

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Slough Wellbeing Board **DATE:** 28th March 2018

CONTACT OFFICER: Colin Moone, Service Lead Strategic Housing
(For all Enquiries) (01753) 874057

WARD(S): All

PART I

FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION

THEMED DISCUSSION: HOMELESSNESS – THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report provides the Slough Wellbeing Board with a summary of the current homelessness situation in the borough. Homelessness can be wide-ranging so this report concentrates on homelessness that is the responsibility of the Strategic Housing Service.

1.2 At the meeting, Emma Seria-Walker, Consultant in Health and Wellbeing, PHE South East Centre, will facilitate a workshop on this item, to explore some of the issues around homelessness and rough sleeping with a specific focus on health and wellbeing and the wider determinants of health.

2. Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The Slough Wellbeing Board is recommended to note this report and comment on any aspect of it and the presentation.

3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

The priorities of the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS) have been taken account of in the production of the Housing Strategy and homelessness forms a key part of the Strategy. Housing is a key determinant of health and wellbeing and it is a priority in the Wellbeing Strategy. Being homeless can exacerbate a household's housing situation and therefore their health will be affected as a result.

3b. The JSNA

The Housing Strategy Key objectives identifies homelessness as a key plank. A new Homelessness Strategy is about to be written but the Housing Strategy identifies that:

- specialist accommodation is available for adults and children (if needs cannot be met within ordinary housing solutions)
- homelessness and rough sleeping is reduced

3b. Five Year Plan Outcomes

The key driver for the Housing Strategy is to deliver Outcome 4 of the 2017 Five Year Plan "Our residents will have access to good quality homes" (this will follow through

into 2018/19). As homelessness is one of the main routes to accessing accommodation in the borough, this area is really relevant to the outcomes of the Five Year Plan. It also helps to deliver and makes significant contributions to each of the other outcomes:

- 1) Our children and young people will have the best start in life and opportunities to give them positive lives
- 2) Our people will become healthier and will manage their own health, care and support needs
- 3) Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and visit
- 5) Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide jobs and opportunities for our residents.

4. **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial** – Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, it should be acknowledged that the more households being accommodated in expensive temporary accommodation will have a detrimental impact on the Council's General Fund position.

(b) **Risk Management** – Increasing homelessness increases the financial risks to the Council.

(c) **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications** – There are no Human Rights Act implications arising from this report.

(d) **Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)** - There are no equality issues arising from this report.

5. **Summary**

Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act, is the legislation that determines how the Council governs homelessness in the borough. There are five tests, which households must satisfy. Whether a household: -

- Is eligible for housing
- Is homeless
- Has a priority need
- Has made themselves intentionally homeless
- Has a local connection

Each of these tests has a high threshold to qualify and have a large body of case law, which has built up since the inception of the original Act in 1977. Needless-to-say, for this report, it will not be possible to delve into the depths of these.

6. **Supporting information**

Homelessness Provision

6.1 When a household (a single person, a couple or family) comes to the Council and states that they are homeless, the Housing Demand Team, within Strategic Housing Services, will carry out an initial investigation and decide whether that household should be placed into temporary accommodation, pending further

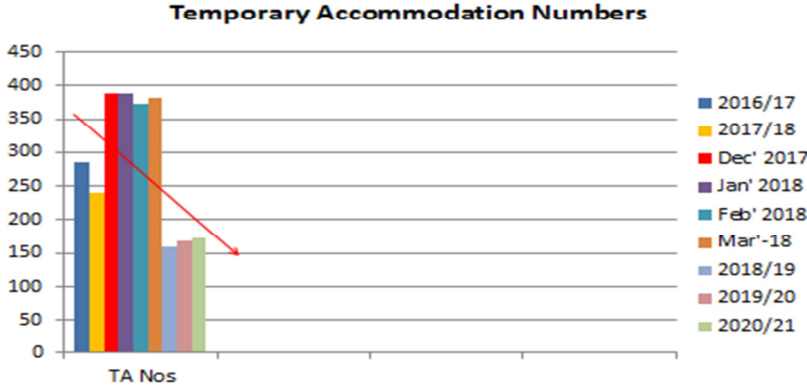
investigations. It is in the Council’s best interest to keep households out of temporary accommodation as long as possible because, in some cases, all of the housing costs cannot be met and therefore the General Fund has to cover the shortfall.

6.2 There are different types of accommodation, which households will be placed into, pending a final decision on homelessness; from bed and breakfast to houses, on a longer term basis.

6.3 Part of the test for homelessness is that a household must be actually homeless within 28 days of presenting as homeless. At the beginning of April 2018, this aspect of the law will change to 56 days meaning that the Council may have to take responsibility for households much earlier and therefore this is likely to increase costs to the Council.

