

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING	<b>Climate Emergency and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel</b>	
MEETING	<b>18 January 2021</b>	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	<b>HOMELESSNESS &amp; ROUGH SLEEPING UPDATE</b>	
WARD:	All	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>		
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b> None		

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The Council delivers support and assistance to people at risk of becoming homeless and people who are homeless by commissioning services, developing effective partnerships with the voluntary sector and having an effective Housing Options & Homelessness Team. This report provides an update on these services including new approaches taken as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

### 2 RECOMMENDATION

**The Committee is asked to;**

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report.

### 3 THE REPORT

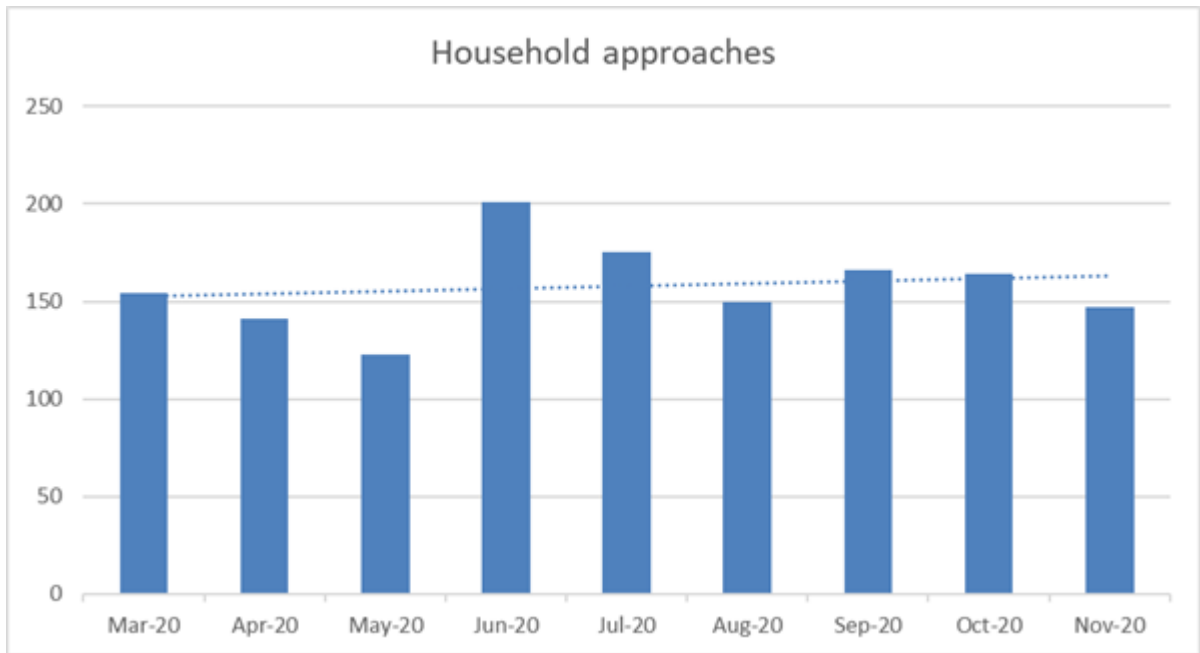
#### Background

- 3.1 The Council delivers support and assistance to homeless people by providing services directly, working in partnership with the voluntary sector and the commissioning of specialist services. The term homelessness is wide and includes: households threatened with imminent homelessness; those living in non-settled accommodation, such as “sofa surfing”, bed & breakfast or other types of temporary accommodation; or people sleeping on the streets/tents/cars etc.
- 3.2 Temporary accommodation (TA) provided by Bath and North East Somerset Council includes:
- Hostel accommodation occupied on a licence;
  - Flats occupied on an assured shorthold tenancy;
  - Bed & Breakfast accommodation.
- 3.3 Both the hostel accommodation and the flats are commissioned through Curo Housing. The hostel provides high quality accommodation suitable for singles and couples and small families of up to 3 people in 17 rooms with some shared communal facilities. The dispersed flats comprise 6 self-contained two bedroom properties and one, self-contained one bedroom property. These are family units and are for people with more than two children.
- 3.4 The Council tries not to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation (B&B). However, where there is no alternative, or it is an emergency, it will be used. In these circumstances the Council will attempt to accommodate households in B&B within district and for the shortest time possible. However, securing local B&B accommodation can be a challenge and as such out of district placements can also be used on occasion.
- 3.5 In 2019 a former supported housing scheme, located in the ward of Southdown, and leased to a third party was returned to the Council. Since April 2020 the property been used to accommodate rough sleepers during the Covid19 pandemic. However, Housing Services are proposing to renovate and extend the property to create an eleven-room supported housing scheme providing emergency/temporary accommodation for homeless households. The scheme will be directly managed by the Council. Works to renovate the property are due to start in later this year and once the current occupants have been provided with alternative accommodation.
- 3.6 This scheme will reduce the use of unsuitable and expensive bed and breakfast accommodation and provide an enhanced service and experience for households experiencing homelessness.

