EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	Scrutiny Review of Homelessness	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
Meeting of:	Scrutiny (Environment, Health & Well-being) Committee	**X**
	Corporate Management Team	X
	Leader and Deputy Leaders	X
	Cabinet	

Scrutiny Committee Review Final Report

Title: Homelessness Review

Scrutiny Committee: Scrutiny (Environment, Health & Well-being) Committee

Committee Chair: Cllr Ackroyd

Sub-group Members Leading Review:

- Cllr C Wileman
- Cllr H Hall
- Cllr J Killoran
- Cllr L Beech
- Cllr L Walker
- Cllr P Walker
- Cllr V Gould

Is the Report Confidential?   No

If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972:   N/a

Scope for Homelessness review in East Staffordshire
Scrutiny (Economic Growth, Communities and Health) Committee

Group Membership:
As above

Background / Context:
The background for this review is encapsulated in the Council motion below

"That, in response to the tragic circumstances surrounding the death, by suicide of Mrs Angela Winter in June of 2021, this Council calls for an urgent scrutiny review by the Community Regeneration, Environment and Health and Well Being Committee to establish if the current policies and practices involved in delivering a service to rough sleepers are the best they can be and based on the Committee's findings, make any necessary recommendations to the Executive for ways to improve the service".

What are the core questions (no more than 3) the review is seeking to answer?

What does the provision of the current service entail?

Which authority is recognised as the benchmark for homelessness services? How does ESBC compare with this and what enhancements could be made?

What lessons have been learned from the suicide of Mrs Winter?

What is the purpose of the Review (in one sentence)?
To explore the provision of homelessness service and to assess this against recognised best practice in the UK.

To identify any lessons learned and make recommendations for service enhancement

Scrutiny approach

In scope

What will be included in the review?

A review of the service provision and to seek recommendations for potential enhancements

Out of scope

What will not be included?

An examination of the circumstances around the death of Mrs Winter

What is the timescale?

December 2022

What evidence / data do you need?

Homelessness data

Scale of homelessness in East Staffs

Contract specifications if applicable

Details of how the service currently operates

Best practice examples

Resources
Officer time

Stakeholders to interview

Housing Options Manager

Burton YMCA

Burton Hope

SECTION 1: COMMITTEE'S REPORT

1.   What does the provision of the current service entail?

1.1.1   Presently, the ESBC Homelessness service entails a basket of services which incorporates Rough Sleeper Outreach Service (RSOS), Housing First, Navigator Service and Emergency bed spaces. These services have gradually been introduced since 2016 with RSOS being the oldest having been re-commissioned in 2016.

1.1.2   Homelessness can take many guises and the causes multi-faceted and complex. As a result, ESBC are required to have an agile and responsive service that can meet the varying demands of clients. The Council motion makes specific reference to the rough sleeper service and it is this element of the Homelessness service that this review will focus on. Consequently, the three stakeholders that have been interviewed have been asked to provide their perspective on the homelessness service and the provision for rough sleepers. However, it should be noted that the RSOS is targeted at those experiencing the most acute form of homelessness, which is a small subset of the all those experiencing homelessness and accessing relevant services in the borough. Rough sleeping is a comparative rarity amongst all those experiencing homelessness in a given year, and in most cases they have not suddenly found themselves in that position. Rougher sleepers can often have complex physical and mental health needs and homelessness can also be brought about by dysfunctional relationships and/or domestic abuse. The Government definition of rough sleeping is defined 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 streets, 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 "bashes".

1.1.3   The ESBC RSOS is a contractually commissioned service delivered by Burton YMCA (recognised as the best YMCA in the UK in 2022). Part of this service involves the delivery of fortnightly sweeps across the borough to identify rough sleepers. These sweeps are conducted by experienced officers (two staff and six volunteers) who are often former rough sleepers and have the experience and insight to locate homeless people utilising local intelligence. Although this can often be a difficult undertaking, particularly if a person is determined not be seen as homeless and/or sleeping rough. In addition, other front-line Council teams- as part of their day-to-day activities- assist in the identification of rough sleepers and report to the Housing Options team any signs or evidence of rough sleeping/sleepers. These include Community & Civil Enforcement and Open Spaces.

1.1.4   Portfolio holders for Homelessness services have previously taken a very hands on proactive approach to this service and have accompanied officers on their sweeps to witness these efforts first hand. Consequently, the service has a degree of dependency on local intelligence which can take many forms. Once a report of a potential rough sleeper is received this is passed on to the YMCA who have a contractual commitment to respond within 48 hours. 48 hours has been set as the benchmark due to weekends and bank holidays. However, commentary from the YMCA suggest that they regularly contact identified people within 24 hours. Once contact has been made the YMCA guide rough sleepers to secure accommodation but can also assist with tasks such as obtaining

identification documents, which are crucial to help prevent someone from becoming an entrenched rough sleeper. Various ongoing methods of support are also available to ensure a person/s receives the service that is most appropriate for their circumstance.

