

# FOLKESTONE & HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL

# BRIEFING NOTE

## **F&HDC Housing Briefing – support for rough sleepers**

6 November 2020

To: **Councillors, Staff, Tenant & Leaseholder Board, and other Stakeholders**

### **Introduction**

This edition focuses on the support that the council is providing to rough sleepers, particularly in light of the coronavirus pandemic and as the winter months and associated severe weather draw in. It provides information on the steps being taken to address the levels of rough sleeping in the district, as well as the critical wrap around support that goes with providing a home.

This briefing also explains how we are working closely with our partners to improve access to housing and support so that people can find not just shelter, but also a stable home. It also outlines the wider aspects of homelessness and how we continue to respond through the provision of temporary accommodation.

Feedback on any of the enclosed is always welcome and can be sent to:

[housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:housing.service@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk)

### **Councillor Jennifer Hollingsbee**

Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Communities, Lifeline, Area Officers and Street Homeless

### **Councillor David Godfrey**

Portfolio Holder for Housing and Transport

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## How we know who is rough sleeping

Through carrying out a rough sleeping count every year, together with information from our outreach workers and partners, we are provided with an in-depth knowledge of who is rough sleeping. We know them by name, where they are sleeping and a great deal about their circumstances. As this number is often debated we agree the figures with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Rough Sleeping Coordinator weekly. In June there were 17 people confirmed as rough sleepers and on 1 November there are 12 people confirmed, although we expect this figure to rise.

MHCLG defines people who sleep rough as:

- 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 street, 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 makeshift shelters often comprised of cardboard boxes).

The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites, or other sites used for recreational purposes, or organised protest, squatters, or travellers

The next Street Count will take place on the evening of 24 November 2020 (commencing at 11.30pm) into the early hours of 25 November 2020.

## How we are supporting rough sleepers

Since the end of March 2020, we have provided temporary accommodation for 59 households who were rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping in the district, 10 of these households have subsequently been supported into long-term housing.

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Supporting rough sleepers who may have not lived in a home for many years has proven particularly challenging and we are working with our statutory service and voluntary sector partners to ensure the appropriate support is provided both now and when they move on to permanent homes. Of particular concern is the high incidence of substance misuse amongst people with a history of rough sleeping. We are working with Kent County Council and local health services to review the support services available for these clients in the district to ensure that they are able to retain their accommodation and move to a more settled way of life.

Key partners are the Rainbow Centre, Porchlight, and Serveco, who identify and assist people who are rough sleeping or who are at risk of doing so. Of the 12 people who are sleeping rough in the district, all are known to us and we are working as a partnership to encourage their engagement to access local services and accommodation.

The council regularly chairs a Rough Sleepers Forum with our local partners to discuss ongoing cases and agree how best to help the individuals concerned. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the partnership, a group of 5 rough sleepers refuse to engage with local services and the council's Prevention Plus Officer is working with them to encourage engagement.

We continue to closely monitor guidance provided by the government in respect of rough sleeping and COVID-19. We are also in regular contact with their local homelessness and rough sleeping advisers to ensure that our strategies and processes are fully in line with guidance and good practice.

## **Next Steps Accommodation Programme bid**

Earlier this year we worked in partnership with Dover District Council to submit a bid under the government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP).

The NSAP is part of the government's landmark commitment to end rough sleeping for good and is intended to help councils respond to homelessness issues caused by the COVID-19 emergency, and also assist people who are entrenched rough sleepers with the most complex needs.

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The government has confirmed recently that the council will receive additional funding to assist people who are rough sleeping or currently accommodated by the council.

The funding breaks down as follows:

- £520k to assist with the purchase of accommodation to assist rough sleepers with complex support needs.
- £198k to provide high level support to people accommodated by both councils.
- £53K to support the delivery of a Winter Shelter service, to be delivered by the Rainbow Centre – the service is to be delivered through bed and breakfast accommodation due to current COVID-19 guidance.
- £25K to assist the council with some of the costs of placing rough sleepers in accommodation during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Officers are working closely with our local partners to progress these initiatives as quickly as possible. Further information will be provided as the initiatives are progressed.

## **This year's Winter Shelter and Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)**

The Rainbow Centre is currently finalising its arrangements to deliver the annual Winter Shelter scheme over the coming winter period, to support people who are rough sleeping in the district, or at risk of doing so. The scheme is run in conjunction with Churches Together in Folkestone, from December to February, offering emergency accommodation.

Due to current COVID-19 guidance, the initiative will run differently to previous years and be delivered in fixed locations in Folkestone, with customers being housed in bed and breakfast accommodation. Customers will also be assisted to access support services, and supported to obtain long-term accommodation.

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We will also continue to support people who remain rough sleeping over the coming winter period and are working with Paramount Independent Property Services and the Salvation Army to look at how best to deliver the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) in-line with COVID-19 guidance from central government. The SWEP sets out the plans put in place by the council and its partners to assist people who are sleeping rough during periods of severe weather during the winter.

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol is available on the F&HDC website here:  
<https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/housing/sleeping-rough-in-winter>.

## Being homeless

Being homeless includes a much broader group of people than just those that are sleeping rough. The definition of homelessness is not having a home.

The following housing circumstances are examples of homelessness:

- People without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough.
- People living in hostels, shelters, refuges or other temporary circumstances, for example in institutions.
- People staying temporarily with family and friends ('sofa surfing') and people who are threatened with eviction.
- People living in unfit housing or extreme overcrowding.

## An update on homelessness

Since 1 April this year, approximately 665 households have approached our Housing Options team requesting help with their housing difficulties. The main reasons that people approached the council for assistance with housing difficulties during the period were:

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- Loss of accommodation due to domestic abuse.
- Loss of accommodation due to the ending of a private sector tenancy.
- Loss of accommodation because family and friends are no longer able to accommodate.
- Loss of accommodation due to relationship breakdown (non-violent).

Forty five households are currently placed in temporary accommodation and we are working hard to provide long-term housing solutions for these households as quickly as possible. While some of these households may be offered accommodation with the council, or with our housing association partners, many will be helped to access homes in the private rented sector. A key role of the Housing Options team is to build links with private landlords to enable the council to assist homeless households to access good quality private rented accommodation and prevent the need for them to be accommodated in temporary housing.

Approximately 250-300 council and housing association homes become available each year, and there are approximately 1200 households currently registered on the council's housing list.

## Homelessness Prevention Strategy

The draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy sets out how the council and its partners intend to work together to respond to homelessness in the district. The consultation process for the draft strategy 2020-2025 ended on 2 October 2020. The new plan sets out the council's three priority areas:

- Ending rough sleeping.
- Early intervention, prevention and support.
- Ensuring a good supply of affordable and suitable accommodation.

We are currently reviewing the responses received and will be reporting the outcome to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2020.