

Appendices

None



CABINET REPORT

Report Title

Cabinet Response to the Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Homelessness (Pre-Decision Scrutiny)

AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	18 October 2017
Key Decision:	No
Within Policy:	Yes
Policy Document:	No
Directorate:	Chief Executive's
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Ward(s)	All

1. Purpose

- 1.1 On 21 June 2017, Cabinet received a report on the findings and recommendations of an Overview & Scrutiny Panel Review of Homelessness.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to ask Cabinet to approve the response to the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's recommendations.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is **recommended** that Cabinet:
 - (a) Accepts the recommendations included in the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's report on Homelessness; and
 - (b) Congratulates the task and finish group on a high quality and comprehensive report and thanks the group for the time and effort given to produce it.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 At its work programming event in April 2016, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee agreed to carry out a pre-decision review of how Northampton Borough Council and its partners prevent homelessness and respond to those without homes in the borough. An in-depth review commenced in May 2016 and concluded in March 2017.
- 3.1.2 This review links to the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan, especially 'Housing for Everyone - Helping those that need it to have a safe and secure home'.
- 3.1.3 The key lines of enquiry were:
- To gain an understanding of the work currently being undertaken by Northampton Borough Council, partnerships and statutory and voluntary organisations to address homelessness
 - To assess the extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough and assess the initiatives currently in place to tackle homelessness
 - To examine the Council's Severe Weather Provision
 - To gain an understanding of the effect on the health, wellbeing and the safety of homeless people, including rough sleepers
 - To gain an understanding of the causes and barriers to support homelessness
 - To identify any specific groups that are not accessing services
- 3.1.4 A number of meetings were held to gather evidence from a broad range of stakeholders. During this process, a significant amount of evidence was heard.
- 3.1.5 The Overview & Scrutiny Panel's Report includes 13 recommendations. They are broadly focused on how the Council and partner agencies can provide a more joined up approach and response to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 3.1.6 The focus of the recommendations is on multi agency working, access to homelessness services, access to health services, and temporary accommodation.

Responses to Overview & Scrutiny Recommendations

- 3.1.7 Cabinet accepts all of the recommendation in the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's report. Its response to the 13 recommendations is set out below.
- 3.1.8 **Recommendation 1**
The Council undertakes a comprehensive review of homelessness in the borough and develops a new 5-year Homelessness Strategy that is designed to substantially reduce the number of households that become homeless and the number of homeless families that are living in temporary accommodation.

Response

This is a substantial piece of work that will set out how the Council and its partners will tackle and prevent homelessness over the next 5 years. Work will start in Spring 2018 when the Government has issued its Code of Guidance and the Council has a better understanding of its duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

3.1.9 **Recommendation 2**

The Council establishes a Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group to direct, co-ordinate and monitor the action that the Council and its partners take to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness in the borough.

Response

A multi agency group will be set up in the Winter of 2018/19 to oversee the successful and timely implementation of the new 5-year Homelessness Strategy.

3.1.10 **Recommendation 3**

The Council publishes an information leaflet (in an electronic and paper format, and in languages commonly known to be spoken by rough sleepers) for distribution to all agencies and services and more widely available to members of the public. The leaflet should set out very clearly how the Council's homelessness and housing advice services are organised – together with details of the services provided by other organisations and services – and how people can access them.

Response

An information leaflet will be published in Spring 2018 when the Government has issued its Code of Guidance and the Council has decided how best to organise its services to meet its obligations under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. In December 2017, a shorter information leaflet will be produced for rough sleepers (in a number of languages) explaining what help is available from the Street Outreach Team, the Nightshelter, the Hope Centre and other organisations and services.

3.1.11 **Recommendation 4**

A comprehensive review of rough sleeping services is carried out to ensure that all services are operating efficiently and effectively, and that there is no unnecessary duplication of effort between the Nightshelter, the Hope Centre, Oasis House, NAASH and other services

Response

This work is already being undertaken as part of the implementation of 'TOGETHER we change lives', the multi agency strategy for ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton. One of the key objectives of the review is to improve joint working at Oasis House. This review is expected to be completed by June 2018.

3.1.12 **Recommendation 5**

A Homelessness Forum is established that involves, and engages with, all relevant statutory and non-statutory agencies.

Response

In January and February 2018, the Housing & Wellbeing Service will be holding a couple of half day workshops for local services and organisations, to talk about the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and agree on how everyone can work together to tackle, prevent and reduce homelessness in Northampton. During the workshops, participants will consider the benefits of establishing a local Homelessness Forum.

