

Meeting: Housing Committee

Date: 12th September 2018

Wards Affected: All

Report Title: System change for Vulnerable Adults with Complex Needs

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1. Background

Torbay has seen rising numbers of people presenting to the Council as homeless, and rising numbers of rough sleepers. Official counts of rough sleepers conducted for MHCLG have seen numbers rise from 5 in 2013, to 24 in 2017. Surveys carried out by volunteers as part of the Torbay End Street Homelessness Campaign, found 29 people in April 2017 and 38 people in February 2018 sleeping on the streets in Torbay.

Alongside this, anti-social behaviour in Torquay town centre has risen, leading to a visible street population that causes concern for local businesses and the community. While not all anti-social street activity can be attributed to rough sleepers, the concentration of services for people who are homeless in Torquay town centre adds to the difficulties of preventing anti-social behaviour in the town centre, and is a potential block to town centre regeneration.

The current 'system' around adults who are homeless in Torbay involves the Council's Housing Options team, and commissioned/grant funded services. At present, people who present to the Council's Housing Options team may be placed in temporary/emergency accommodation whilst a decision around statutory duty is made. People/families to whom the Council has a duty will receive assistance with housing. Single homeless people with complex needs, or who are not owed a duty by the Council, are placed in the Leonard Stocks hostel.

People may also enter the system through the outreach team, who connect with people on the streets with a view to accommodating them. They may be initially housed within Safe Space, a separate unit in the Leonard Stocks building, which immediately accommodates the most vulnerable rough sleepers whilst a housing solution is found.

The current position is that whilst the system works for a majority of people, a large proportion of the most entrenched individuals are not maintaining accommodation, and are repeat users of the system (for data, see appendix 1). This is not only difficult for them as individuals, often resulting in an escalation of existing health conditions and social care needs, but it also impacts on the community, and wider services.

2. Recommendation

That members endorse the approach and actions outlined in the report for implementing system change together with local health, social care and criminal justice partners to support some of the most vulnerable people in Torbay. This will support homeless people with the most complex mental and physical health needs to access and sustain suitable accommodation. Stable housing with support will improve health, social care, recovery, access to employment and life chances for people with complex needs and reduce anti-social street activity and criminal justice interventions.

3. 'Housing First'

- 3.1 Torbay Council has agreed to adopt Housing First, a new approach that has evidenced successful outcomes internationally for repeat users of services. The traditional approach (which we use in Torbay) is to house people in a hostel until they are 'ready' to move into their own accommodation. People are expected to start addressing their drug and alcohol use, debts, mental and physical health needs, legal issues etc. to prove that they are 'ready' to move on. The hostel environment is often not the best place to address these issues and as a result, some of our most complex and entrenched rough sleepers, as well as people with particular needs, and often women, may refuse hostel accommodation.
- 3.2 Housing First takes a different approach; the model sees stable housing as the key to people being able to address issues such as poor mental and physical health, drug and alcohol use and legal issues. In this model, those the current system fails, resulting in patterns of repeat homelessness are instead placed straight into stable housing with personal, intensive, non-time limited support.
- 3.3 This model originated in the USA and has also been successful in Europe. Housing First has central government support and MHCLG are currently funding 3 Housing First pilot areas in the UK; Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester.
- 3.4 In order to assess the feasibility of Housing First in Torbay the Nationwide Foundation provided Shekinah, in partnership with Torbay Council and Westward Housing with funding commission Crisis, the national homelessness charity, to undertake a feasibility study around Housing First in Torbay. The Crisis report is included as Appendix 2

4. Summary of Crisis report

- 4.1 Crisis reviewed data from Housing Options as well as Commissioned and grant funded services, spoke to stakeholders and people who are experiencing homelessness, considered finances, and current national and international policy and good practice around homelessness.
- 4.2 They found pockets of good practice in Torbay. However, they found that the 'system' of services around homelessness in Torbay is fragmented, the percentage of single people being placed into temporary accommodation is

extremely high compared to the rest of England, the level of complexity of rough sleepers is increasing, and in the last year around 50% of people who entered the hostel had been there previously.