#### Statutory homelessness applications and use of temporary accommodation

Given the challenges and variable operating conditions of 2020, including full lock-down, limited lock downs and legislation to suspend eviction activity it might be reasonable to have expected to see significant fluctuations in homelessness applications and approaches across this period. Perhaps surprisingly, the data

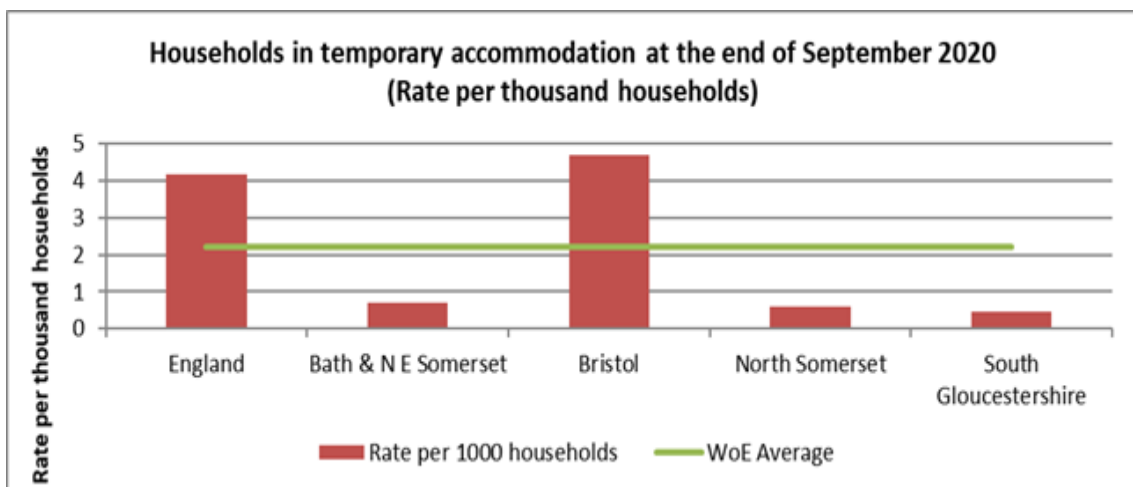
shows a broadly steady caseload of new homelessness approaches across the year, and which is not too dissimilar to previous years.



3.7 However, what has been significant is the number of households registering on Homesearch, which between 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and 1<sup>st</sup> October increased by around 28% to 5,418 households. The increase was particularly significant in Group A, the highest priority group and which increased by almost 60% to 484 households.

Use of temporary accommodation

3.8 At the time of writing there are 53 households in temporary accommodation and accommodated under statutory homelessness provisions. However, this includes 26 rough sleepers housed in response to the pandemic. Removing this recording anomaly means that we have 28 households in temporary accommodation. Although this marginally exceeds our self-imposed target of 27 households, as in previous years, it remains extremely low when set against both local and national comparators, as shown in the table below.



