

Report of the Director of Housing Economy and Regeneration

Report on the Homeless Winter Night Provision 21/22

Summary

1. This paper updates the Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Committee on the current homelessness situation and the winter night provision for rough sleepers and single homeless people in York.

Background

The Current Homelessness situation

2. City of York Council is currently in a partnership with other organisations across York, working under the 2018-2023 Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Together strategy. This partnership approach is well established, operating effectively for many years, and continues to work hard to rise to the challenges of tackling all forms of homelessness. These challenges have been further complicated by the covid pandemic and the restrictions imposed on service delivery because of it. Despite this, we continue to provide a high quality Housing Options Service and a nationally recognised advanced Resettlement Service
3. As part of the ongoing response to Covid, the team worked hard to ensure everyone had a place to sleep which was safe and minimised the risk of infection. This was/is supported by funding from central government. This approach remains in place and can be utilised if needed as part of our winter response.

2021-2022 Winter night Provision

4. This year due to Covid and the continuing potential of lockdowns there has been a different response to bed provision in the city. On 1st November, we will activate our winter night provision for rough sleepers and single homeless people. This offers direct access to safe and warm accommodation during the winter period from **1st Nov '21 to 28th Feb '22**. Due to the unique challenges posed by covid, much of this extra provision is

already in place, meaning that the transition into winter is less demanding on the accommodation, services and residents than previous years. The work of service providers this year, whether statutory, voluntary or faith based, is currently keeping the number of people sleeping rough low and this service will continue to house people over winter despite the extra challenges that cold weather brings.

- The nature of the Covid outbreak means that we have to offer a different form of night provision than pre pandemic. In previous winters we offered up to 29 extra beds over winter. Many of these were in a shared rooms. The ongoing threat of covid means that we have revised our approach to keep people as covid safe as possible. A summary of the previous winter response is presented in the right-hand column of the table below. The left-hand column shows how Covid has limited the capacity of our usual response. Over the 2020-21 winter period we offered 10 extra beds and this year we are increasing to 14 while maintaining safe practice.

Addition winter beds this winter period – 1st Nov to 28th Feb	Pre pandemic winter bed offer
Peasholme centre – offer of 4 emergency beds, 5 in absolute emergency utilising a back office interview room	7-8
Howe Hill – offer of 3 Emergency beds	7-8
Union Terrace Hostel – Offering 2 emergency beds but do prioritise empty rooms on this basis	7
Robinson Court – 1 emergency bed	1
Yes Below Zero (flat 2 Howe Hill site) – 3 emergency beds	5
Totals 14	29

- In order to fill the gap in provision above we have the following additional options to utilise at short notice if needed:

Ordnance Lane – accommodation for rough sleepers added to emergency capacity this will need to be handed back for development in March 2022	9
We have also worked with our partners in the Salvation Army to provide a POD provision that can accommodate up to 4 rough sleepers in an emergency	4
Hotel Partners – relationships in place and could be utilised if needed	Dependant on availability

The winter provision will provide a reliable supply of emergency accommodation to meet demand and ensure health and wellbeing. A triage approach is undertaken on how and where to place people and those deemed to have complex needs are prioritised into the supported accommodation schemes where skilled staff are on duty 24/7 to support them.

Housing Options, Supported Accommodation and Resettlement Services

7. In addition to providing services as usual extra burdens have been placed on the teams due to the extra covid related requirements. This includes the effect on sickness levels, the 'pingdemic', increased numbers of staff vacancies and difficulties in recruitment. Remote working, lack of person to person peer support and an increase in requests for service from 80 per week pre pandemic to around 200 for the Housing Option team have put increasing pressure on staff and resources.
8. The pandemic, the 'Everyone In' initiative and the additional resources to combat rough sleeping successfully bid for by CYC over the last few years demonstrates the continued commitment locally and nationally to end rough sleeping
9. These efforts have led to a reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in York over the last few years and it is hoped that demand will be lower this winter than previously. In the event of a change in circumstances or an extreme weather event, our approach allows us to provide a significant increase in emergency capacity if required all year round as well as over the winter period.
10. The extra winter provision can also be available through March and April should we have adverse weather during this period.
11. We take a phased approach to closing down the extra winter beds to ensure no one is returned to the streets or made homeless just because the winter is over. The service continues to work on expanding long term provision to support the goal of ending rough sleeping.
12. This year, we are yet to hear about if we will receive any Cold Weather funding from DLUHC to offset the additional cost of an increase in emergency bed provision during winter. Last year we received £6,000.
13. This year we received £560,634 Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding for a variety of front line workers which has supported our 'in reach' work with rough sleepers currently in accommodation. This has significantly reduced

rough sleeping in the city.

