

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING DELIVERY TASK GROUP

Minutes from the Meeting of the Homelessness & Housing Delivery Task Group held on Monday, 6th July, 2020 at 10.30 am in the Remote Meeting on Zoom and available for the public to view on WestNorfolkBC on You Tube - Zoom and You Tube

PRESENT:

Councillors Miss L Bambridge, C Bower (Chair), S Collop, J Moriarty, C Morley and S Sandell

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

2 **MEMBERS ATTENDING UNDER STANDING ORDER 34**

There were no Members present pursuant to Standing Order 34.

3 **NOTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the previous meeting were agreed.

4 **UPDATE ON 'EVERYBODY'S IN' INITIATIVE IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 - ACTIONS AND FUTURE PLANS**

D Hall provided an overview on the measures taken in relation to Everybody's In Initiative brought in by Government, in response to Covid-19.

Since the last time that the Task Group had met, there had been unprecedented times because of the pandemic, and the response to it brought about a change in the way in which homelessness, particularly rough sleeping, was dealt with in the community.

He paid tribute to the response to the pandemic from the Housing Team and other parts of the Council to the Everybody's In initiative and stated that their efforts should not go unrecognised. The effort to bring everyone in from the Night Shelter and other people who were known to be sofa surfing or rough sleeping, to a community centre which overnight was transformed into temporary accommodation, a vacant building was turned into accommodation, to the security, cleansing services which were procured overnight, bedding, food and access to support was completely unprecedented and saw people working overnight and weekends, which was a huge effort.

The Council had worked closely with partners including the Purfleet Trust and their response was also extraordinary and humbling with problems being resolved. The effort resulted in everyone, including the hardest people to help, with a housing solution and no-one left on the street. Lots of buildings were used and converted into accommodation and the Council procured some welfare cabins which had been remodelled to allow people to live in them. Because of that huge effort, a positive outcome was achieved for some of those people. The feedback had been that for a lot of people, who had been difficult to reach and engage with, there had been some success stories through a degree of stability, and some had taken the first steps to change their life around and to get some more secure accommodation.

The Chair added that the team should be very proud of all their efforts.

Nikki Patton added that Council had been working closely with the Night Shelter and had already taken it over that week due to Covid-19 reasons.

The Council also received the letter at the end of March from Dame Louise Casey that all dormitory style accommodation needed to be closed, this included the Night Shelter.

Staff had worked closely with the Purfleet Trust and the Night Shelter over that weekend, to find suitable accommodation. It resulted in a mix of accommodation with some hotels providing a limited amount of rooms. The Council used one of its own community centres and turned the meeting rooms into self-contained accommodation. In addition, one of the Council's hostels, which had been closed for refurbishment, was also used for accommodation and staff had worked closely with Broadland Housing to do that. All 23 people from the night shelter were moved into the accommodation. Throughout that period, 3 meals a day were provided and during that time close working was held with the Purfleet Trust who provided that support into all the accommodation that was being used, so everyone had visits from support staff.

As Covid took hold, it became apparent that some of the people were in the critically vulnerable health groups and some of the accommodation allowed people to share bathrooms, a decision was made to consolidate accommodation and everyone was moved across to Travel Lodge at the end of April / early May and this allowed everyone to have their own bathroom facilities. The support model was transferred across with Purfleet, who provided support 7-days a week. In addition, security staff was provided on a 24-hour basis. That came to an end on 30 June 2020. Since then the Council continued to work with Freebridge and with Broadland to provide further accommodation.

At the current time, there were interim solutions, with properties provided by Freebridge, which were being used as shared accommodation with ongoing support provided by Purfleet. There was

also the outreach service that the Borough Council had commissioned which had been running for some time. This would also provide in-reach support for those people in accommodation.

In addition, people who had higher support needs, had been provided with accommodation within the existing hostel so that they had 24-hour support.

It was explained that the next steps would be to look at the medium to longer term needs and to have sustainable options for those people that had now been accommodated. Work would continue with the support providers to ensure that not only they had been accommodated but they also received the appropriate support that they required to maintain their accommodation.