Managing Homelessness

6.4 The table below shows the current number of homeless households in all forms of temporary accommodation.



6.5 As at 9th March there were 382 households in temporary accommodation. In July 2017, the numbers were 315. There was a significant increase from then until November 2017 and officers have so far kept numbers hovering around the current number. However, a number of challenges will put the ability of officers to keep this under 400 at risk.

6.6 The Council manages homeless demand by accessing Council accommodation or properties in the private sector. Given the acute supply and demand situation in the borough, like many boroughs, the private sector is becoming increasingly important to mitigate the lack of social housing. However, rehousing households in to the private sector is expensive and the Council cannot access enough accommodation because it has a limited budget to pay deposits or incentive payments, which is unfortunately a feature of homelessness. It can cost an average £9,000 in incentives payments to house one homeless household into a two year tenancy. After that period, if they do not resolve the housing issues themselves, they will be back to the Council – ‘the revolving door’.

6.7 A significant and emerging problem is that London boroughs are placing an increasing number of homeless households into Slough. In 2016/17 the figure was

160. After these tenancies end, the households will have a local connection with Slough and therefore we will have an additional 160 households to accommodate. This figure is likely to be significantly under reported and therefore we do not know the scale of it. However, we believe the unexpected increase in homeless approaches is for this reason. Slough cannot compete with London in incentive payments and Landlords are not loyal to Slough. This is a worrying problem and nothing can currently be done to stop it.

6.8 It is estimated that in order to keep pace with homelessness next year, 152 Council and Housing Association lettings (out of approximately 400) will have to be achieved. This is coupled with 57 properties from the private sector.

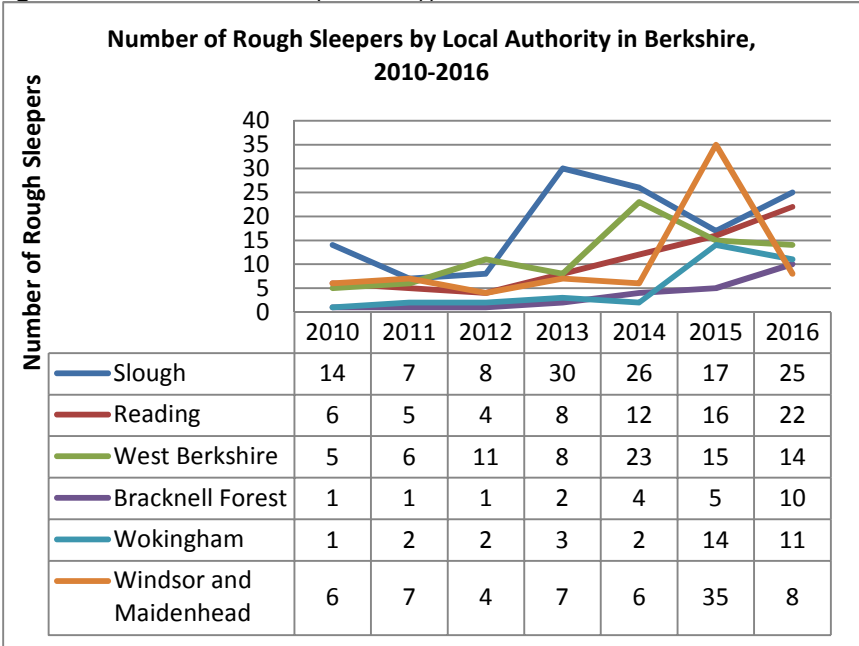
6.9 The private sector figure includes 30 units from James Elliman Homes, which is a company set up by the Council. The Council is making £18m available for James Elliman Homes to purchase properties in the private sector, to assist with the homelessness problem. However, even with this volume, based on projections, the Council will still be 100 properties short to keep numbers in temporary accommodation at existing levels.