3.1.13 **Recommendation 6**

The Council carries out an annual review of rough sleeping in the borough that goes beyond the limitations of the statutory requirements and includes, for example, the production of a personalised development plan for each rough sleeper that continues to be implemented after they have moved into settled housing.

Response

Improvements to support planning are a key element of 'TOGETHER we change lives', the multi agency strategy for ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton and we are already planning to extend the scope of this work (as part of our preparations for the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act) in 2018.

The Homelessness Reduction Act requires local authorities to assess, and provide meaningful assistance to, everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness, and to provide them with a 'personalised housing plan'. The aim of the plan is to provide a personalised approach to advice and assistance, and tailored support that will be more effective in preventing and relieving homelessness.

After the next rough sleepers count (scheduled for November 2017), we will begin to 'trial' the use of personalised housing plans with those rough sleepers that are willing to engage the Street Outreach Team and local services. The lessons we learn from this will then be used to inform our annual review of homelessness.

3.1.14 **Recommendation 7**

There is active and meaningful involvement of service users and individuals who have lived experience in the development and delivery of services, and in the implementation process.

Response

During the 8 months that Northampton's Emergency Nightshelter has been up and running, service users and individuals who have lived experience have been actively and meaningfully involved in the development of services. This work will continue and, in the course of implementing the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's recommendations, the Council and its partners will actively consider how best to involve homeless people (including families) in the development and delivery of services and the implementation of plans and strategies.

3.1.15 **Recommendation 8**

The Council considers its approach to assisting individuals with multiple and complex needs.

Response

A series of changes have now been made to the remit and approach of the Street Community Action Group and this has ensured that services and organisations work

more collaboratively with one another to address the needs of people who are sleeping rough and have multiple and complex needs. Although this can be very challenging – especially where the person is causing anti-social behaviour and refusing to engage – the help and support is now being targeted more effectively. Further changes will be made to this approach in light of the new obligations (including the duty to co-operate and the requirement to produce personalised housing plans) under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

3.1.16 **Recommendation 9**

The existing arrangements for meeting the health needs of homeless people (including rough sleepers) are reviewed and strengthened – informed by a Health Needs Audit - to ensure that rough sleepers and people who are living in temporary accommodation are not only aware of, but are also helped to connect with, local support services.

Response

The Housing & Wellbeing Service is planning to meet with Healthwatch, local health professionals, homeless families living in temporary accommodation, and people who have previously been sleeping rough with a view to assessing and strengthening the existing arrangements for meeting the health needs of homeless people. It is proposed that the new arrangements are put in place by the beginning of April 2018.

3.1.17 **Recommendation 10**

Details of the medical advice and treatment available to people who are homeless and/or sleeping rough – at various locations, including Maple Access and Oasis House – are communicated to all organisations and services in order that they can be shared with people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Response

These details will be included in the information leaflet produced for people who are sleeping rough (see Recommendation 3, above) in Spring 2018.

3.1.18 **Recommendation 11**

The Council develops an ambitious plan, using SMART outcomes, for minimising its use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation and out-of-borough temporary accommodation.

Response

Despite the uncertainty over the impact that the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is likely to have on the number of homelessness applications and demand for temporary accommodation, the Council has produced a comprehensive, ambitious 12 months action plan for halving the number of households living in temporary accommodation, reducing by 90% the number of households living in Bed & Breakfast and ending the need to place households in temporary accommodation that is situated outside of the borough. To support the implementation of the action plan, the Council has set aside additional funding from its housing reserves.

3.1.19 **Recommendation 12**

The Council works imaginatively and collaboratively with Northamptonshire County Council, and other agencies and organisations, to provide more support for homeless families in temporary accommodation and mitigating any

adverse effects on the families' finances and the children's schooling and healthcare.

Response

As homeless families' finances and schooling are most affected by the Council's placement of those families in Bed & Breakfast accommodation – especially where it is situated outside of the borough – the priority of the Housing & Wellbeing Service is to implement the 12 months action plan (see Recommendation 11, above) as this is designed to reduce by 90% the number of households living in Bed & Breakfast and end the need to place households in temporary accommodation outside the borough. It is proposed, therefore, that the Head of Housing & Wellbeing reviews the situation in April 2018 and then meets with the Officers from the County Council and other agencies and organisations to explore ways in which homeless families can be provided with more support while they are living in temporary accommodation.

