

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

26 February 2019

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 ROUGH SLEEPING UPDATE

Summary

With a rise in Rough Sleepers nationally and the high profile nature of the issue, this report will update members on the number of rough sleepers in the district following the recent annual estimate and the Councils response.

1.1 Rough Sleeper Estimate

- 1.1.1 As there is no national mechanism to count the number of people sleeping on the streets, each year the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) requires all local authorities to undertake a count or estimate of the number of rough sleepers in their district.
- 1.1.2 The count/estimate is a snapshot on one “typical” night chosen by the local authority anytime in the period during October and November. This snapshot methodology aims to get as accurate a representation of the numbers sleeping rough as possible and is based on evidence from the local authority and key partners about the numbers sleeping rough in that area on the given night.
- 1.1.3 The Kent Housing Options Group co-ordinates the dates of the Rough Sleeper estimates/counts and for 2018 the night of 21 November 2018 was chosen by the authorities across Kent with all of them completing their counts/estimates on this night. The choice of whether to do an estimate or count is left to each council and an estimation was chosen by Tonbridge and Malling due to the large and rural nature of the district and the difficulty with covering it in one night to count.
- 1.1.4 To support local authorities and ensure consistency Homeless Link publish a toolkit which authorities can use and before submission of the final figure to MHCLG they also complete a final verification check. As well as being a guide for how to complete the count/estimate, the toolkit also contains a very specific definition of what constitutes a Rough Sleeper to assist with consistency. The definition is:

People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes”).

1.1.5 Following the homeless link guidance and once the estimate had been completed and verified the final return to MHCLG showed a 50% increase in numbers rough sleeping in the district from 8 in 2017 to 12 in 2018. There were 3 other rough sleepers we were aware of but were unable to verify if they were rough sleeping on the night of the estimate.

1.1.6 The table sets out the Kent authority’s figures for rough sleeping year on year from 2010 until the most recent count/estimate.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2017 rough sleeping rate (per 1,000 households)
Ashford	2	7	4	1	5	5	8	11	19	0.21
Canterbury	3	22	20	22	38	47	50	36	33	0.55
Dartford	0	15	16	12	19	10	9	9	12	0.2
Dover	8	14	5	5	4	9	9	13	20	0.26
Gravesham	1	8	10	8	3	6	12	9	21	0.21
Maidstone	27	19	19	14	25	38	35	41	9	0.59
Medway	7	12	17	6	2	14	14	44	19	0.39
Sevenoaks	0	1	2	2	0	6	2	4	7	0.08
Shepway	9	12	5	4	4	13	9	16	?	0.32
Swale	0	2	6	5	2	6	6	9	32	0.15
Thanet	1	9	8	14	15	17	33	46	23	0.72
Tonbridge & Malling	1	4	3	4	7	0	4	8	12	0.15
Tunbridge Wells	9	13	10	12	15	15	15	20	7	0.4

England	1,768	2,181	2,309	2,414	2,744	3,569	4,134	4,751	N/K	0.20
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1.2 The Council’s Response to the rise in rough sleeping

1.2.1 In response to the rise in the numbers of Rough Sleepers in the district, the high profile nature of the issue and to ensure that we are delivering services to those who are on the streets, we have developed four distinct workstreams. These are:

- The development of a joint agency protocol to support working with those who are rough sleeping;
- Review and update of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol to incorporate new guidance and best practice;

- The feasibility of the development of a winter night shelter; and
- The submission of a bid for funding from MHCLG to fund a Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator role, a Housing First pilot and an early prevention project, and money to support the extended SWEP offer and the feasibility study for a night shelter.

1.3 Rough Sleeper Protocol

1.3.1 The first of these workstreams is the development of a Rough Sleeper protocol which will allow the Council to co-ordinate agency responses to reports of Rough Sleepers across the district and this details how partners will work together to provide timely advice and assistance to any rough sleeper aged 18 and over. The protocol is attached as **Annex 1**.