1.1.5 YMCA reported a figure of 25 people that had received the RSOS from the start of the calendar year until July 25th. There is a contractual requirement to facilitate and staff the annual rough sleeper count. Since autumn 2010, all local authorities have been required to submit an annual snapshot figure to DLUHC to indicate the number of people sleeping rough in their area on a 'typical' night between 1st October and 30th November. They can arrive at this snapshot by using one of three approaches:
- Count-based estimate with a full physical count of visible rough sleeping
- Evidence-based estimate meeting using evidence from different partner agencies, which may include people in hidden rough sleeping sites
- Evidence-based estimate, including a spotlight count using evidence from different partner agencies. This includes a physical count of areas with visible rough sleeping alongside evidence for other locations (discussed during an estimate meeting), which may include people in hidden rough sleeping sites.

Figure 1: Local Authority snapshot figures 2010-2021- Staffordshire, South Derbyshire and major local cities (DLUHC)

Local authority	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Birmingham	9	7	8	14	20	36	55	57	91	52	17	31
Cannock Chase	0	---	---	---	5	---	---	5	---	---	8	---
East Staffordshire	---	---	7	---	---	7	6	16	11	5	0	0
Lichfield	---	0	---	---	---	---	---	---	5	5	---	---
Newcastle-under-Lyme	---	---	---	---	---	7	0	5	---	6	9	7
South Staffordshire	---	---	---	0	0	---	---	0	0	---	---	---
Stafford	---	---	---	---	---	5	15	7	7	5	10	8
Staffordshire Moorlands	0	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	0	---
Stoke-on-Trent	---	16	---	16	15	14	17	19	34	16	28	21
Tamworth	---	---	---	---	---	5	8	---	---	5	5	---
Derby	---	21	24	47	26	10	21	37	26	14	6	11
Nottingham	---	10	7	9	9	14	35	43	34	30	31	23
South Derbyshire	---	---	---	0	---	---	---	---	0	0	---	---

1.1.6 All of the above approaches record only those people seen or thought to be sleeping rough on a single 'typical' night. They do not include everyone in an area with a history of sleeping rough, or everyone sleeping rough in areas across the October-November period. East Staffordshire has adopted the Count-based estimate approach over recent years due to a long standing disagreement between local partners on numbers, this is an approach which is supported by the guidance. To coordinate a count based estimate, the Council engages with experienced local partners and dividing the borough into three areas and teams (made of these local partners) and carrying out a search within their prescribed location in the early hours of the morning. Nationally the snapshot highlights that rough sleeping has increased by 38% since 2010, but has declined by 9% between 2020 and 2021. Demographic information linked to the snapshot suggested that 85% of rough sleepers are male, with only 15% 25 and under and just over two-thirds are UK nationals. Westminster (187) record the highest number of rough sleepers in 2021.

1.1.7 However, locally, this method has been disputed by Burton Hope as it is believed not to capture all rough sleepers. Research by the Committee, through interviews with

stakeholders, have highlighted that Homelesslink remain steadfastly committed to the methodology as being valid, and have attended the count activity to provide verification on each occasion that the methodology has been employed. Furthermore, Burton Hope voiced concerns that some support workers were inexperienced in helping homeless people access services or housing provision.

1.2   Which authority is recognised as the benchmark for homelessness services? What lessons have been learned? How does ESBC compare with this and what enhancements could be made?

1.2.1   Having embarked upon the review the Committee wanted to identify a potential "best practice" operator amongst UK local authorities. However, advice from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) suggests that there is no one singular exemplar but services that excel in one of the four building blocks of provision: prevention, intervention, recovery or systems support. Indeed DLUHC advisors have indicated that East Staffordshire is "*a local authority that provides a very strong and sustainable offer to rough sleepers and those at risk"*[1]

1.2.2   Following a formal review in July, DLUHC highlighted the first night offer and rapid response as a strength of the outreach service. In addition, strong individual and team performance received recognition along with good levels of community engagement. Other positive aspects included a creative approach to hostel "move-on" through the use of stage two accommodation. Conversely, the Empire of God situation was considered to be a potential risk factor that could lead to a spike in homelessness presentations. Other areas for development included the relationship with Probation services and access to supported accommodation for rough sleepers with high risk profiles e.g. sex offenders.