3.1.20 Recommendation 13

All nightly-purchased temporary accommodation that is used by the Borough Council should provide free Wi-Fi facilities.

Response

The majority of Bed & Breakfast establishments that the Council uses already provide free Wi-Fi facilities. Since the publication of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's report in June 2017, the Council has procured a significant amount of nightly-purchased, self-contained temporary accommodation as a better alternative to Bed & Breakfast. As these are individual houses and flats, it would not be reasonable to impose on the housing suppliers the requirement to provide the occupants with free Wi-Fi facilities. It is proposed, therefore that, from April 2018, all nightly-purchased Bed & Breakfast accommodation that is used by the Council should provide Wi-Fi facilities.

3.2 Choices (Options)

- 3.2.1 Cabinet could choose not to adopt any of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's recommendations.
- 3.2.2 Cabinet could choose to adopt some of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's recommendations.
- 3.2.3 Cabinet could choose to adopt all of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's recommendations. This is the preferred option.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

- 4.1.1 The action that the Council is proposing to take is in line with Council policy and reflects the priorities in the Corporate Plan 2016-20.

4.2 Resources and Risk

- 4.2.1 Implementation of the recommendations in the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's report will be met from the Housing & Wellbeing Service's existing resources.
- 4.2.2 As a number of the recommendations are expected to result in a reduction in homelessness and Bed & Breakfast use, their successful implementation will

complement a lot of the work that is already being done and is likely to contribute to an overall reduction in the cost of homelessness and temporary accommodation.

- 4.2.3 The Housing & Wellbeing Service and Finance Team will set up appropriate arrangements for assessing and monitoring the impact that these actions have on the nature, extent and financial cost of homelessness in the borough. Implementation of the recommendations will be monitored by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

4.3 Legal

- 4.3.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

4.4 Equality and Health

- 4.4.1 Implementation of the recommendations will have a positive impact on people with protected characteristics.
- 4.4.2 A Community Impact Assessment was completed as part of the Overview and Scrutiny process, and this has been updated to take into account the Overview and Scrutiny Panel's recommendations.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

- 4.5.1 The Panel took evidence from a wide range of Stakeholders and Councillors from Northampton Borough Council:

Internal expert advisors

- Cabinet Member for Housing, NBC
- Housing Options and Advice Manager, NBC
- Head of Revenues and Benefits, LGSS
- Cabinet Member for Community Safety, NBC
- Chair of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and Community Safety Team
- Case Managers, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit

External expert advisors

- Head of Protecting Vulnerable Persons, Northamptonshire Police
- Director of Public Health, Northamptonshire County Council
- Manager, Maple Access
- Manager, NAASH
- Drug and Alcohol Challenge Officer, the Bridge
- Operations Manager, Midland Heart Housing Association
- Service Manager, Salvation Army
- Chief Executive, Central Northamptonshire CAB
- Emmaus, Homelessness Charity
- Shelter
- Crisis
- Healthwatch Northamptonshire

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

4.6.1 Implementation of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's recommendations will help meet 3 of the priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- **Safer Communities:** It will help people (including rough sleepers and homeless families) to feel safe and secure by reducing rough sleeping and the use of Bed & Breakfast and out-of-borough temporary accommodation, and by improving their access to health services.
- **Housing for Everyone:** It will help to end the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton and for homeless families to be placed in temporary accommodation outside of the borough. It will also minimise the Council's use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation.
- **Working Hard and Spending your Money Wisely:** It will actively promote collaborative multi agency working and reduce the amount of money that the Council spends on temporary accommodation and, in doing so, it will help the Council to be economic, efficient and effective and get the best from the resources available.

4.6.2 Implementation of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel's recommendations will also contribute positively to 2 of the 3 Business Development Priorities that support the Corporate Plan and help manage the Council's future financial challenges:

- **Empowering Communities:** It will encourage communities to become actively involved in tackling homelessness and improving the neighbourhoods where they live in order to help make everywhere in Northampton a great place to live, visit, work, study and invest.
- **Partnership Working:** It will help build strong and effective relationships between partners, based on a coherent, consistent and clearly defined approach to partnership working. As well as increasing efficiency and effectiveness, this will reduce duplication, deliver better outcomes and improve residents' housing, health and wellbeing.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

Overview & Scrutiny Panel Report on Homelessness (Pre-Decision Scrutiny) May 2017

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