1.3.2 The aims of this protocol are to:

- Prevent rough sleeping in Tonbridge and Malling.
- Ensure early identification of rough sleepers
- Ensure that rough sleepers are aware of their housing options and the services that are able to assist them and, where possible, rough sleepers are referred to services for support.
- Increase reports of rough sleeping from members of the public or any other organisation who come into contact with a rough sleeper.

1.3.3 Initially we will invite internal services within the Council to sign up to the protocol and then we will look to key partners such as the Police and the Outreach Services to achieve maximum sign up. The protocol will be flexible enough however to allow sign up by other agencies that may be involved in working with or delivering services to those who may be sleeping on the street at any time if they wish to.

1.4 The Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

1.4.1 The second work stream focuses on the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). Tonbridge and Malling Council last updated its SWEP in 2014 and it was designed to ensure that the council had a plan in place to ensure accommodation was made available to all those who were rough sleeping, regardless of their status during extreme cold weather to protect their health and wellbeing. The SWEP period begins on October 01 and ends on 31 March.

1.4.2 The existing protocol suggests that SWEP should be triggered when the temperature falls below zero for three consecutive nights as forecast by the Meteorological Office website.

1.4.3 Since October 2018 to date SWEP has been activated three times and we have accommodated 10 unique Rough Sleepers. The increase in placements could be

due to the increase in numbers or the notification to key partners of the activation and the use of Social Media.

- 1.4.4 However new guidance now suggests that local authorities should take a more flexible approach to SWEP and protocols activated after one night of severe weather irrespective of the number of nights the temperature is set to drop below zero. Guidance now also suggests that SWEP should be activated when there are other forms of severe weather, such as extreme heat, wind or rain.
- 1.4.5 To incorporate the new guidance the Councils SWEP has been reviewed and a new SWEP has been drafted to reflect improved communication regarding SWEP when it is activated and to make it more flexible to allow the council to adapt its responses to Rough Sleepers based on the weather. This is attached as **Annex 2**.
- 1.4.6 The Council has already introduced improved notification for key partners when SWEP is activated to ensure that anyone who may come into contact with those who are Rough Sleeping are aware that they can access accommodation and can make the appropriate referrals. The notification is via email and goes out when SWEP is activated to internal departments such as Customer Services, the Community Safety Service, Safeguarding and also external partners such as Porchlight and faith groups in the district. The mailing list can be added to at the request of agencies.
- 1.4.7 The notification ensures that key partners are aware of who to refer the rough sleeper to and what our response will be. Placements can be made during office hours but can also be made out of office hours by telephoning the out of hour's number where a Housing Options and Support Officer will respond and ensure that accommodation is made available.
- 1.4.8 However, given that the Homelessness Reduction Act introduced new duties to relieve homelessness, the Council, would like to include in its reviewed SWEP, regardless of the number of nights the weather is set to be severe, on initial approach the Council would like to place those who are Rough Sleeping into accommodation for three nights as a minimum. This will then allow officers to have the opportunity to visit and undertake a full assessment of the needs of the Rough Sleeper, to ensure that we are fulfilling any statutory duties we may have to the applicant. This will have the added benefit of developing the council's knowledge of the needs of this cohort and allow us to develop and deliver more responsive services.

1.5 The feasibility of a night shelter

- 1.5.1 The third workstream relates to a high level feasibility report considering the development and operation of a night shelter within the district given the rise in the numbers of those rough sleeping.
- 1.5.2 Previously there has been provision of a night shelter in Tonbridge and Malling.

- 1.5.3 Given the recent increase in the numbers rough sleeping in the district, and much of the available accommodation for SWEP being out of the area, the Council would like to complete a high level feasibility study to consider the provision of a night shelter in the district. It is anticipated that if this were to go ahead then we would work with faith groups and this would allow us to offer extended winter provision to those who are rough sleeping.
- 1.5.4 The aim is to complete the study by early summer so that if it is determined that there will be benefit to opening a winter night shelter, and there is full support for this then the shelter could open in Winter 2019/2020.