Single Homelessness

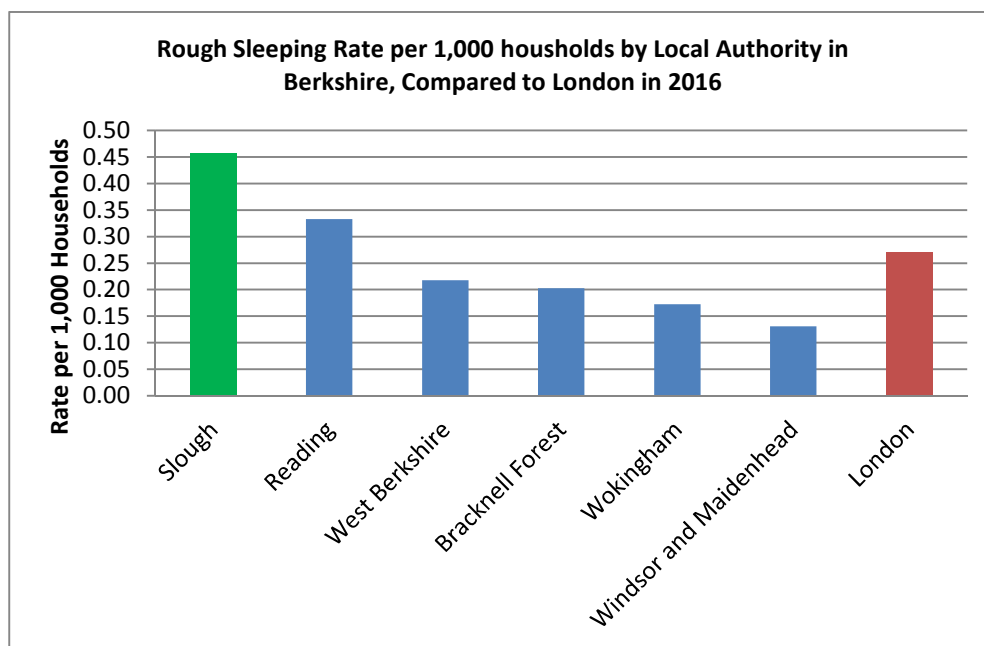
6.10 Single homelessness is a mixed bag in Slough. The Council lacks provision with the pending closure of Millennium House and the previous closure of the Foyer. The YMCA is the main provision for single homeless households but collectively it is a struggle to find suitable accommodation for younger people, particularly for some Children Leaving Care. Single homeless temporary provision is commissioned through Adult Social Care and there is current discussion with Housing about where the appropriate place for the commissioning function to sit.

Rough Sleepers

6.11 The following table below shows the current number of rough sleepers by each of the Berkshire Local Authorities between 2010 – 2016 (Source: DCLG Rough Sleeping Returns, Jan 2017 (annual))



6.12 The next table shows the rough sleeping rate per 1,000 households by Local Authority in Berkshire, compared to London in 2016 (source: DCLG Rough sleeping returns, Jan 2017 (annual)).



6.13 There is no one service responsible for rough sleepers in Slough. Strategic Housing participates in a number of multi-agency approaches, however, there is no outreach work funded by the Council and therefore relies, to a degree on services run by the Voluntary Sector.

6.14 Rough sleepers are not statutory homeless cases as described above in Section 5. The official Rough Sleeper Count was 27 this year and 25 last year. 12 of these cases were UK Nationals and 15 were EU Nationals. The EU Nationals have not exercised their Treaty Rights and therefore are unable to access public services. Anecdotally many of the rough sleepers who are begging, are receiving benefits and therefore it is difficult to discern an accurate picture of what is really happening.

6.15 Some rough sleepers access the services of the Night Shelter, but up until recently only an average of 6 rough sleepers were using the service each day. However, after Christmas numbers have risen to, on average, 17 a night. Approximately 9 of these rough sleepers, on any night, are Eastern Europeans who are not exercising their Treaty Rights and therefore not eligible for public Assistance (housing/benefits).

6.16 Strategic Housing Services operates the Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP), which is a service that is activated when the weather becomes extremely cold.

6.17 Below is some information in relation to the usage of SWEP: -

- 29/11/17 – 3/12/17 – a maximum of 14 people used the provision
- 8/12/17 – 18/12/17 - a maximum of 18 people used the provision
- 5/2/18 – 14/2/18 – a maximum of 3 people used the provision
- 22/2/18 – 4/3/18 – a maximum of 20 people used the provision

6.18 It should be noted that although SWEP is a provision used by anyone, it is controlled through a booking system administered by Strategic Housing. However, it is currently being funded through government grants.

7 Comments of Other Committees

7.1 There are no comments from any other committees.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Homelessness takes many guises but it is becoming an increasing challenge in Slough. Whilst it may not be in all cases, some London boroughs have a targeted policy to secure as many private sector properties in Slough as possible and then discharge the homelessness duties into these. In turn, when tenancies end, the household presents to Slough as homeless. Temporary accommodation numbers are on the rise and it is anticipated that the new Act, coming into force on 3rd April 2018, will increase the burden on the Council. The London Borough of Southwark are a pilot authority for the new Act and have experienced a rise in homelessness of over 50%. Any rise in homelessness and consequently temporary accommodation will result in increased costs to the General Fund.

8.2 Rough sleeping in Slough is dealt with on a multi-agency basis but there is no outreach work funded by the Council and provision accessed through the Night Shelter is run by the Voluntary Sector, although supported by a number of agencies, including Strategic Housing. However, the rough sleeping population in Slough is difficult to pin down, as the population is transient and there are close ties to neighbouring boroughs. Slough, however, enables rough sleepers to access emergency provision when the weather becomes very cold and accommodated 54 rough sleepers between the end of November 2017 to the beginning of March 2018.

8 Appendices - None

9 Background Papers

1 – Housing Performance – February 2018