

Report to:	TOURISM, ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Andrew Foot, Head of Housing
Date of Meeting	6 June 2018

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the extent and causes of homelessness in Blackpool, the response of the Council and partner agencies, and plans for further development of those responses through the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 That the Scrutiny Committee considers the issues set out in this report and the effectiveness of the response of the Council and its partners.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 To help further develop effective responses to homelessness in Blackpool.

- 3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

- 3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

- 3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

None

4.0 Council Priority:

- 4.1 The relevant Council Priority is: "Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience".

5.0 Background Information

None

6.0 Homelessness in Blackpool

The extent of homelessness in Blackpool is shown by:

- Around 2,900 households (out of 64,000 total households in the town) sought help from the Council's Housing Options team in 2017/18 because they were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This level of contacts has remained broadly the same over the last 5 years.
- Over 1,400 were helped to prevent homelessness by securing their existing accommodation or finding new accommodation, and a further 700 received advice. The number where homelessness was prevented has increased significantly over the last three years.
- There were 785 households in 2017/18 who received homelessness assessments and 603 of these households were found to be homeless. This means that Blackpool has over 3 times the national average number of homeless households per head of population, with the majority of applications from single people and couples without children. But the total number of households found to be homeless has reduced slightly over the last three years with more successful prevention, reducing from 702 in 2015/16 to 603 in 2017/18.
- Temporary accommodation hostels owned by the Council and managed by Blackpool Coastal Housing have had very high levels of occupancy for the last 24 months, and this has led to fairly frequent use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Temporary accommodation is provided to households who are homeless and in priority need because they are vulnerable, including families with children. An increased proportion of households homeless and in priority need - over 20% - was because of violent relationship breakdown.
- The number of rough sleepers is rising in Blackpool, although at a slower rate than national rises. Rough sleeping has become more prominent in Blackpool in the last couple of years, linked to begging and street drinking. Around a third of people found on the streets during the day time are rough sleepers, with the November 2017 count identifying 13 rough sleepers in the town at that point, 8 of whom did not have a connection to the town. This is up from 11 in 2016 and is the second highest total in Lancashire after 19 in Preston. The total number of individuals found to have slept rough at least once in a year has increased significantly from 160 in 2015/16 to 235 in 2017/18.

6.2 So while there has been some success in preventing homelessness and reducing the number of households who end up homeless, the rise in the total number of people who have resorted to rough sleeping is a particular cause for concern, with more

people who have complex problems and need a lot of support.

- 6.3 Social issues are a more important driver of homelessness in Blackpool than the unavailability of accommodation. A lack of accommodation is not the principal reason behind homelessness in Blackpool because of the large supply of easily accessible flats in the town, but the biggest challenge is to give the right support to help people address issues in their lives. The increasingly large group of people who have rough slept at least once in the year often move in and out of accommodation, finding and then quickly losing it through chaotic lifestyles or because of social isolation. This is very different to the situation in many other places where simple lack of access to accommodation does play a significant role in homelessness.
- 6.4 The reasons for rising numbers of rough sleepers are likely to be the impact of welfare reform and reducing support services. The large majority of rough sleepers have other issues or complex needs, predominantly substance/alcohol misuse or mental health issues. The main reasons why people stay on the streets are:
- A refusal of help to return to their place of origin – we cannot house everyone who arrives in Blackpool from other places and around 60% of rough sleepers in Blackpool are new to the town. Instead, we look to help re-connect and fund travel home.
 - Homes have been repeatedly abandoned as people struggle to manage a home and are wary of trying again; rough sleeping can sometimes provide a social environment and freedom that seems better than being isolated in a flat or hostel. Most rough sleepers in Blackpool have suffered significant trauma in their lives that have led to this desperate situation and this has to be addressed.
- 6.5 Paradoxically, the easy accessibility of homes in the private rented sector, and the transience that this fuels, leads to generally high levels of homelessness. There is a tendency in Blackpool for tenancies to continually break down, because of the poor quality of accommodation, the poor behaviour of some tenants, and the expectation that there will always be somewhere else available. This leads to many people getting into cycles of finding and losing their accommodation, often with their chances of getting somewhere decent to stay reducing as they get a reputation for rent arrears or anti-social behaviour.

7.0 The Response of the Council and Partners

- 7.1 There has been significant progress in the provision of homelessness services in Blackpool since the adoption of the last strategy in 2014, but also a more challenging environment of increasing demand and a reduction in the availability of supported

housing following recent funding cuts. The number of staff in the Housing Options team has been cut by around a third over the last 5 years, but the range of services available has remained similar or been increased.

- 7.2 Additional resources have been secured recently through a successful Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer bid for additional funding to March 2019, and the Council has also received Flexible Homelessness Support Grant funding for the first time from 2017/18.
- 7.3 The Fulfilling Lives Multiple and Complex Needs programme provides support for rough sleeper outreach and works intensively with people with the most severe issues. Funding from Fulfilling Lives has enabled the establishment of a new Housing First approach from July 2017, providing a home and intensive support for rough sleepers. Early signs are that it is very successful in overcoming entrenched issues and it has recently been agreed to increase funding to support 18 individuals in this way.
- 7.4 Multi-agency teams have been established to address begging, street drinking, and rough sleeping in the town centre, balancing enforcement with support. Frequent outreach offers help to get into housing with support for people with a local connection, and support to return home for people who are new to the town. Help is available for everyone who will accept it. There are a small number of emergency beds available for rough sleepers with a local connection and an emergency night shelter available to everyone in periods of the coldest weather.
- 7.5 Supported accommodation hostels have been under pressure following the loss of Housing-Related Support funding from the Council, leading to the closure of Bay HA, and the loss of Great Places' supported accommodation from 2014. Caritas and The Ashley Foundation continue to offer supported accommodation and Streetlife provide emergency beds for young people aged up to 25 years old. The loss of Bay HA's supported accommodation for young people has been mitigated by the Council continuing to fund accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds at Clare Street and Places for People's The Place facility, and by Blackpool Coastal Housing developing dispersed supported housing for Looked After Children.