Rough Sleepers

3.9 Whilst rough sleeping is only a relatively small part of the wider homelessness agenda it is the most visible element and the most challenging. High levels of specialist support are required to provide positive outcomes. Working with local partners, including health, welfare, housing and employment the following services were already in place before the pandemic was declared to help rough sleepers make a transition into safer and healthier lives:

- Provision of 29 units of modern high-quality accommodation with on-site medical provision. (20 direct access & 9 move-on units)
- Assertive outreach provided in partnership by Julian House, DHI and AWP – supports individual rough sleepers into accommodation and other services by working with them on the street.
- A Reconnection Service. Some rough sleepers arrive from other parts of the country, having left accommodation and support networks behind. Wherever possible, contact will be made to ascertain that accommodation is still available and that appropriate support can continue. Where this is the case, travel costs are covered and the person offered the opportunity to return home. If there is any suggestion of violence or any other threat, this is not implemented.
- Winter Shelter, open every night from November to March with 20 bed spaces plus funding for other agencies to attend and offer support to residents.
- Range of specialist support workers including: specialist mental health outreach worker; dual-diagnosis (mental health and substance misuse) worker; specialist rapid assessment and reconnection workers; and private sector housing worker.
- Homeless hospital discharge service based at the RUH
- Housing First Project, providing 16 units of accommodation
- Supported Housing Gateway – web-based single access point for supported housing schemes.
- Priority on Homesearch Scheme for people in supported housing, and in some cases rough sleepers. This helps release bed-spaces that can then be allocated to rough sleepers.
- A Task & Targeting multi-agency group that shares information on and identifies solutions for named, entrenched rough sleepers.

#### Response to the pandemic

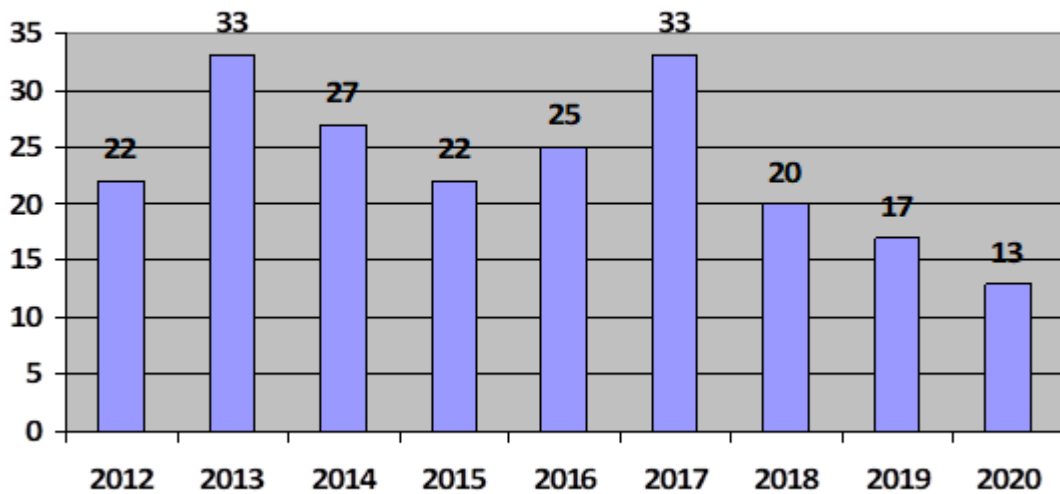
3.10 On Thursday 26th March, in response to the Covid-19 crisis, Dame Louise Casey, leading the government's response on rough sleeping, wrote to every local authority with a directive to get “everyone in” by Sunday 29th March. This unprecedented request from the government meant that councils across the country had just 48 hours to find emergency accommodation for all rough sleepers.

