

**SPELTHORNE BOROUGH COUNCIL AND
SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**



SPELTHORNE JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE: 16 DECEMBER 2019

LEAD OFFICER: DAVID BIRLEY, HOUSING STRATEGY & POLICY MANAGER

SUBJECT: HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVES IN SPELTHORNE

AREA(S) AFFECTED: ALL

SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

This report summarises the initiatives being undertaken by Spelthorne Borough Council to prevent and relieve homelessness, including rough sleeping.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Spelthorne Joint Committee is asked to note the report and the initiatives currently being undertaken by the borough in respect of homelessness and rough sleeping prevention.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

This report is presented for information only.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 Spelthorne Joint Committee has previously been informed of initiatives being undertaken by the borough council under efforts to prevent and relieve homelessness. The most recent report was presented in July 2018 regarding plans to develop a hostel in Ashford for single homeless people, particularly those with complex support needs.
- 1.2 For a number of years, homelessness has been moving up the political agenda within Government. Some notable outcomes of this include:
 - **Rough Sleeping Strategy** – setting out the Government's ambitious target of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminating it by 2027.
 - **Rough Sleeper Initiative funding** – Government allocating money for local housing authorities to fund initiatives which support the aims of the Rough Sleeping Strategy.
 - **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** – new legislation implemented from April 2018 which puts homelessness prevention within a statutory framework, allowing local housing authorities to support households and intervene earlier where there is a threat of homelessness.

- 1.3 The borough council has statutory responsibility for housing and homelessness services, but a big part of this is through partnership working with the county council, health services and other statutory and non-statutory services.
- 1.4 Meeting the housing needs of Spelthorne residents has been a priority within the Spelthorne's Corporate Plan since 2016, with various initiatives working to this goal within a range of strategies and policies.
- 1.5 The borough council is required to produce a strategy, at least every five years, to set out how it will work to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping within Spelthorne. Any strategy must be informed by an in-depth look at how services are currently delivered. This is called a Homelessness Review. Spelthorne's Homelessness Review was completed in November 2019, in advance of the next Homelessness Strategy 2020-25, and is appended to this report at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.6 This report summarises the strategic priorities which are emerging within the revised Homelessness Strategy 2020-25, and also pinpoints key initiatives which are currently in place in Spelthorne.

2. ANALYSIS:

2.1 Homelessness Strategy 2020-25

- 2.1.1 The emerging strategic priorities, which will be open to public and stakeholder consultation between November 2019 and January 2020 include:
 - a) **End the use of emergency accommodation:** We need to ensure that our residents who are facing or who are at risk of homelessness are assisted at the earliest opportunity. Emergency accommodation lacks security and can therefore be disruptive to households; particularly to those with children as found by Children's Commissioner in a recent report. Emergency accommodation is sometimes not ideal and adds to the pressures homeless households are already under. Sometimes placements are out-of-borough which makes it difficult for them to sustain their existing support network and access local services. It is also extremely costly to the council whereby expenditure could be used on greater homelessness preventative methods and long-term solutions. Spelthorne Borough Council currently has a gross budget of £1.5m per year for emergency accommodation.
 - b) **Reduce the length of stay in temporary accommodation:** Whilst temporary accommodation is slightly more secure than emergency accommodation it is still a temporary measure and can still be disruptive to homeless households. Our recent Homelessness Review identified that households in temporary accommodation were on average staying for over a year. Where possible, we want to see a significant reduction in the time homeless households spend in temporary accommodation and see an improvement in the number of households we are moving on to more settled accommodation. This will support the reduction both in numbers of households and length of time they stay in emergency accommodation.

