

Report to:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date:	27 November 2019
Executive Member/Reporting Officer:	Councillor Gerald Cooney – Housing, Planning and Employment Ian Saxon – Director, Operations & Neighbourhoods
Subject:	UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S ROUGH SLEEPING SERVICE & CHANGE OF LOCATION FOR THE "A BED EVERY NIGHT" PROVISION
Report Summary:	This report summarises the work carried out over the last 12 months to reduce rough sleeping in Tameside & outlines a proposal to move the existing "A Bed Every Night" (ABEN) provision from Ryecroft Library to St Anne's Resource Centre
Recommendations:	That the success of the Homelessness Team in significantly reducing rough sleeping across the borough is recognised & approval is given to continuing the service into its next phase which will look to prevent homelessness & rough sleeping in a more sustainable way, keeping rough sleeping figures as low as possible for the foreseeable future. That approval is given to commence work on the St Anne's building in preparation for moving the ABEN service.
Corporate Plan:	Reducing rough sleeping across the borough contributes towards the corporate priority of living well.
Policy Implications:	Reducing rough sleeping also positively supports the work in implementing the Council's strategy to prevent homelessness.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	Funding has been identified from grants that have been received and could be utilised to implement this project, but it is necessary that the costs are individually identified and a correct estimate of the costs is reviewed. No additional corporate funding will be required.
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	The Diocese has very strict legal framework for such matters and it is highly unlikely that they will allow any building works or delivery of the service in advance of legal agreements/licenses being in place. Accordingly, it will be necessary for Estates and Legal to be engaged on this work expediently.
Risk Management:	Failing to provide an adequate service for rough sleepers brings a significant risk of harm to the rough sleeping population & an increased risk that criminal behaviour & anti-social behaviour associated with rough sleeping will continue to increase. Failing to move the ABEN service from Ryecroft Library brings a risk of increased issues in the local area & an increase in complaints from local residents.

Access to Information:

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

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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. TAMESIDE COUNCIL’S APPROACH TO TACKLING THE PROBLEM

- 2.1 In autumn 2018, Tameside Council started to develop a range of approaches & interventions with the specific aim of reducing rough sleeping across the borough – initially through the introduction of hostel type accommodation, but also with a longer-term aim of providing appropriate permanent accommodation for people who are, or at risk of sleeping rough.

Rough Sleeping Initiative
- 2.2 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).

- 2.3 The 2018/19 grant was £309,115 and was used to implement several schemes designed to tackle rough sleeping in Tameside during 2018/19.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 The RSI work has been closely monitored by MHCLG and Tameside has recently been granted a further £420,000 for 2019/20.
- “A Bed Every Night” (ABEN)**
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 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.
- 2.12 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.
- 2.13 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.

- 2.14 After considering 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.
- 2.15 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.
- 2.16 By late February, the service 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.
- 2.17 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.
- 2.18 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”.
- 2.19 Most significantly of all, however, was the opportunity to work regularly 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.
- 2.20 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”.
- 2.21 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.
- 2.22 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.
- 2.23 On 26 September 2019, another count was carried out & the number of rough sleepers had fallen again – this time to 2.
- 2.24 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. The reduction in numbers in Tameside has been significantly better than any other Greater Manchester Authority to date.

3. THE NEED TO MOVE THE SERVICE

- 3.1 Now that the service has been successfully established, there is a need to move to a more suitable location which will allow the Rough Sleeping Team to continue to develop the service and provide an appropriate hub for the service. The Team have ambitions beyond the early successful reduction in rough sleeping numbers and a better location for the service will allow further creative ideas and interventions to be developed in an appropriate environment.
- 3.2 Despite capacity issues and a lack of specialism in estates management, managers from the Community Safety & Homelessness team conducted an extensive search for a property which was suitable to house the ABEN service.
- 3.3 A property was identified on the Plantation Industrial Estate off Whitelands Road in Ashton-under-Lyne. Although this property was an empty industrial unit, initial surveys were carried out, and it was concluded that, with the right changes to the layout of the building, the Plantation unit could potentially house the ABEN service.
- 3.4 When the project was costed out, however, it was estimated that it would cost in excess of £250,000 to make the building suitable for use – an amount which was considered prohibitively expensive.
- 3.5 A further search was conducted in an effort to identify a suitable building which could house the ABEN element of the service & following negotiations throughout late September & early October with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford and the local Catholic Priest, an opportunity has arisen for the service to potentially move to a building adjacent to St Anne's Church on Burlington St in Ashton-under-Lyne.
- 3.6 The building identified as a potential ABEN location was previously occupied by Tameside Council and used as an adult learning centre. The building was vacated by the Council approximately 10 years ago and has remained unoccupied since then, but initial inspections of the building have shown that it is in a serviceable condition and that, with some minor updates and refresh works, it would be an ideal location for the ABEN service.

4. THE FUTURE OF THE ROUGH SLEEPING SERVICE

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 Moving the service from Ryecroft to St Annes will allow the site becomes a 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.

- 4.4 Alongside the obvious benefits to the rough sleeping service, the Church are in the process of developing the ground floor area of the building into a community “hub”, including a café where anyone from the local community can attend, have a meal, carry out voluntary work etc. Alongside this community hub, the residents of the ABEN hostel will be welcome to spend the day in the ground floor area, receive support & address any ongoing welfare needs.
- 4.5 Prior to moving the service, some work is required to bring the building up to a modern, residential standard. Fire alarms, for example, will need to be refreshed, showers & laundry facilities need to be installed and the building needs decorating & carpeting.
- 4.6 Meetings with the Diocese have been extremely positive & the Council have received approval to carry out more detailed assessments of the required work.
- 4.7 The Head of Service is acutely aware of the need to move the service as soon as practically possible & early indications from contracted surveyors are that the service could potentially move into St Anne’s in time for Christmas 2019. With this in mind, the Service should be able to move out of Ryecroft Library by 31 December 2019 at the latest, but with the aim of moving out by Christmas 2019.
- 4.8 Lease arrangements have been discussed in detail with the Diocese, and they have shown recognition that the Council will be making a capital investment in the improvements to the building and as such will allow the Council to use the building in exchange for a peppercorn rent. Work is underway in drafting a suitable lease which protects both parties & ensures clarity over which body is responsible for which elements of running the building during the period of the lease.
- 4.9 The final costs of the move have not yet been calculated, but funding has been identified within existing budgets to cover the cost of the move.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 As set out at the front of the report.