Councillor Mrs Collop asked the following question: The situation was that traditionally emergency accommodation had always been in dormitory style, mainly EDAB's at merchant terrace and due to the increased level of homelessness had created the need for the night shelter, which was also dormitory style accommodation, which had recently moved to new premises to the vicarage along Blackfriars Road. As given by Government legislation these shared room dormitories were considered unsafe and did not comply with social distancing measures, so their future use was currently questionable at least for the foreseeable.

Great steps had been taken over the last 3 months to ensure that nearly all vulnerable people have had temporary accommodation. Obviously, there were going to be people that slip through the net because there are difficult issues which make it more challenging to offer support and housing.

However how has it become possible that in the space of one week, after the temporary hotel accommodation had ceased, there was no offer of emergency accommodation and vulnerable people had been turned away and told to stay on the streets for the weekend. Just because partner organisations had worked really hard to accommodate people did not negate that there would always be new people who were in crisis and needed immediate support.

What measures were going to be taken to secure that much needed response support when it was normal practice is considered unsafe, and why have these measures not been put into place right now as people who are on the verge of suicide may not be able to last the weekend until the Council opened on Monday.

The Assistant Director advised that he could not comment on what may have happened at the weekend and individual circumstances but there were and would continue to be offers of accommodation to people who needed emergency accommodation. Where possible, this would be self-contained accommodation with appropriate support as required.

Occasionally where this was not possible, a hotel B&B bed space was used in the short term. There were existing well established out of hours arrangements.

On the matter of dormitory style provision - Night shelter and Emergency Direct Access Beds the current advice was that these were likely to be inappropriate for public health reasons for the foreseeable future and this coming winter. Discussions were on-going between the Council / the Winter Night shelter charity and the Ministry for Communities and Local Government directly regarding the operation of a Night shelter. There is a risk that this sort of accommodation will not be available, and that alternative arrangements needed to be considered.

In relation to the issue that some people who had used hotel accommodation and had been asked to leave, and were now subsequently rough sleeping, the Council would do everything they could but if they had been threatening it was not possible to keep them there. This did not mean that the Council would give up on them – the Council would try and get them to engage and look at other options and through the outreach team would continue to work with them.

The Assistant Director confirmed that his response would be provided in an email to Councillor Mrs Collop.

5 **LGA ROUGH SLEEPER GUIDANCE - ATTACHED FOR NOTING PURPOSES ONLY**

Councillor Moriarty asked how relevant the guidance was for the Council in the future, as all the case studies referred to cities.

D Hall explained that the guidance was trying to address a lot for areas with different needs and characteristics. He added that it was important to understand that there was a lot that could be done for the next step strategy.

The guidance would help to inform what things could be done in the short to medium term to stop people returning to the streets. It highlighted some funding opportunities, the most important one The Rough Sleeper Initiative where the Government had identified the need for 6,000 new supported housing bed spaces across the country. It had made £300 million pounds available for both revenue and capital schemes which needed to be spent over the next two years but needed to be identified in this financial year. The guidance talked amount empty buildings, the use of modular accommodation and other funding sources. The Assistant Director stressed that it was important that some of these key opportunities were not missed including the High Street Heritage Action Zone to repurpose shops and accommodation above shops.

He added that in some ways this was an opportunity as the next steps strategy and Government funding opportunities meant that some of work identified in the Homelessness Strategy was intensified and could be delivered quicker.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A to the Act.

7 **REID WAY TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

The Task Group received an update on the temporary accommodation at Reid Way in King's Lynn. Examples of similar types of accommodation were shown to the Task Group.

Other sites where temporary accommodation could be sited were put forward.

RESOLVED: That the updated be noted.

8 **MEDIUM / LONGER PLANS WITH PARTNERS**

D Hall provided an update on the medium / longer plans with Partners to the Task Group.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

9 **DISCUSSION WITH NCC HOUSING RELATED FUNDING SUPPORT MODEL**

The Task Group were provided with details of discussions held with Norfolk County Council regarding a Housing Related Funding support model.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

10 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

In response to a question regarding what the plans would be if there was a second spike of Covid 19, it was explained that this was a strand of work that was ongoing and it was hoped that the Council could offer a range of accommodation options, but it was hoped to keep as many people in accommodation as possible.

11 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To be advised.

The meeting closed at 11.53 am