

## **Housing, Homelessness and The Night Shelter**

### **1. Purpose**

This report:

- provides the context for homelessness in Walsall
- provides information on initiatives aimed at supporting residents to remain in their home, or access and sustain a home if sleeping rough
- invites Health and Wellbeing partners to consider how they can contribute to the prevention and relief of homelessness.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Board note the contents of the report, and consider what further support their organisations can provide to help prevent homelessness, or support rough sleeper initiatives and the Night Shelter in Walsall.

### **3. Report detail**

- 3.1 A full review of Homelessness Services was undertaken in 2017 and a new Walsall Homelessness Strategy 2018 to 2022 was agreed at Cabinet on 21 March 2018. A variety of partners were consulted during the preparation of the Homelessness Strategy, including Public Health, Adults and Children's Services, and Housing Associations. A full copy of the Review and Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan, can be found on the Council's Website at: [https://go.walsall.gov.uk/housing\\_strategies\\_and\\_policies](https://go.walsall.gov.uk/housing_strategies_and_policies)
- 3.2 The Walsall Homelessness Review 2017 confirmed a number of key facts including:
- Parents, other relatives, or friends, no longer willing or able to accommodate is the main reason why people become homeless in Walsall. Homelessness occurring due to non-violent as well as violent breakdown of a relationship with a partner is the second main cause of homelessness;
  - The number of people experiencing street homeless in the Walsall area increased by two-thirds during the past five years, standing at 26 in 2016/17. The last annual Rough Sleeper count was completed on 22 November 2017 and reported a small decrease to 20 street homeless in Walsall on that night;
  - The number of households registered for social housing has increased by 42% since 2013.
- 3.3 The Homelessness Strategy included Walsall's response to the April 2018 implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This Act includes:

- Placing a new duty on Councils to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness (which extends to single people and couples not in priority need).
- A duty to refer, for specified public authorities, to notify local housing authorities of service users they think are homeless or may be threatened with homelessness within 56 days. This duty came into place on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018 and includes prisons, probation, Jobcentre Plus, Accident and Emergency/urgent treatment centres/hospitals providing in-patient treatment, social services. There is a dedicated webpage and referral link on the council's website at [https://go.walsall.gov.uk/finding\\_a\\_home](https://go.walsall.gov.uk/finding_a_home)

3.4 The Homelessness Strategy contains a comprehensive action plan which includes a number of key actions:

- Establish protocols with external bodies such as the Manor Hospital and criminal justice system to ensure that homelessness is prevented at the point of discharge  
**Update**— a discharge protocol has been drafted with the Manor Hospital and a discharge protocol has been agreed and signed with the Probation service. Based on last year's Night Shelter experience specific attention needs to be given to the critical transition from prison to community at the end of a period of custodial remand or sentence.
- End the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, and remodel the Council's current temporary accommodation from the existing flatted block provision to a dispersed accommodation model  
**Update** – a Temporary Accommodations Options Appraisal is currently underway and will be concluded by early November to report to Cabinet with a preferred option on 12 December 2018.
- Revise the existing Allocations Scheme and carry out an options appraisal on the establishment of a common housing register and allocations policy  
**Update** – the Council was successful in attracting £14,000 from the Local Government Association Housing Advisers Programme, which will provide dedicated external consultancy time to work with partners to revise the Allocations Scheme, and consider the implications of a common housing register. This work has recently commenced and will report to Cabinet in February 2019.
- Establish joint commissioning arrangements to tackle homelessness  
**Update** – Money Home Job and Children's Services have come together to jointly commission housing and support services for young people (16 to 25, and up to 29 in some cases) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The commission for this service will go out to tender in October, and be reported to 12 December 2018 Cabinet for approval to award, with a January to March 2019 contract start. The service will provide housing options for young people whatever level of support they need on a flexible basis, and will ensure there are a greater variety of options for our young people to remain in the Borough.
- Future commission of accommodation and support services for street homeless to be changed to a Housing First led service  
**Update** – in November 2017 Money Home Job and Public Health successfully commissioned a Housing First pilot with Accord and whg providing 25 properties and support for some of our most entrenched rough sleepers. This self funded pilot was commissioned to avoid the entrenched rough sleepers who accessed the night shelter over the winter

period having to have to return to the streets when it closed on 4 April 2018. This is an 'early action' initiative by Walsall in advance of the West Midlands Combined Authority regional pilot, from which Walsall will receive £1.3m to help house and support an additional 71 rough sleepers (bringing the total to 96 including the existing 25) over the next 3 years. The commission for the new service will go out to tender in October, and be reported to 12 December 2018 Cabinet for approval to award, with a January 2019 contract start. Experience from running the pilot is that its essential there is clear, timely and appropriate access to mental health and addiction services. It is expected that most of the Housing First referrals will come from the Council's Outreach Team and Night Shelter.

- 3.5 In 2017 in response to the visible rise in rough sleepers, Walsall Council Public Health commissioned the Black Country YMCA to deliver a Winter Night Shelter for rough sleepers in Walsall from November 2017 until March 2018. A total of 150 rough sleepers accessed the service during this period (112 males and 38 females). The quality of this initiative was complemented by a tremendous response from local people who volunteered to support the service, with 102 volunteers offering 3800 hours support.
- 3.6 Earlier in the year Walsall Proud Partnership endorsed the writing of a joint bid for funding from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for 2018-19 to help improve the pathways for rough sleepers. The majority of the initiatives out-lined in the joint bid were approved, and funding of £354,000 has been provided.
- 3.7 This new funding has been used to commission the services of the Black Country YMCA to deliver the Winter Night Shelter for an extended period from October 2018 through to March 2019. The opportunity to volunteer will again be offered and is being coordinated and supported this year by One Walsall.
- 3.8 The funding has allowed for the appointment of a new team of outreach workers who will be available throughout the year to help support local rough sleepers to access health care and find suitable accommodation. A local charity 'Street Teams' has also been appointed to offer tailored specialist support to a group of entrenched female rough sleepers to secure and sustain accommodation (some of whom are involved in the street sex work). This project is called 'New Beginnings' and Accord have already begun to provide properties for this vulnerable client group.
- 3.9 Finally, the council and partners have been successful in attracting a further £412,174 (provisional indication of funding from MHCLG) to deliver the same services (Outreach, Night Shelter, New Beginnings) in 2019/20, and additional services including GP and other health related support.

#### **4. Implications for Joint Working arrangements:**

Good joint working arrangements are crucial to the delivery of Walsall's Homelessness Strategy. A number of actions contained in the Strategy are to be delivered by the Council's partners. These include:

- the Council developing and operating successful discharge protocols with Probation and Manor Hospital to prevent homelessness;
- the Council agreeing a prevention of eviction protocol with Housing Associations to try and reduce evictions if possible, and if not possible, to ensure that any eviction is 'managed' to minimise disruption to vulnerable individuals

## 5. Health and Wellbeing Priorities:

Walsall's Homelessness Strategy relates to all of the priorities and obsessions identified within 'The Walsall Plan: Our Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2020'.

### Background papers

Walsall's Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 2022

### Authors

Adrian Roche – Head of Social Inclusion

☎ 653746

✉ [Adrian.roche@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Adrian.roche@walsall.gov.uk)

Neil Hollyhead – Senior Housing Strategy Officer

☎ 655411

✉ [neil.hollyhead@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:neil.hollyhead@walsall.gov.uk)