

Serving You

Regeneration Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

10 October 2024

Draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030 – A note on winter provision

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Summary

This note explains how Medway Council's housing service and its partners work to provide additional accommodation and support for people sleeping rough during periods of very cold weather.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Housing services operates a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) which is implemented when the nighttime temperature is predicted to be zero degrees centigrade or below. The concept of SWEP is to provide emergency accommodation when the threshold has been met, this ensure that a provision of a warm, secure space overnight for people who are sleeping rough.
- 1.2. When SWEP is implemented, it is communicated to all partners of the Homelessness Forum and key stakeholders, such as Kent police and commissioned providers.
- 1.3. As part of the Council's drive to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping, it is recognised that as part of the SWEP provision allows an opportunity to engage with this complex client base, providing an opportunity to assist with linking in with support services and potential routes into accommodation.

To note; support provision for rough sleepers is available throughout the year and not just when SWEP is implemented.

2. Current utilisation of resources and budget

- 2.1. Winter provisions were put in place in 2023/2024 for people who were rough sleeping.
- 2.2. Utilising Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) grant, plus additional grant for Medway's Target

Priority Group (the target priority group, or TPG, is an identified group of people who have either slept rough for an extended period, or who have a pattern of frequently sleeping rough after losing accommodation), the following provision was set up:

- 2.2.1. Winter refuge provision – over night provision based at a local church hall in Chatham, with the capacity on a standard night for 20 people and 30 people when pressure on bed spaces is acute. This provision is supported by One Big Family volunteers in the evening, welcoming people into the refuge, checking on the individual's welfare and discussing the support available. To ensure everyone's safety on any given night the provision is running is undertaken by a security and support service funded by Housing (utilising the funding streams highlighted in section 2.2) Due to the funding available in the winter of 2023/24, the Council was able to lower the threshold in which SWEPP would be triggered, ensuring additional nights refuge provision.
 - 2.2.2. Block booking of a local bed & breakfast (5 bed spaces) – this is used for people who have been deemed as high risk for a shared space or have complex needs that would mean a self-contained room would be more appropriate.
 - 2.2.3. Provision of a support housing property (3 bed spaces) – this provision provides self-contained rooms with visiting support from a commissioned local provider. This provision is used based on risk and needs assessments.
 - 2.2.4. Additional provision at Medway Assessment Centre (MAC) – Housing fund additional security and staffing hours which allowed MAC to expand their standard provision of self-contained rooms from six to eleven for SWEPP periods.
- 2.3. The planned provision for winter of 2024/25 intends to mirror last year's provision except for the block booking of B&B spaces (5), this may alter depending on whether additional funding/grants will be available. Previous years have seen additional financial support being made available via a winter pressures RSI grant; however, these tend to be announced partway through the winter period.
3. Existing provision – non winter related
- 3.1. Medway's RSI Team (Outreach and Navigator provision) manage access to the following resources:
 - 3.1.1. Ten **Housing First** flats, which is independent living for single people and couples where they have their own tenancies and intensive visiting support to ensure tenancy sustainment and other support needs.
 - 3.1.2. The provision of supported housing (11 bed spaces) which allows services to take on clients with a higher level of need.

- 3.1.3. A refurbished, shared 3-bedroom flat and six, 1-bedroom flats purchased through government grant, with visiting support.
- 3.2. In addition to the above service provision the RSI Service works with a variety of landlords to support people sleeping rough to access social housing or private sector tenancies with ongoing visiting support through the RSI Navigators.
- 3.3. The RSI Outreach provision provides early morning proactive outreach from 5.00am (this is on a shift basis) in addition to a proactive outreach service when referrals are received into the team. Outreach services offer support, advice and where clients engage begin the work towards settled accommodation. The work is not easy, with people often having had multiple years of sleeping rough and complex histories, often with a combination of factors including substance use, criminal justice detentions, mental health and trauma.
- 3.4. The RSI team, supported by volunteers including day centres, faith groups, commissioned support services, homelessness charities, the wider housing service and Kent Police, carries out bi-monthly street counts year round, between midnight and 5.00am. There is also an annual, independently verified count undertaken across all local authorities in England. This year, in Medway this will be in mid November 2024.
- 3.5. The RSI have accommodated over 300 people since starting in 2018.

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