8.0 Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018

- 8.1 The Council approved the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018 at the Executive meeting on 16th April 2018. The reasons for preparing a new Strategy were:
 - The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced from April 2018 significant new duties on local authorities in how they respond to people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.
 - Homelessness is a prominent issue locally and nationally, with increasing

demand for support from people at risk of homelessness across the country, including Blackpool.

- Local authorities must publish a homelessness prevention strategy at least every 5 years to meet statutory requirements, and Blackpool's last strategy was adopted in 2014.

8.2 The new Homelessness Reduction Act statutory duties can be summarised as requiring local authorities to work to prevent and relieve homelessness for everyone regardless of priority need. The work under the new duties is focussed on agreeing and working through Personal Housing Plans with every person at risk of homelessness, so although the Council has always sought to assist everyone with a local connection, there is likely to be an increased workload from the new formal requirements. New Government reporting requirements will monitor the detailed circumstances and outcomes for every individual but there are no specific targets set by Government. The experience of the first six weeks of the new regime has been broadly positive although it is still too early to understand whether it will make a significant difference in Blackpool when there was already a strong service in place focussed on prevention.

8.3 The new Strategy is set in the context of the new statutory duties and sets out some key principles. These are:

Prevent people becoming homeless in the first place by working with partners to identify risk and intervene earlier.

The targets under this theme are for an increasing proportion of households to stay in their own home without ever becoming homeless, an increasing proportion to have homelessness prevented, and for even fewer households to need support again within a year (the current baseline is 11%).

Resolve homelessness rapidly when crisis occurs, so that harm is minimised

The targets are for people placed in temporary accommodation to move to permanent housing more quickly than the current average of 56.5 days, and for an increasing proportion of people who are homeless to have their homelessness relieved within 56 days (the statutory period of the new relief duty).

Recover - Help more people avoid repeat homelessness by getting them back on their feet by providing long term solutions

The targets are to have fewer rough sleepers who end up on the streets again, and for more households who receive tenancy support to remain in their tenancies for at least 12 months.

8.4 The Strategy sets out a number of actions to achieve these targets but a more detailed action plan is being developed with partners through the Blackpool Homelessness Partnership to ensure that there is ownership and consistent delivery between agencies across the town. This will ensure that the Council continues to address the wide-ranging issues that can lead to homelessness and provide an effective response. The plan will be kept under review to respond to on-going changes in local demand.

8.5 The key actions are likely to focus on:

- Working even more closely with all public agencies to recognise and address the threat of homelessness early, especially with a new Duty to Refer people at risk of homelessness to Housing Options likely to be introduced from October 2018.
- Being more pro-active in ensuring access to suitable new homes for people at risk of or suffering homelessness, through access to quality homes in the private rented sector facilitated by My Blackpool Home, and social landlord partners
- Signing off a new 16/17 year old protocol with Children's Services and further integrating support for young people and care leavers with Blackpool Young People's Service and voluntary sector providers
- Further develop the Housing First model and ensure that it is financially sustainable
- Review the emergency accommodation and support available to potential rough sleepers
- Move people through temporary accommodation to permanent homes more quickly, and increase the capacity using dispersed homes as required
- Re-connect homeless people to their home areas more effectively through the Homelessness Reduction Act relief duty
- Develop more in-house tenancy support for people with complex needs, using psychologically-informed approaches to help facilitate lifestyle changes
- Make use of peer mentors with lived experience, building on the work of Fulfilling Lives
- Encouraging key health support services around substance misuse and mental health to work even more closely with homelessness support

- 8.6 The new Strategy has clear outcomes targets that will be kept under review, and the action plan will be owned and monitored by the Blackpool Homelessness Partnership. It is expected that the action plan will be agreed and will guide action from September 2018. In the meantime, the Council's Housing Options service will continue to push forward work in all the areas of the strategy and refine its approaches following the introduction of the new statutory framework six weeks ago.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

List of Appendices:

None

9.0 Legal considerations:

- 6.1 The Council has a number of legal duties around homelessness, including duties to produce a Prevention of Homelessness Strategy, provide housing advice to all, assess for homelessness, and provide immediate housing for those homeless and in priority need. The Council also has a duty to develop a policy for the letting of social housing – the “allocations scheme”- and let the majority of social homes to those in housing need according to the allocations scheme.

There are further duties in relation to homeless 16 and 17 year olds which require that there is a protocol in place with Childrens' Services and that children are safeguarded and cared for.

10.0 Human Resources considerations:

- 7.1 None. No new policy is proposed in this report.

11.0 Equalities considerations:

- 11.1 None. No new policy is proposed in this report.

12.0 Financial considerations:

- 12.1 None. No new policy is proposed in this report.

13.0 Risk management considerations:

13.1 None. No new policy is proposed in this report.

14.0 Ethical considerations:

14.1 None. No new policy is proposed in this report.

15.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

15.1 A Homelessness Partnership brings together the different agencies dealing with homelessness issues in Blackpool through a quarterly meeting.

Work is underway to explore how service users' views can be taken into consideration in a more systematic way in the development of homelessness services.

16.0 Background papers:

16.1 Blackpool's Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018