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- c) **Nobody sleeps rough in Spelthorne:** The government's rough sleeping strategy aims to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate by 2027. We are committed to help achieve this target. Nationally rough sleeping has nearly doubled in the last 8 years. In Spelthorne, the number of rough sleepers has varied over the years but is an increasing trend which represents an extreme form of homelessness. Further details on rough sleeping in Spelthorne can be found on pages 34 to 36 of **Appendix 1**. Nobody deserves to be sleeping rough in Spelthorne and we want to ensure our homelessness support and outreach service is maximised to ensure this doesn't happen.
- d) **Increase use of private rented sector for homelessness prevention and relief:** Privately rented accommodation is our primary offer of accommodation to households facing homelessness. With the decline in social housing we are seeing a considerable change in how we are able to offer assistance to prevent and relieve homelessness. Strengthening our use of the private rented sector offers us an opportunity to move on homeless households quicker from both emergency and temporary accommodation. We want to encourage as many local landlords, estate agents and property developers to work with us as possible. Increasing our use of the private rented sector allows us to prevent and relieve homelessness at an earlier stage.
- e) **Invest in staff training and development in order to improve the customer journey within the Housing Options service:** Residents who are unfortunately at risk or are threatened with homelessness are going through a potentially stressful and detrimental point in their life. Improving our Housing Options team's customer service skills will help us to deliver homelessness advice and support in a more empathic and understanding manner. A recent Housing Options service user survey completed by Spelthorne Borough Council reflected comments in regards to the customer service skills at Spelthorne Borough Council. We endeavour to listen to our residents and want to improve this aspect of our service.

2.1.2 More details on how the borough will work to these priorities can be found in **Appendix 2** of this report. Once the public and stakeholder consultation closes in January 2020, we will compile a final draft strategy which will be presented to Spelthorne's Cabinet for approval in March 2020.

2.2 Rough Sleeper Initiative scheme

- 2.2.1 The borough council was recently successful in a bid to Government for some funding to support rough sleepers in Spelthorne. The grant award was £50,000 to fund:
- a) **Rough Sleeper Coordinator and Outreach Officer:** This role is responsible for coordinating rough sleeper services in the area, working closely with key partners and stakeholders to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, rough sleeping in Spelthorne. It is also an assertive outreach service to rough sleepers, which ensures that contact is made and sustained with rough sleepers in Spelthorne, appropriate assessments and referrals are undertaken and that all clients are engaged with services in

order to receive support towards ensuring they move from the streets, and into accommodation or reconnection services. On the whole, the role is the single point of contact for all rough sleeping related work in Spelthorne and the surrounding areas.

- b) **Rough sleeping initiatives fund:** This small budget allows the borough to support rough sleepers with exceptional costs associated with supporting rough sleepers into accommodation. It may be to fund a mobile phone so that partner agencies can get in touch, or it may be to fund travel to supported housing assessments or medical appointments – all to support an eventual move away from the streets.

- 2.2.2 The borough is required to report data to Government on a monthly basis. These data returns are showing some very positive outcomes, including settled accommodation for four rough sleepers, who previously would not have been offered the additional support which they now receive.

2.3 Hersham Road supported housing

- 2.3.1 The borough council continues to access supported housing for single homeless people at Hersham Road, Walton-on-Thames. This project is run by Transform Housing & Support, and is jointly shared with Elmbridge and Runnymede. Hersham Road is a 12 bed hostel for single homeless people with support needs, with staffing on site. Clients have the use of a lounge, kitchen, dining room and laundry room. All clients have their own single bedrooms, with two having en-suite facilities. The hostel is staffed 24 hours a day, with a member of staff sleeping on the premises at night to deal with emergencies.

- 2.3.2 The support service includes help with benefits, budgeting, training and employment etc. The main aim of the hostel is to work with residents on daily living skills to enable them to live independently within the community. The level of support provided will vary, but can be as high as ten hours per week. The average length of stay in the hostel is around nine months.

- 2.3.3 The borough council contributed capital funds to a project to extend the building. This extension was due to act as an annual winter shelter, however planning restrictions in relation to the size and shape of the extension meant that the originally intended purpose was no longer possible. The extension now provides, as a twelve month trial, space for a daytime drop-in service. The service is run by Elmbridge Rentstart and is accessible to rough sleepers from either Spelthorne, Runnymede or Elmbridge.

2.4 White House Hostel, Ashford

- 2.4.1 As reported in July 2018, the borough council has plans for a hostel in Ashford for single homeless people, particularly those with complex support needs. Since the last report, the following progress has been made:

- a) **Planning consent** achieved for the site in September 2019 for a 27 bed and 4 flat hostel, with parking and associated landscaping.
b) **Contract Heads of Terms** agreed with Salvation Army Housing Association to take on a lease of the building for twelve months.

