

| | |
|--|---|
| Report to: | STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING BOARD |
| Date: | 24 July 2019 |
| Executive Member/Reporting Officer: | Cllr Gerald P Cooney – Executive Member (Housing, Planning and Employment) Emma Varnam – Assistant Director, Operations & Neighbourhoods |
| Subject: | UPDATE ON HOMELESSNESS, ROUGH SLEEPING IN TAMESIDE & THE "A BED EVERY NIGHT" SERVICE |
| Report Summary: | This report provides an update on rough sleeping in Tameside, the work undertaken to tackle rough sleeping & the “A Bed Every Night” (ABEN) service. |
| Recommendations: | Strategic Commissioning Board to receive the report with following recommendations for Cabinet: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to acknowledge the success of the ABEN and wider rough sleeping service and to support to the development of work of the service. 2. Agree to the immediate identification of an alternative venue for the ABEN Service. 3. Cease the delivery of ABEN Service at Ryecroft Library and transfer to a new location as soon as practically possible. 4. to acknowledge the welcome announcement of financial support for the ABEN from the GM Joint Commission Board allowing for a joined up response across the public sector of healthcare and housing need. |
| Corporate Plan: | Provision of services for rough sleepers supports the corporate plan by helping some of the most vulnerable residents of the borough to live well through nurturing communities. |
| Policy Implications: | Provision of services for rough sleepers contributes significantly to the delivery of the Council’s “Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021” in tackling rough sleeping head-on and providing positive long-term outcomes for those accessing the service. This strategy was approved by the Council in September 2018. |
| Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer) | The ABEN service is currently funded in its entirety by grant funding which has been confirmed to run until at least June 2020. If this funding ceases after June 2020 a review of the service provided within Tameside will need to be carried out. As stated in the report, the service also receives an additional grant: Rough Sleeping Initiative funding from MHCLG which funds specific schemes. Currently, the costs of using Ryecroft Hall are funded through ABEN, however any set up costs of a new hub would need to be assessed once an appropriate building has been identified. |
| Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor) | Whilst there is no statutory requirement to provide overnight accommodation for rough sleepers unless they meet the criteria set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (with effect from 3 April 2018), Central and Local Government strategy is to work |

to devise mechanisms to reduce numbers, and so any funding received to support these strategies must be used appropriately and in accordance with the same. Data is required to be collated and analysed under the Act, and so compliance with strategies is monitored nationally. It would be helpful to demonstrate that whilst a priority service it is providing value for money on the significant cost avoidance it achieves particularly for partner organisations.


Risk Management:

Failing to provide services aimed at tackling rough sleeping could lead to a rise in the number of rough sleepers across the borough and an increase in vulnerability for those at risk of rough sleeping.

Access to Information:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| APPENDIX 1 | infographic of key info re bed for a night service. |
|-------------------|---|

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report author John Gregory – Head of Community Safety & Homelessness:

 Telephone - 0161 342 3520

 E-mail: john.gregory@tameside.gov.uk

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Homelessness and rough sleeping have significantly increased over the past decade, both regionally and nationally as well as locally within Tameside. Government figures show that there were 1768 people sleeping rough in England in 2010, a figure which rose to 4677 by 2018.
- 1.2 Although the figures are much higher in city centre locations, every town & borough in the UK has its own rough sleeping problem – in Tameside, there were 7 people rough sleeping across the whole borough in 2012, but this had risen to 42 by 2017.
- 1.3 There are many reasons why some people end up sleeping rough – poverty, unemployment, drug & alcohol addiction, debt, family breakdowns, mental health and a wide range of other issues can result in our most vulnerable residents being on the street with no prospect of obtaining a place to live or even a bed for the night.
- 1.4 Local Authorities have a statutory duty to house certain people who are homeless, but this duty does not cover people who are considered “intentionally homeless” or who do not have a “priority need” – for example those who have been evicted for failing to pay rent, or for tenancy issues related to drug/alcohol issues. Some people have no recourse to public funds, and as such the Authority is unable to house them, which can also result in people having no other option but to sleep rough.
- 1.5 Sleeping rough brings with it a wide range of risks for people who are already extremely vulnerable. Spending just one night on the streets will make a person feel unwell. Spending numerous nights out – with little or no prospect of getting off the streets, can very quickly lead to serious physical and mental health problems. If addiction is the primary cause of someone rough sleeping, then sleeping rough will tend to increase their use of drugs or alcohol in order to mask the situation they find themselves in. Even those with no addiction issues can very quickly be drawn into drug and/or alcohol use once they start sleeping rough.
- 1.6 Rough sleepers are also vulnerable to abuse & exploitation and are much more likely to become victims of crime.
- 1.7 Rough sleeping is a key priority contained within the Tameside corporate plan under the heading of “nurturing communities”.
- 1.8 Rough sleeping was likely to continue to increase in Tameside and across Greater Manchester unless significant action was taken.