1.6 Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding

- 1.6.1 Central Government launched its rough sleeper strategy in the summer of 2018. To support the delivery of this it also announced a number of funding streams. One of these is the Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding.
- 1.6.2 On the 05 September it announced £34million would be given to the authorities with the highest numbers of rough sleepers across England. In Kent the authorities that received money from this initial round were Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone, Canterbury, Thanet and Medway.
- 1.6.3 Government has since announced additional monies via this initiative and has asked authorities to bid for this. Based on the workstreams above Tonbridge and Malling Council submitted an initial bid on Monday 14 January 2019 and as a result of this has been provided with feedback from MHCLG and invited to submit more detailed proposals.
- 1.6.4 This project will be a multi-agency approach to tackling rough sleeping. If successful then the funding will deliver a project which is co-ordinated by a project worker who will also work to raise awareness of initiatives to end rough sleeping, outreach work which will focus on engaging with those who are already on the street and try to locate and secure suitable accommodation and support to get them away from the streets, three units of accommodation for a housing first pilot to be delivered and also the development of access to the private rented sector. This will involve engaging with landlords and working with them to try and get them to accept homeless households where they may not have done so previously. The project will also work with those who are most at risk of rough sleeping around prevention and tenancy sustainment. We will also be including an element to fund the extended SWEP and the feasibility study.
- 1.6.5 If successful then the project will be delivered via a multi agency partnership comprising of the Council, Look Ahead, Porchlight and Clarion Housing Group.
- 1.6.6 The second round of bidding closed on 14 February 2019 and we will be made aware of the outcome in March with mobilisation commencing in April 2019 if we are successful.

- 1.6.7 The partners were chosen following the recent commissioning by Kent County Council for Service for Vulnerable People with Look Ahead being appointed as the Prime Contractor for these services in Tonbridge and Malling and Porchlight being appointed as the other prime contractor for the County – however this project will involve the outreach workers who will continue to form part of the Kent wide outreach team.
- 1.6.8 Clarion Housing Group are the main social housing provider in the district and they will be providing the three units of accommodation to support the Housing First element of this project and will also work with the council on the early identification and intervention element of this project.

1.7 Legal Implications

- 1.7.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced the requirement for housing authorities to take a preventative approach to homelessness and this was further strengthened with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act which has placed new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness on Councils. Therefore these workstreams ensure that the council is delivering against its statutory functions.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.8.1 A recent report which was completed for the Government to support its rough sleeping strategy suggests that a rough sleeper can cost the public purse anything between £14,300 and £21,200 per person per year compared to the average cost of public services provided to an average adult which is estimated to be £4,600. The estimated cost of rough sleeping is between £7,100 and £15,200 per person per year. Therefore working to remove rough sleepers from the streets or preventing them from entering rough sleeping is more cost effective to the Council than dealing with them once on the street and will assist in the reduction of costs to the Council.
- 1.8.2 If the bid is successful this is additional funding that the council will have secured to deliver services above its statutory duties.

1.9 Risk Assessment

- 1.9.1 Risk associated with not delivering these workstreams relate to the council failing to meet its statutory duties to those who are homeless and sleeping rough on the streets.
- 1.9.2 There is also a reputational risk to the council if there are seen to be rough sleepers on the street in the district.

1.10 Recommendations

1.10.1 Members are **RECOMMENDED** to:

1.10.2 **ACKNOWLEDGE** the rise in numbers of rough sleeping in the district and the work the council has identified with an aim of preventing this upward trend from continuing and the numbers of rough sleepers escalating.

1.10.3 To **ENDORSE** the role of the council in co-ordinating agency responses to reports of rough sleepers via the delivery of a joint protocol.

1.10.4 To **APPROVE** the revised SWEP recognising the more flexible approach the council will take to ensure the health and wellbeing of those who may be sleeping rough on the streets.

1.10.5 To **SUPPORT** the development of a feasibility study which considers the role of a night shelter.

1.10.6 To **ENDORSE** the bid made to the MHCLG for funding to support the work around rough sleeping.

The Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

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