- 4.3 The report proposes using Housing First to work with the most complex repeat rough sleepers who have been homeless for an extended period of time. However, Crisis recommends that simply using Housing First as a 'bolt on' service to current provision will not be effective. This is because our current system does not prevent people's needs escalating – we do not work with people early enough and therefore they get to a point where they need intensive, expensive services. This would mean that there would be a constant flow of people with complex needs requiring Housing First. A strategic overview of multiple and complex needs and proposed governance arrangements, reporting to Torbay's Health and Wellbeing Board, was approved by the Council's Senior Leadership Team and is included as Appendix 3.
- 4.4 To address this, Crisis recommend work across the system to focus resources on addressing peoples' needs before they escalate, to create a system where:
- People are prevented from becoming homeless,
 - People who have become homeless are housed rapidly and if needed, given small amounts of support to help them maintain tenancies.
 - Only the small amount of people with the most complex needs are given a Housing First service

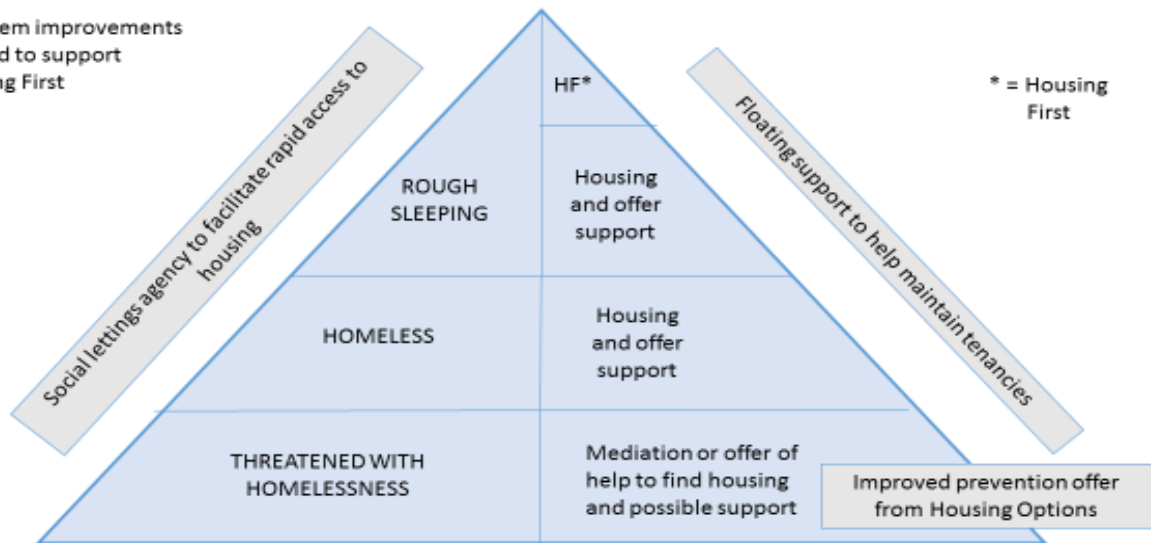
The system change towards Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing will be a long term project over 5 years and will require additional funding. An initial £500,000 has been committed by the Council to start the Housing First service, and additional funding for other elements of system change are being sought from MHCLG, as well as an exploration of other potential funding sources.

Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing will:

- ✓ Improve outcomes for the individual in terms of tenancy sustainment
- ✓ Improve value for money from in house and commissioned services around homelessness
- ✓ Improve the Castle Circus area for businesses and the community as services would not be focused exclusively in that area

The diagram below illustrates system change:

2. System improvements needed to support Housing First



5. Implementation of Housing First/Rapid Re-Housing in Torbay

- 5.1 An implementation plan for Housing First system change in Torbay is included as Appendix 4.
- 5.2 There are 4 main work streams that will need to be undertaken over the next 5 years in the system change:
- ✓ Creation of Housing First support team(s)
 - ✓ Provision of floating support service
 - ✓ Provision of accommodation finding service/provision of accommodation
 - ✓ Provision of short term emergency accommodation (in alternative location to Leonard Stocks, outside of town centre)
 - ✓ Re focusing Council's Housing Options team's work to focus more on prevention
- 5.3 The accommodation finding service will be key to system change as finding accommodation rapidly is the cornerstone of the new approach. One of the major blockages within the current homelessness system is finding accommodation. There are very few social tenancies available, and private landlords will often not accept people in receipt of benefits, or those who have support needs. Both Leonard Stocks and the outreach team report that difficulties in finding accommodation are a key reason for people not moving into their own accommodation from the streets or the hostel.
- 5.4 An accommodation finding service aims to work with people who would otherwise struggle to find a home through more usual channels such as lettings agencies. Accommodation finding services can take many forms, from a simple matching service which simply holds details of available tenancies and provides these to tenants, to a social lettings agency. Social lettings agencies have many different ways of working, such as leasing and managing properties, owning properties, or a

combination of the two. There are also many examples of innovative schemes around the country which offer various incentives or guarantees to landlords to encourage them to work with this group of people. An options appraisal with full costings for each model will be undertaken.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Data on usage of Leonard Stocks

Appendix 2: Crisis evaluation report on Housing First in Torbay

Appendix 3: Strategic Overview of Multiple and Complex Needs and Proposed Governance Arrangements (report to SLT)

Appendix 4: Transition Plan for introduction of Housing First/Rapid Re-Housing