2. ROUGH SLEEPING INITIATIVE

- 2.1 In 2018/19, Tameside Council successfully applied for a grant under a new scheme announced by the Ministry of Housing, Community & Local Government (MHCLG) – the “Rough Sleeping Initiative” (RSI).
- 2.2 The 2018/19 grant was £309,115 and was used to implement several schemes designed to tackle rough sleeping in Tameside during 2018/19.
- 2.3 The schemes funded by this grant include the employment of specific members of staff tasked with co-ordinating work to tackle rough sleeping, additional outreach workers, additional accommodation units, winter provision and a rent guarantor scheme.
- 2.4 The RSI work has been closely monitored by MHCLG and Tameside has recently been granted a further £420,000 for 2019/20.

3. “A BED EVERY NIGHT” (ABEN)

- 3.1 When he was elected as Mayor of Greater Manchester in May 2017, Andy Burnham made tackling homelessness and rough sleeping a top priority. As part of his pledge to tackle rough sleeping, he started the Mayor’s Homelessness fund – a charitable fund designed from the outset to help deal with homelessness & rough sleeping across Greater Manchester.
- 3.2 In Spring 2018, the GM Mayor approached all 10 GM authorities with a proposal to introduce an innovative new scheme called “A Bed Every Night” (ABEN). The Mayor asked for assistance from the Authorities in offering a bed in a safe, warm environment every night between 1 November 2018 and 31 March 2019 for anyone who was rough sleeping.
- 3.3 Funding for the scheme would come from the Mayor’s homeless charity, but the scheme would be managed and operated by each individual GM Local Authority. Authorities were free to design their own services, without excessive interference from the Combined Authority.
- 3.4 Every winter, until the winter of 2017/2018, Tameside, along with all other Local Authorities was statutorily obliged to provide shelter for all rough sleepers if the temperature fell below freezing. The opportunity to extend this provision throughout the winter months was seen as a significant opportunity to provide a much improved winter service for rough sleepers in Tameside.
- 3.5 Work commenced over the summer of 2018 to design an ABEN service for Tameside and to identify premises in which rough sleepers could be accommodated. Working with the third sector, two church halls – St Christopher’s in Ashton and Union Church in Hyde - were identified as appropriate buildings & agreement was reached with both churches that they would be used alternately for the ABEN provision in Tameside for the six month proposed period of the scheme.
- 3.6 Provision at the Churches was basic; single camp beds in a dormitory style with very little in the way of luxury, but service users would be provided with clean bedding, a place to wash & shower, and a basic meal in the evenings and mornings. The service would only be available between 9.00pm and 9.00am, but would be open every night, irrespective of the weather conditions.
- 3.7 In the last week of October 2018, an official rough sleeper count was carried out & 36 individuals were found to be sleeping rough in Tameside – 6 less than the count earlier in the year, but still a significant number. It was unknown at this time how popular the ABEN service was likely to become, but 20 bed spaces were immediately available for male rough sleepers, with provision for the much smaller number of females to be given in bed & breakfast accommodation.
- 3.8 Through November, the number of people accessing the service quickly grew. In mid-December, it became clear that the space available in the churches would soon be insufficient & that a further building was required if the Council were to fulfil its commitment to provide a bed every night for all rough sleepers.
- 3.9 After considering – and rejecting – a number of possible options, the old library building in the grounds of Ryecroft Hall was identified as a suitable location. The building had only recently been vacated by a pupil referral unit, it was in good condition, was safe and easily accessible. There was also enough room to accommodate any additional rough sleepers who could not be accommodated at the church halls.