- 3.11 The emergency accommodation had to be suitable for self-isolation and social distancing, and therefore all communal night shelters had to be shut down, which included the MHCLG funded Safesleep winter accommodation. It was also necessary to move half the residents (10 in total) out of Manvers Street Hostel to reduce the risk of transmission in the hostel and to create space for residents to socially distance and self-isolate if required.
- 3.12 The Council and its partners, notably Julian House, adopted a hybrid approach to this task, utilising vacant council-owned, self-contained accommodation and only securing hotel type accommodation (through the YMCA and YHA) for a relatively small number of clients. The vacant accommodation took time to secure, clear, clean and commission but was in use by 7 April, 10 days after the directive was in place. MHCLG were fully supportive of the approach taken by the Council.
- 3.13 In total, 69 rough sleepers were assisted as part of covid-19 work, including those who needed to be decanted from the Manvers Street Hostel and Safesleep provision due to social distancing rules. Whilst many were helped to return to family or friends outside the B&NES area under the existing Reconnection Policy the Council ultimately and directly housed 42 rough sleepers.
- 3.14 The number assisted was greater than the combined total of those decanted and the rough sleeper count. This was due to a combination of factors including: the nature of rough sleeping, with many people moving in and out of temporary, insecure settings only to return to them at a later date; the limitations of the rough sleeper count (single night snapshot of demand); the government's decision to release prisoners early as part of their covid-19 prison plans; and the "pull factor" of the government's offer of accommodation.
- 3.15 It is interesting to note that of the 69 assisted, only 11 had been identified on rough sleeper counts since November 2018. This demonstrates the significant level of change within B&NES's rough sleeping cohort.
- 3.16 Despite the extra provision and improved offers of accommodation rough sleeping was not entirely eradicated and a small number of people continued to sleep rough, as follows:

Details	Number
Refused offers of accommodation	7
Have accommodation they are not using	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>

3.17 The chart below details the official rough sleeper count for the district, which is undertaken each year, usually in November. Given the work that has gone into reducing rough sleeping over the past year the reduction to 13 was disappointing and in part explained by the above table. However, on a more positive note at the time of writing the latest informal count found only 4 people sleeping rough.

Official Rough Sleeper Count



### Future Plans

3.18 On the 18th July MHCLG launched their Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP). This scheme gave Local Authorities the chance to bid for funding to provide support and accommodation for rough sleepers. Following support from informal cabinet a successful bid for £2.1m was submitted to MHCLG to meet the cost of the following:

- Interim support for housed rough sleepers until 31st March 2021

The Council continues to fund support and assistance to around 30 residents in four separate Council owned buildings. This funding allows this support and assistance to continue until the end of the financial year.

- Platform for Life Scheme

This is a development of the Council's existing and very successful low-support housing model for young-people currently run in partnership with the YMCA. However, in this iteration the scheme will be orientated to former rough sleepers. The funding allows for around 8 units of accommodation across 2x properties. Property to be owned by the Council with management and support outsourced to a suitable and specialist partner.

- Supported Housing Scheme

Funding allows for the renovation of an existing Council owned building to create 20 units of supported housing for former rough sleepers. The scheme will be owned and maintained by the Council and with allocations overseen by the Council. However, the on-site management and support will be outsourced to a suitable and specialist partner.

3.19 With the pandemic ongoing, the Winter Safesleep dormitory provision could not be put in place as has become usual in November. In order to make sure lives are not lost and that there is extra provision for Winter 2020/21, a range of alternatives have been identified and agreed:

- 9 self-contained flatlets leased at Bath YHA via Julian House. Funding to cover costs has been secured under the MHCLG Cold Weather Fund;
- A 6-bedroom house in the private rented sector has been secured by DHI's private rented service, Home Turf Lettings. Leased for 6 months and managed by Home Turf, the property will be available during the colder months

#### **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 4.1 The, [Housing Act 1996](#), the [Homelessness Act 2002](#) and the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#), all place significant statutory duties on local housing authorities (the Council) to ensure that advice, assistance and other housing duties are available to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 4.2 New requirements from central government were introduced due to the Coronavirus pandemic and continue to be in force at the time writing. These included preventative measures, such as, the closure of some services and the development of new accommodation and support options. These are set out in the report.
- 4.3 The delivery of services for homeless people has implications for corporate statutory considerations such as equalities, crime and disorder, safeguarding and public health and inequalities.

#### **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

- 5.1 This report is for information only, and as such, there are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

#### **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 6.1 None. Report for information only.

#### **7 EQUALITIES**

- 7.1 None. Report for information only.

#### **8 CLIMATE CHANGE**

- 8.1 Any new supported housing schemes will be designed to ensure the most practical energy efficiency measures are met. In addition ensuring our clients are accommodated within district will considerably reduce the need for unnecessary travel.

#### **9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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<b>Background papers</b>	None
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