- c) **Homes England grant funding** applied for which will go towards the capital costs of construction, fixtures and fittings.
 - d) **Partner agency working group** to be formed from early 2020 to design the support framework on offer to residents from their move into the accommodation through to them moving onto settled accommodation. This working group will establish gaps in service provision and will work jointly to plug those gaps where possible.
- 2.4.2 It is anticipated that construction work will commence on site in early 2020, with a view to new residents moving in from March 2021.
- 2.4.3 Members will recall that at the time of receiving the July 2018 report, there was a suggestion from Government that funding arrangements for specialist supported accommodation, such as what was at the time proposed for the White House site, would change significantly. On 9 August 2019, the Government confirmed that the funding arrangements would not change after all, and that residents of supported housing placements would still be eligible for housing benefit.
- 2.4.4 There will be extensive opportunities for joint working and projects between Surrey CC, Spelthorne BC, NHS services and other partner agencies once the hostel is operational.

2.5 Harper House redevelopment

- 2.5.1 Planning consent was granted in October 2019 for the demolition and rebuild of the Harper House emergency accommodation scheme in Ashford. The new development will include twenty purpose-build, self-contained units of emergency accommodation for local families, together with an on-site management office, a net increase of parking provision, and a vastly improved street scene.
- 2.5.2 The borough plans to contract with a third party to provide a housing management and resident support service. The procurement process has begun and we hope to have a provider on board in a consultancy role approximately six months prior to re-opening Harper House, so that they can be party to key decisions about the operation of the accommodation, based on their experiences elsewhere.

3. OPTIONS:

- 3.1 This report is presented for information only, and no options are presented to the committee.

4. CONSULTATIONS:

- 4.1 The framework of the Homelessness Strategy 2020-25 has been devised based on:
- a) Survey sent to approximately 2000 previous service users to gain feedback on the service they received.
 - b) Stakeholder workshops on 24 September & 14 October: 105 attendees across 42 organisations represented, including borough councillors.

- c) Homelessness Strategy Working Group: including key officers and the Portfolio Holder for Community Wellbeing.
 - d) Peer review of the activities being undertaken by neighbouring and comparable housing authorities. This presents opportunities for cross-borough cooperation and joint working.
 - e) Extensive review of relevant local and national data.
 - f) Feedback from Spelthorne's Health and Wellbeing Group.
- 4.2 The draft framework will be open for public and stakeholder consultation from late November 2019 until early January 2020. The views of the public and stakeholders will be considered prior to a final version being presented to the Cabinet of Spelthorne Borough Council in March 2020.
- 4.3 The views of residents have also been considered as part of the planning process for both Harper House redevelopment and the new hostel at the White House site. These views have influenced the design on both schemes, and specifically with the Harper House redevelopment, the specification for the housing management and resident support service.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 The borough currently receives a limited amount of grant funding from Government to support efforts to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping. The vast majority of the costs associated with running the Housing Options service are borne by Spelthorne's general fund. Further information on the expenditure on homelessness services can be found on pages 37 to 41 of **Appendix 1**.
- 5.2 Applications for additional grant funding are made on a regular basis to various funders, including the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. These applications are usually for specific projects, such as a Spelthorne's rough sleeper outreach scheme.
- 5.3 Where projects have specific impacts on health and/or social care initiatives, funding bids are compiled in partnership with the Health and Social Care Integration team at Surrey County Council, and other boroughs or districts as appropriate.
- 5.4 A proportion of the capital funds for the boroughs residential development schemes comes from the additional income generated from the borough's commercial portfolio.

6. WIDER IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 As a whole, the delivery of homelessness prevention initiatives does not present significant implications for any of the areas listed in the table below. When specific initiatives are designed, these areas are considered at that time.

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Crime and Disorder	No significant implications
Equality and Diversity	No significant implications
Localism (including community involvement and impact)	No significant implications
Sustainability (including Climate Change and Carbon Emissions)	No significant implications

Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No significant implications
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	No significant implications
Public Health	No significant implications

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 7.1 The committee are asked to note the homelessness and rough sleeping initiatives being undertaken by Spelthorne Borough Council.

8. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

- 8.1 The approval of the borough's Homelessness Strategy 2020-25 is scheduled to take place in March 2020. A group will be set up to monitor the implementation of the strategy and action plan. This group will be made up of key stakeholders.

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Consulted:

As per section 4 of this report.

Annexes:

Appendix 1: Spelthorne Homelessness Review 2014-19

Appendix 2: Spelthorne's proposed strategic priorities for the next five years (from Homelessness Strategy 2020-25 consultation documents)

Background papers:

None.

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