- 3.10 Beds and supplies were taken to the Ryecroft building during the week before Christmas, but no-one was accommodated there until the new year, when numbers of people presenting as rough sleeping started to rise again.
- 3.11 By late February, the service (across all sites) was accommodating between 32 and 36 people every night. In addition to the simple fact that these individuals were accommodated overnight, the service started to demonstrate a number of other longer term advantages.
- 3.12 Many of the rough sleepers had not had any kind of home for a number of years, but having access to the ABEN scheme allowed them to start to form some routines in their lives – routines which many of them had struggled to build for a long time.
- 3.13 Having the majority of the boroughs rough sleeping population in one or two places every night allowed the Homelessness team to build support around the service users much more effectively than they had ever done before. Drug & alcohol rehabilitation, housing options, welfare support and physical & mental health services could all be delivered to the service users whose previous chaotic lifestyles meant they were often unable to attend appointments and would often “fall off the grid”.
- 3.14 Most significantly of all, however, was the opportunity to work regularly and importantly build trust with service users to try to get them into more permanent accommodation. It is this area of work, which is probably the most significant success of the service. Since 1 November 2018, more than 40 ABEN service users have been moved into more permanent accommodation, and no longer need the short-term hostel accommodation offered by the ABEN service.
- 3.15 A large proportion of the success of the Tameside ABEN scheme is down to the assistance of a number of charitable partners, who have brought not just help and assistance, but also a breadth of knowledge of the Tameside rough sleeping population, and the ability to connect with even the most entrenched rough sleepers – some of whom would not want to engage with “officials”.
- 3.16 The service has also evolved since starting in November 2018. In the early days, some rough sleepers were excluded from the scheme because of choices they made. For example, there was no provision for couples, or rough sleepers with pets. As the service continued to develop, provision for both these groups was established.
- 3.17 A rough sleepers count was carried out in the last week of March 2019, and in 6 months, the number of rough sleepers in Tameside had fallen by 2/3rds from 36 to 12. A further count was carried out on the night of 30/31 May, and the number had fallen further to 9.
- 3.18 No other programmes in recent years have led to such a significant reduction in the numbers of rough sleepers in Tameside, and the Tameside scheme has been praised by the Combined Authority as a trailblazing scheme which has had an overwhelmingly positive effect.
- 3.19 Please see **Appendix A** for the ABEN Infographic.

4. CONTINUATION OF THE ABEN SERVICE

- 4.1 The initial request from the GM Mayor was for the ABEN service to operate as a pilot scheme during the winter months of November 2018 to March 2019.
- 4.2 As the successes of the service became more and more apparent, by early February, Authorities across Greater Manchester were beginning to realise that ending the service in

March would cause serious problems for the service users, who would likely go back to sleeping rough, with all the problems associated with returning to the streets. Discussions started to take place about how to continue the service beyond 31 March 2019.

- 4.3 In Mid-March, Andy Burnham announced that he was attempting to identify additional funding streams which would allow the service to continue throughout the year. In the meantime, he announced that funding would continue, so that the service could remain operational until the end of May 2019.
- 4.4 In late May 2019, the Mayor announced further additional funding which would allow ABEN to move into “phase 2”. The funding will remain in place until 1 June 2020, so the service now has a clear 12 months ahead, to allow authorities to build on the significant successes of the first phase.
- 4.5 Continuation of the ABEN service also contributes significantly to the delivery of the Council’s “Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021” in tackling rough sleeping head-on and providing positive long-term outcomes for those accessing the service. This strategy was approved by the Council in September 2018.