1.2.3   Evidence for the success of the service can be seen in the growth of homelessness provisions. Without an initial good track record, the RSOS could not have been augmented by the Navigator service, emergency bed spaces nor Housing First. Combined, these schemes provide a diverse and holistic product to assist those at risk of or those that are homeless.

1.2.4   Despite these positive comments there is always the potential for reflection and subsequent improvement. The Committee have heard that a Homelessness Partnership had been established and used to meet regularly. Examples of the membership include Burton Hope. Disruption due to the COVID pandemic has somewhat curtailed partnership activity. Given the positive comments made toward the partnership, the Committee believe this group should be resurrected to further strengthen the relationships and activities amongst partners. Committee members have also heard how there has been an increase in food bank take up and are cognisant of new financial pressures on households. If not already, partner agencies and organisations that can provide "upstream" interventions- such as debt advice- should be incorporated into the rejuvenated partnership.

1.2.5   Part of this review has also examined the Homelessness policies and strategies of other local authorities in Staffordshire and neighbouring Derbyshire. Of these policies the use of Street Scene operatives by Stafford Borough Council was considered innovative[2]. These officers combine aspects of street cleaning and open spaces work. Street scene officers are often around in the early hours and visit the locations inhabited by rough sleepers. Consequently, it is recommended that ESBC street cleaning workers are trained to report any signs of rough sleeping or rough sleepers. This addition would build on the existing practice of the Civil Enforcement and Open Spaces teams reporting evidence of rough sleeping to Housing colleagues.

[1] Andy King, Rough Sleeping Advisor, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
[2] Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-2025, Stafford Borough Council

1.2.6   Outside of Staffordshire, Derbyshire operate a pan-county partnership which has developed a shared strategy to tackle homelessness[3]. Whilst this may not be possible for Staffordshire, there are elements of this approach that East Staffs may want to adopt. The strategy has strong emphasis on "upstream" interventions akin to the public health approach used to combat such issues as youth violence. Clearly, there are a number of stages before a person/s becomes homeless and complicating contextual factors such as alcohol or drugs use may be present in some cases. Therefore, it is recommended that ESBC commission training for front-line staff (and those in partner organisations) to help recognise these domestic or contextual factors and potentially guide individuals to specialist support. Increasing capacity at a preventative level should then help towards reducing the potential numbers of homeless people and those rough sleeping.

1.2.7   There is general agreement that agencies need to work together to prevent individuals becoming rough sleepers, hence the importance of resurrecting the Homelessness Partnership. ESBC Housing Options work to do that with the individuals referred to them, but other agencies need to be involved as it may be that it is the failure of early intervention that results in rough sleepers and homelessness. The Derbyshire Homelessness strategy emphasises this, recommending actions such as awareness campaigns to encourage individuals to seek help at the earliest point and developing prevention toolkits. Front line staff are essential to this work across the borough but need training to identify and assist individuals who may be in need of help.

1.2.8   Finally, throughout the course of this review members where pleased to hear of the positive work that has been undertaken by the Housing Options team. The good track record of service delivery by ESBC has enabled the Council to secure additional funding and has added to the basket of services delivered creating a more holistic provision.

1.3.   <u>Recommendations</u>

1.3.1   To propose to former members of the Homelessness Partnership that the partnership is resurrected and expanded to include organisations that can provide "upstream" advice to those at risk of becoming homeless.

1.3.2   ESBC consider commissioning a training package for all front-line officers to raise awareness of the causal factors that lead to homelessness and the support available to individuals.

[3] Derbyshire Homelessness Strategy 2022-2027

SECTION 2: OFFICER CONSIDERATIONS

2. **Financial Considerations**

This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit: Anya Murray

2.1 The main financial issues arising from this Report are as follows:

2.1.1 The council currently hosts a website for the Burton Homelessness Partnership which is due for renewal this next financial year. It is currently anticipated that any updates necessary can be met from existing homeless resources.

2.1.2 Additional training for front-line officers falls within the corporate training budget provided for the purpose.

3. **Legal Considerations**

This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team: Glen McCusker – Locum Solicitor

3.1 There are no significant legal implications arising from this Report.

4. **Risk Assessment and Management**

4.1 The main risks arising from this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:

4.2 **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits): n/a

4.3 **Negative** (Threats): n/a

4.4 The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register.

4.5 Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

5. **Equalities and Health**

5.1 **Equality Impacts:** The subject of this Report is not a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is not required at this time.

5.2 **Health Impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

6. **Human Rights**

6.1 There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report.

7. **Sustainability** (including climate change and change adaptation measures)

7.1   Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures)