

<b>Item No.</b> 5.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 24 June 2020	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Housing Scrutiny Commission
<b>Report title:</b>		Homelessness in Southwark during and Post Covid-19 Lockdown	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		Electoral ward(s); All	
<b>From:</b>		Ian Swift, Head of Housing Solutions	

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That the housing scrutiny commission note the report on homelessness in Southwark during and post Covid-19 lockdown and the key areas for dialogue with central government and partner agencies as detailed in paragraph 41 of the report.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Rough Sleeping

2. One of the most significant steps taken in response to Covid-19 has been the 'Everyone In' initiative in England, and parallel efforts by Scottish and Welsh governments and their partners. This resulted in national governments instructing all local authorities to accommodate people sleeping rough, in night shelters, and in hostels with shared facilities, into self-contained emergency accommodation. Critically, access to emergency accommodation has been based on need alone and regardless of tests in the respective homelessness legislation in each nation. In England, people who would normally not qualify for homelessness assistance because they are not considered to be priority need, do not have a local connection, are considered intentionally homeless, or as a result of their immigration status, have been supported into safe accommodation.
3. Southwark Council's response to rough sleeping during the COVID19 public health pandemic has been viewed positively by key partner agencies, community/ faith organisations and central Government. In June 2019 it was estimated that 91 people were sleeping rough in Southwark, this reduced to 35 people identified as sleeping rough in March 2020. However, on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020, this figure reduced to 3 people sleeping rough in Southwark and these three people were offered accommodation, food and support on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020, by Southwark Council and it is hoped these clients will be persuaded to move into the accommodation by close of business today.
4. Consequently, as at the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020, the council is currently accommodating 138 former rough sleepers in first stage temporary accommodation. The accommodation provided is self contained hotel rooms or self contained nightly paid temporary accommodation.
5. Of these 138 people living in hotels and Nightly Paid temporary accommodation 86 people have No Recourse to Public Fund.

6. Of these 86 people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) 40 are EEA nationals with no access to public funds and 46 are other Non UK Nationals with no recourse to public funds by condition of their immigration status. The anticipated cost associated with this new work since COVID 19 during the 2020/2021 financial year is £1,790,627 (including accommodation, support and food costs).
7. The council is working in partnership with Southwark Law Centre to support these people with NRPF to settle their immigration status, and has awarded £45,000 to the Law Centre to support this work.
8. The Housing Solutions service is currently exploring the possibility of employing directly some of these former rough sleepers who have No Recourse to Public Funds and are EEA nationals and encouraging partners to employ these people in an attempt to build future employment opportunities and this work is being conducted in partnership with BEAM and Southwark Works. If this proves to be successful it will help the person to regulate their stay in the country and for the person to be sufficient without the need for the council to pay for accommodation and food. This work could also be repeated across Southwark Council and potentially with all partner agencies.
9. As at the 23 March 2020 the Housing Solutions Service accommodated 654 single homeless applicants at risk of sleeping rough and homeless. During the COVID19 period the Housing Solutions service has accommodated an additional 323 single person households whom were at imminent risk of sleeping rough or actually sleeping rough bringing the total to 977. All have a personal housing support and needs assessment alongside a medical assessment.
10. The numbers of former rough sleeping people still living in first temporary accommodation today is 138.
11. Of the 138 former rough sleeping people currently accommodated in first stage temporary accommodation the following support needs have been identified:
  - People in need of Housing First/Supported Housing with intensive support = 42 people
  - People in need of Supported housing or housing led with floating support = 14 people
  - People in need of Private Rented Sector/social housing tenancy with start-up floating support = 72
  - Assistance to reconnect to family and friends/return home = 10 people
12. The council has received the following revenue funding from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government to support the rough sleeping work in Southwark during the 2020/2021 financial year:
  - £1,754,426 for the full year 2020/21 for all of the council's rough sleeping work. Please note this is not a response to Covid19, this funding has been received for the previous two financial years and is provided mainly to fund staffing costs associated with the council's normal rough sleeping work
  - £33,000 for our rough sleeping work during COVID19

- £542,000 to support EEA nationals who have no recourse to public funds.

### **Suspension of derogation**

13. The Government's decided to continue the Suspension of the Derogation in Greater London, Luton, Bedford and Milton Keynes until 31 December 2020. Under this approach Southwark Council can continue, in certain circumstances, to offer up to three months of basic emergency accommodation alongside support to work-ready EEA national rough sleepers to help them into employment. As before, these changes do not extend access to welfare benefits. Southwark Council received 9% of all of the available funding.

### **Government funding for supported homes to end rough sleeping**

14. On 24th May the Westminster Government announced that it is bringing forward £160 million of the £381 million funding allocated in the 2020 budget to provide supported homes for 3,300 people moving on from rough sleeping in England, and an additional 3,000 in the following year. An additional £50 million will be added to the £144 million already allocated for support costs as well as the £237m for property leasing and acquisition, to support 6,000 people previously sleeping rough in England, and now in emergency accommodation, over the next four years. This is an important first step in ensuring that those helped by the emergency measures to tackle rough sleeping will not be forced back onto our streets once emergency measures are eased, and that they can access housing and a package of support. Southwark Council is waiting for a decision to identify if funding will be secured through this budget.

### **Homeless households living in shared living accommodation**

15. During COVID19 Southwark Council moved 288 homeless households from all forms of shared living arrangements which left 356 homeless households still living in shared accommodation (hostels and nightly paid accommodation) as at the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020. It is hoped that during June, July and August 2020 further lettings to Southwark Council, Housing Association and Private Rented Sector properties can be created to help eliminate the use of shared living accommodation for homeless households in Southwark in the future.
16. The council is committed to eliminating the use of shared living arrangements for homeless households and the actions taken during COVID19 are positive and imaginative by using accommodation located on the Ledbury Estate, with properties also used through the acquisition at Churchyard Row and the temporary use of accommodation at Sumner Road. As at the 17<sup>th</sup> June there are no homeless households actually sharing facilities in Southwark Council hostels.
17. The household composition of 356 homeless households living in shared accommodation as at the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020, are as follows:
  - There are 105 homeless households living in Southwark Council hostels 39 single people and 66 homeless families
  - There are 251 single homeless households living in shared properties within the private rented sector and hotels. Please note these single people are all affected by the artificially low Local Housing Allowance rates in Southwark and the Single Person threshold which prohibits people living in anything other than bedsits or hotel rooms.

- Total 356

## Performance

18. The Housing Solutions service performance during COVID19 has been positive compared to the same period in 2019. The following table helps to summarise this performance, as the service continuously improves its performance.

Area of performance	2019 performance	2020 performance	Improvement
Homeless decisions in April and May	422	632	Yes
Homeless decisions April	119	323	Yes
Homeless decisions May	303	309	Yes
Homeless applications received April and May	460	620	Yes
Responses to elected members within the corporate timeframe April and May	92%	97%	Yes
Responses to complaints within the corporate timeframe April and May	92%	93%	Yes
Outstanding housing register applications April and May	721	494	Yes
Rough sleeping numbers May	91	3	Yes
Compliments	2 <sup>nd</sup> in the council for compliments received	1 <sup>st</sup> in the council for compliments received	Yes

19. However, the number of homeless approaches in the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 period is 856, compared to 562 in the same period in 2019. Therefore, as a direct consequence of COVID19 the council has seen a dramatic increase in homeless presentations. In addition to this there has been a 16.3% increase in the use of temporary accommodation in the same period.

## Customer experience

20. A survey of 48 customers who used the Housing Solutions Service between the closure of the Homesearch Centre in Peckham as a result of Covid-19 on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 up to the April 30<sup>th</sup> was undertaken to gain insight into levels of

customer satisfaction and customers' feelings and preferences for communications, specifically digital channels / communication methods. To compliment this, a survey of partnership based stakeholders was also undertaken to gather their feedback also.

21. Insight from customers and partnership based stakeholders was sought as a mechanism to consider the strengths and weakness of the 'channel shift' from a majority face to face service primarily operating from the Homeseach Centre (Bournemouth Road, Peckham) to a digital service without a physical building.
22. At this stage of the channel shift, the feedback from customers will be used to evolve and improve the Housing Solutions Service for customers, stakeholders and Housing Solutions service staff.

**Key insights from the feedback gathered are as follows:**

23. Customers identify with the Bournemouth Road Homeseach Centre without knowing what the name of the building is or what the name of the service is.
24. The telephone and emailing were seen as the most appropriate method of digital communication.
25. Customers are willing to communicate using technologies / software not currently offered.
26. Online information needs to be easy to access, read and use on a mobile telephone screen.
27. The importance of a personal touch is valued, the ability to listen and communicating the 'customer journey' and /or next steps remains vital.
28. The customer journey could be enhanced through a visual display of what the journey is and where they are in the journey with timeframes included.
29. Language barriers are challenging for customers and further work is required as to how to improve this service.
30. Participants were asked what their preferred methods of communication are from the following: 1) telephone 2) webchat 3) video calls 4) website 5) email 5) WhatsApp 6) SMS 7) social media, 8) face to face 9) other. Responses are as follows:
  - 1 customer identified social media
  - 1 customer identified Facebook
  - 1 customer identified the website
  - 2 customers identified live chat / webchat
  - 2 customers identified video chat / call
  - 5 customers identified face to face services
  - 5 customers identified WhatsApp
  - 9 customers identified text message
  - 22 customers identified email
  - 25 customers identified telephone

31. Overwhelmingly customers said they were treated with respect and it was easy to talk to officer.
- 13 participants identified the service as excellent;
  - 1 participant identified the service as very good;
  - 12 participants identified the service as adequate (including one who said adequate/good);
  - 1 participant identified the service as poor;
  - 1 participant identified the service as very poor; the remained of participants did not comment or gave alternative answers.

### **Partner agencies feedback on service provision during COVID19**

32. An email based survey was sent to all Southwark Homelessness Forum partners on 30 April 2020, in order to assess the work of the Housing Solutions service during COVID19.
33. Survey feedback was received from the following partners:
- Look ahead
  - Shelter
  - Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers
  - SGTO (Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations)
  - Southwark Law Centre
  - Southwark Leaving Care Service
  - Southwark SPOT (Street Population Outreach Team)
  - St Mungo's
  - Terence Higgins Trust
34. Overall the feedback from partners has been positive with regards to communications with staff and Southwark. Southwark SPOT said "Overall, I think the response from Housing Options to move to a telephone based service has been excellent for partners and I'm finding it easier to make queries and get responses than ever before so thank you very much for that!" Shelter has noted that "email is more reliable".
35. The following are the main themes from this feedback:
- Accessing staff via telephone is easy.
  - Access for customers via internet is not easy.
  - Telephone triage has been much faster than the face to face at Bournemouth Road before COVID19
  - Referrals have gone smoother during COVID19
  - It has been really helpful that we can assess the client and then use the Duty to Refer form to share basic information with Southwark in order to start the triage and assessment process so hopefully clients don't have to keep repeating the same information.
  - Please continue to house vulnerable people and do not evict those in hotel accommodation.
  - I just wanted to drop you a line to say thankyou to the Housing department for the support of the last few months.

- Things like women being able to access housing without going to Bournemouth Road, practitioners being able to conduct SDA assessments, housing officers reading through old files to find documentation when people haven't been able to provide it, and the swift solution-focused approach to homelessness difficulties, has made a really big difference to our work and our women.
- I have also been doing a mini-impact assessment of the last few months of COVID on people facing the most complex disadvantage – speaking to professionals across street outreach, hostels, probation, drugs services and mental health SLAM and Adult Social Care- and both St Mungo's, Solace and Probation have specifically highlighted the difference that Housing has made - all saying how proactive Housing has been – whether it's finding ways of accommodating vulnerable people in-borough, whether it's supporting a move in instances of domestic abuse and safeguarding concerns. The response of 'solve first' has been really incredibly appreciated. We really appreciate it and we appreciate also how hard everyone in housing has been working to keep everyone safe. Thankyou so much.

36. The council also commissioned Shelter to conduct a Mystery Shopping exercise of the front line Housing Solutions service during COVID19 and this report will be available shortly to improve further the quality of the service offer. In addition to this newly developed customer satisfaction for our housing advice service has been implemented in June 2020 and data will be available soon to further guide the quality of our customer service.
37. The Housing Solutions service also conducted a staff survey on the future operating model for the service and the results of this service will be known on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

### **Future homeless pressures**

38. The council is currently facing increasing homeless approaches as evidenced above. However, these pressures will continue to build going forward as a result of the economic decline across England as a result of COVID19. The number of new Universal Credit applications increased significantly in Southwark as evidenced below:

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Southwark</b>
Total Over Period	14532
Mean pre-16th March	319
Mean post- 16th March	1645
Difference in Mean	1327
% increase in mean	517%

39. The number of new people claiming Universal Credit will place pressure on the council's homelessness services, as the household's full rent will not be paid for all private sector rented properties in Southwark, due to the artificially low Local Housing Allowance which does not cover the cost of even the cheapest private rented homes in Southwark.

## Conclusion

40. It is clear for the council to continue with its excellent homelessness approach it will require substantial Government investment and structural changes to be made to the delivery of public services by central Government
41. The following are some of the key areas for dialogue with central Government and partner agencies:
  - Increasing the Local Housing Allowance (and benefits cap) in Southwark to correctly reflect the private rented market
  - Substantial investment in the Housing First approach
  - The creation of a Rapid Re-housing model as provided in Scotland
  - The need for capital funding to build and secure additional Southwark Council new homes for homeless households
  - Additional revenue funding to support the council measures to sustain tenancies, increase life expectancy work for homeless clients through a bespoke support package for clients
  - Changes to the UK welfare system, and protections for private renters alongside increased investment in the provision of homes for social rent in England to ensure everyone can afford a home.
  - Ensure no one across Great Britain is left without a safe place to stay because of their immigration status
  - Temporarily suspending NRPF conditions for at least the next 12 months.
  - Supporting EEA nationals to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme throughout the COVID-19 outbreak.
  - Ensuring the benefit cap does not undermine support from the Local Housing Allowance and Universal Credit
  - It is clear due to the financial fallout of COVID19 the council is seeing increasing levels of homelessness as evidenced within this report. Therefore, additional financial resources for staffing and the use of temporary accommodation will need to be identified in the current financial year and also future financial years.
  - Due to COVID19 a different operating model will be required for the Housing Solutions service, which will be mainly by Digital by Default in the future. During COVID19 0.4% or 17 applicants have been unable to access our services electronically or through our face to face service for people sleeping rough.
42. Southwark Council will need to conduct active dialogue with central Government Departments and these discussions will have to consider all available options. The discussions will have to be with the Treasury, the Department for Works and Pensions, the Home Office, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, and Department of Health, as the issues identified above cut across Whitehall.
43. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Panel launched and chaired by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Modernisation in January 2020, has certainly assisted the Housing Solutions service partnership work during COVID19 and this partnership work has produced structural changes to our work that have been focussed on the rapid re-housing and innovative solutions to meet the clients housing and support needs.



44. The strong partnership work with Shelter, Solace Women's Aid, Stonewall Housing, and Southwark Law Centre has helped the council to achieve something no one thought was possible on the 22 March 2020. It has taken a public health international crisis for the elimination of rough sleeping in Southwark and many parts of the UK.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Kieron Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Modernisation		
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Ian Swift, Head of Housing Solutions		
<b>Report Author</b>	Ian Swift, Head of Housing Solutions		
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Director of Law and Democracy		No	-
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance		No	-
<b>Cabinet Member</b>		Yes	Yes
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