5. ISSUES

- 5.1 The scheme has not been without its problems, however. The rough sleeping population contains a number of individuals with serious addiction issues, mental health problems, criminal histories and other problems, which in many cases have been the cause of their homelessness in the first place. These issues can and do occasionally result in minor instances of disorder and anti-social behaviour occurring both inside and outside the ABEN sites.
- 5.2 Understandably, local residents living close to the ABEN sites, have expressed their concerns about a homeless hostel opening close to their homes. Some have been quite vocal in expressing their concerns, particularly in relation to the proximity of the site to a public park and children’s playground. Protests have been held, a petition has been organised and residents have written to local Elected Members and MPs with their concerns.
- 5.3 Measures have been put in place in an attempt to alleviate the residents’ concerns. The site is now staffed by security guards during the day as well as at night, to prevent service users from hanging around outside the building or in the vicinity of the park. Residents are carefully selected for the Ryecroft site in an attempt to ensure only the most settled individuals stay there until they can be rehoused.
- 5.4 Despite these measures, however, Residents continue to express their concerns. Had the service ended as planned on 31 March 2019, this would no longer be an issue, but with the announcement that the service has now been extended to June 2020, the use of Ryecroft library now needs to be immediately reviewed.
- 5.5 To further compound the current accommodation issues, Union Church in Hyde have now given notice that they can no longer allow their church hall to be used for the ABEN service, as they require the hall for their own use over the summer.
- 5.6 The search is on for a more appropriate premise from which to operate the ABEN service. Any such move needs to be carefully planned in order to minimise any potential disruption to local residents and to the ABEN service users.

- 5.7 There are currently a number of empty and unused nursing homes within the borough. These homes could provide a suitable location for the service, providing the locations are deemed appropriate & the buildings are fit for purpose.
- 5.8 It should also be noted that all ABEN service users are accommodated within the service as their only other option would be to sleep rough, with all the risks associated with rough sleeping. Any change in location would, therefore require the new location to be complete and ready before any service users were asked to leave Ryecroft. Failing to do so would lead to serious issues for some very vulnerable individuals.

6. THE WIDER HOMELESSNESS PICTURE

- 6.1 Rough sleeping is not the only issue faced by the homelessness service and, in fact, could be considered to be the “tip of the iceberg”.
- 6.2 Multiple issues such as poverty, universal credit, rogue landlords, domestic breakdowns and abuse have led to a significant rise in the numbers of families and individuals becoming homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- 6.3 In 2017, 560 people or families were officially homeless in Tameside – a figure which was more than double that of two years previously and which is set to continue to rise over the next few years. 160 families are currently living in temporary accommodation with demand for homes greatly outstripping supply.
- 6.4 Tameside Council commissions its homelessness service and that commission is currently held by Jigsaw Homes (formerly New Charter). Since New Charter was amalgamated with Jigsaw Homes, there is uncertainty about Jigsaw Homes continuing to provide this service beyond the end of the current contract in 2020.

7. THE FUTURE OF THE ABEN SERVICE

- 7.1 The TMBC Homelessness service has ambitions for the ABEN service to be a part of a cutting edge provision for rough sleepers which not only provides them with an initial place to stay, but which also wraps services around the hostel provision & works with individuals to tackle their problems, improve their health & wellbeing and get them back into suitable long-term housing.
- 7.2 Now that ongoing funding has been confirmed, together with the RSI funding, these ambitions are much more realistic and the Head of Service is keen to progress with the further development of these proposals.
- 7.3 Once a new ABEN site has been identified, the proposal is that the site becomes a permanent rough sleeping “resource”, staffed day and night with skilled people who are able to engage with the rough sleeping community & offer whatever support is needed. Establishment of the resource centre will be based on the recognition of the complex nature of the problems which lead to rough sleeping and will employ an early intervention model in tackling these issues & supporting people not only back into housing, but in improving their quality of life over the long term, rather than just the short term. The recent announcement of support from the GM Joint Commissioning Board will ensure that healthcare needs will be met in a timely and holistic manner and ensure that homeless families and individuals have appropriate care preventing an escalation of conditions.
- 7.4 A number of options for “move-on” accommodation are also currently being explored. If additional move-on accommodation can be identified, this will reduce the number of people

accessing the ABEN service & will go some way towards accommodating rough sleepers in a more permanent location, rather than the simple hostel-like provision in ABEN.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 As set out at the front of the report.