receive an offer of accommodation?
- My home no longer meets my needs, what are my options?
- My circumstances will change in the future which means my home will not be available to me/will not meet my needs/will be unaffordable, what are my options?

31. In 215 cases, the team were required to take formal action to prevent or relieve homelessness in accordance with the new duties under the HRA. This is a significant increase to the 77 cases in the same period the previous year.

32. We have seen a 36% decrease in the number of people requiring emergency bed and breakfast accommodation and this is a reflection of work being undertaken by the team to prevent homelessness occurring.

33. Despite this, we are still seeing a relatively high number of individuals sleeping rough in the borough so in March 2018, we brought together relevant partners to look at the issues affecting or caused by rough sleepers in Fareham. Chaired by a member of our Housing Options Team the group, comprising representatives from the police, probation service, FBC Community Safety and Enforcement Teams, Two Saints, Southern Health and HCC commissioned substance misuse service Inclusion, met regularly to develop operational and strategic responses to rough sleeping in Fareham.

34. Following the rough sleeper conference in July 2018, the group has evolved to become known as Fareham StreetAid and is now supported by a number of charities (Catch 22, Acts of Kindness, Friends of the Homeless and One Community). Its aim is to help vulnerable people move off the streets through the provision of bespoke assistance tailored to meet the needs and issues of each individual.

35. The needs of rough sleepers are normally quite complex, spanning substance misuse issues, mental and physical health problems to financial and employment difficulties. As a direct result of StreetAid, joint outreach services are now in place thereby ensuring specialist advice and assistance is available to those sleeping rough.

36. Providing information to the public is also an important part of the group's work. Posters, leaflets and a dedicated website (www.farehamstreetaid.org.uk) have been developed and in January, representatives from the group held an information session in the shopping centre.

37. This multi-agency approach has made a real difference to some individuals who have slept rough in Fareham and some of our most challenging, entrenched rough sleepers are now in their own accommodation as a result of this work.

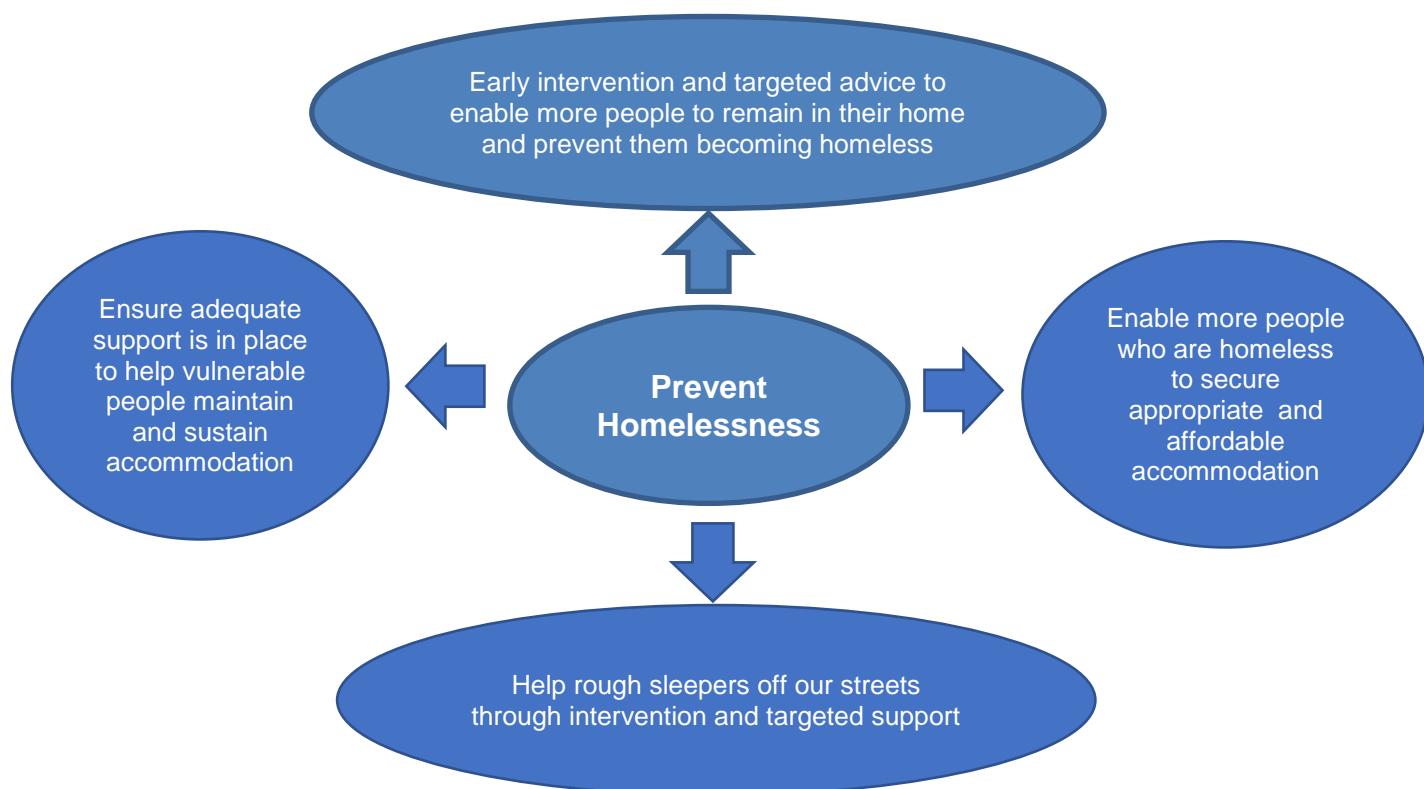
38. Every individual currently sleeping rough in Fareham is known to the StreetAid group and is being provided with tailored support to help them move off our streets. The journey from sleeping rough to secure accommodation can be long and complex and much depends upon the individual being willing to engage and accept the support offered.
39. We have repeated the Winter Bed Provision at 101 Gosport Road by providing funding to Two Saints to enable an additional 5 people per night to access the hostel between November 2018 and March 2019. All individuals taking up this assistance during the winter months are encouraged to work with the Housing Options Team and Two Saints to find more suitable, longer-term solutions. They are supported to claim the benefits they are entitled to and to access local services such as GP's for help with physical and mental health issues. They are also supported to engage with local substance misuse services. The individuals are signposted to any other support provider as appropriate, for example it may be appropriate to refer them to specialist supported housing such as young person's housing or mental health supported accommodation. The individuals are assisted to attend key appointments such as with probation services and to apply for jobs and attend interviews where appropriate.
40. By participating in a programme of support and housing assistance, the next steps for these individuals could include:
- gaining a proper room at the hostel
 - moving to Acton Lodge
 - moving into a council owed flat on a sublet arrangement with Two Saints
 - securing private accommodation with practical and financial assistance from both organisations
 - adding the individual to the housing list for social housing.
41. The extended winter bed provision has been in operation for 2½ months at the time of writing and outcomes so far are as follows:

Offered social housing	1
Taken into custody	1
Found own privately rented accommodation	3
Offered a room at the hostel	3
Gone to stay with family/friends	4
Given financial assistance to secure privately rented accommodation	4

WAY FORWARD

42. Our existing Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy was approved in 2014. Progress against the specific actions within the strategy were reviewed annually by the Housing Policy Development and Review Panel, with the final review carried out in November 2017.

43. The changes to services funded by HCC, the introduction of the HRA, the continued rollout of UC and publication of the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018 will continue to impact on the way we deliver our homeless prevention services.
44. Therefore, a new Homelessness Prevention Strategy is currently being drafted.



45. The key themes detailed above will form the strategic platform for a detailed action plan to prevent homelessness and assist those who find themselves in housing need.
46. It is proposed that a draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy will be ready for Member scrutiny and public consultation in the Summer.
47. One aspect we are keen to explore to supplement our existing services is the introduction of the 'Housing First' model of direct access provision for street homeless people. The principles of 'Housing First' were first developed in the USA and have since been introduced in parts of Europe. Interest in Housing First in England is starting to grow, and some organisations are already providing Housing First services but it is relatively small scale (c. 35 known projects in England). £28 million of funding for three Government-sponsored pilots in the West Midlands, Liverpool and Greater Manchester was announced in May 2018 and we await the findings of these pilots with interest.
48. The existing social inclusion services detailed previously in this report are sometimes not suitable for those with multiple and complex needs, whereas the 'Housing First' model has been shown to be effective in supporting people with a long history of street homelessness as there are no conditions around 'housing readiness' before being provided with a home. Instead, it is viewed as a stable platform from which multiple and complex needs and other key issues can be addressed through wrap-around and personalised support.

49. Generally, the transition from street homelessness to independent living for those with complex needs involves a number of steps that an individual must progress through and for those with substance misuse or mental health problems, are usually dependent on engagement with treatment services. Whilst this approach leads to independent living for some rough sleepers, for others it has been neither successful nor an attractive route out of homelessness.
50. It is reasonable to suggest that the introduction of 'Housing First' as an additional form of housing provision in Fareham will play a role in eradicating rough sleeping in the borough. However, this will require long-term funding and a steady availability of appropriate housing to ensure individuals have access to permanent accommodation and support. This can only be achieved through successful partnership with an established Housing First provider, such as Two Saints, which will be explored in more detail once the evaluation of the Government-led pilots is published.
51. Hampshire Probation Service have just two 'Approved Premises' in the county and one of those is in Fareham. Some ex-offenders spending time there preparing for their release back into the community become familiar with the area and form social and/or support networks here and as a result, wish to make Fareham or our neighbouring boroughs their permanent home. Effective joint working between the probation service and our Housing Options team generally leads to positive outcomes for these individuals however there remains a risk of rough sleeping for some. We therefore await with interest, the Government's plans to review the support provided to offenders who are at risk of rough sleeping on release from prison.

CONCLUSION

52. HCC's decision to reduce their investment in Social Inclusion Services in Fareham, whilst disappointing, has been developed in partnership with officers and stakeholders. The extended contract between HCC and Two Saints, together with the proposed co-commissioned services detailed above will safeguard provision for our most vulnerable individuals who are sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough until March 2021.
53. The development of a new Homelessness Prevention Strategy, aligned with the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy, will set out our commitment and resources to meet our statutory homelessness duties and future proof the borough's homelessness services beyond March 2021.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Caroline Newman (Ext 4645)