RSI staff support in numbers:

- 1 Rough Sleepers coordinator
- 4 Rough Sleeper Housing navigators
- 2 MEAM workers and personalisation monies (*MEAM Making Every Adult Matter*)
- 2 Outreach workers for our salvation army Early Intervention & Prevention Team
- 2 Private rented Sector officers
- A mental Health Worker.

14. We have successfully worked to accommodate all of York's rough sleepers during Covid in addition to working hard over the last four years to reduce official rough sleeping from 29 in 2017 to 3 last year. We are maintaining this level at present through engaging with the small number of people who sleep rough. Reasons for rough sleeping can be complex and we engage with each individual to address the barriers to them accepting accommodation and support from our services. We have enough capacity to accommodate all rough sleepers at present.

15. Below is a summary of permanent accommodation offers to people in resettlement who have previously been, or are at threat of, rough sleeping. The current high level of voids in our stock means that we are struggling to move people on from our Supported Accommodation (resettlement and homeless) as well as affecting our Housing First (for those most complex people who struggle with shared accommodation) offer.

	TOTAL housed in Resettlement category
2019-20	69
2020/21	76
2021/22	29 Current

16. The Housing Options, Support Workers in our accommodation and Resettlement Services continue to be very busy offering housing advice, working to prevent homelessness as well as accommodating and supporting families and individuals who are often very vulnerable and have multiple complex needs. People and families that need a lot of support present real challenges to our services across and beyond the council. If these needs are left unmet it is unlikely that settled accommodation will not be held on to, resulting in tenancy failure and repeat homelessness.

17. We are having to use more B&B's than in previous years for homeless families and we are currently in the process of re-opening Crombie House (family supported housing) to accommodate families that are homeless that

we can not accommodate at James House which is our main supported accommodation for homeless families. Crombie House is ultimately due for redevelopment to provide part of a pathway of supported accommodation for people who need support around mental health.

18. Creating and maintaining a sufficient supply of 'move on' options for people with complex needs continues to be a significant challenge with residents sometimes ending up in our supported accommodation services for too long. We are currently working with the York Human Rights Board to explore further support and move on options around Housing First through organisations and communities across York.
19. There is tremendously high expectation from other services on housing (many of which are facing high demand and financial pressures) to house people including discharge from hospital and prison sometimes without any planning or little notice. Many people presenting have needs that are so complex that they require more support / care than housing can provide. We continue to work with a range of services to share resources and knowledge to ensure as many presentations are planned as possible.
20. Unplanned presentation from people with complex needs often creates short term solutions to long term problems that require more than just housing. In addition we engaged with long term rough sleepers during the pandemic and 'Everyone In' initiative and the use of Ordnance Lane for a rough sleeping triage service and extra accommodation there, in addition support resources from our developing Mental Health accommodation pathway have come on line so we can support more people who previously avoided engaging with services or were too chaotic to accommodate in shared supported housing. In response we are creating multi agency packages of support and care by increasing the number of housing first offers with wrap-around support to help move this cohort on to more settled accommodation. It is important to note that housing first is only appropriate for a small cohort of complex individuals and is very resource intense.

Housing firsts accommodated

18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
1	4	5	2*

*8 agreed and pending accommodation, 4 waiting on decision from Head of Service

21. We have obtained additional resources to expand our resettlement offer through capital and revenue grant funding (Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme – RSAP) to purchase 6 long term (available for this specific purpose for 30 years) supported self-contained homes and provide further bespoke support. 4 properties have been identified and the purchase of 1 of these is due for completion before this scrutiny meeting. These are former council homes which have been offered up on Right Tight Buy first refusal

and checked off with the Housing Management team. We are focusing on properties without front doors opening on to internal communal areas. We are actively looking on the housing market for the additional 2. The deadline for completion on purchases is March 2022. Given the current situation with Building Services we are contracting out any repair work. We are currently recruiting to the RSAP support worker post. In addition we are developing 2 shared houses to support our resettlement pathway further in conjunction with adult social care for one and a faith based supported accommodation provider for the other.

22. There has been a recent spike in offenders from out of area being advised Probation Service to present to York. This is presenting further challenges for the homeless service, as these cases would, if we didn't step in, be in danger of rough sleeping in York. In some instances we are ending up with people with no local connection in service beds while we work to secure accommodation in the area where they do have a local connection. We are currently part of a successful joint bid for funding for a 12 month pilot to help ex-offenders access private rented accommodation along with Scarborough, Harrogate, Ryedale and Selby. We are in the process of recruitment to this post.

23. Approximately 4 % of customers accessing the service state they are from the LGBTQ community. Since the last scrutiny meeting we have rolled out training across the Housing Options and Support Team and have included this training into the mandatory training for new staff and refresher training. We also provide individualised support packages to support people including around LGBTQ issues.

Recommendation:

Scrutiny is asked to note this information and asked to make comment and recommendations on the issues raised.

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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexe

Annex A - Statistics on priority need, last settled accommodation and equalities