

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 25th November

Report Title: Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme

Report Author & Job Title: Mark James – Development Partnership Manager

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Paul Clokie – Portfolio Holder for Housing



Summary:

Homelessness costs are increasing, in part due to the Council successfully partaking in the Government's "Everyone In" initiative in March 2020. Therefore, the Council needs to address the cost (£290,000 since March 2020) while providing real support to those it has taken responsibility for.

The Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) has the benefit of offering an opportunity to select self-contained homes in the right location with good proximity to support services for individuals – to ensure the best outcomes for highly complex cases. It provides intermediate supported accommodation that aims to tackle levels of single homelessness that increased during the pandemic.

Members have already approved a capital spend of £1.7m (including a capital grant award of £764,235). While the capital grant helps to acquire the properties the revenue grant (of £35,000 per annum up to March 2024) helps to fund the intensive housing support that those placed in the homes will require to ultimately move into more secure, permanent placements. Members also agreed that a subsequent bid should be made for further funding to the programme.

This paper reports the success of that bid and seeks approval for the capital spend now required to double the number of move-on homes the Council will be able to provide through this project. These will be homes bought through the process that currently secure street purchase properties in the Housing Revenue Account.

Key Decision: YES (due to expenditure)

Significantly Affected Wards: None specifically, though the accommodation is more likely to be sourced in central Ashford locations, closer to local amenities and easier to manage closely.

Recommendations: The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- I. Note that work has already begun to secure the move-on homes and the intensive housing support officer after the first successful bid
- II. Note that the council has been successful in securing capital grant of £530,000 and revenue grant of £87,500 through its second bid to the RSAP programme
- III. Agree the capital spend of £1,246,000 to supplement the capital grant
- IV. Agree that the General Fund owned property at 240 Beaver Road not be sold but instead converted to be part of the RSAP programme
- V. Agree that the programme be reviewed towards the end of the three-year cycle

Policy Overview: Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Policy, including the Rough Sleeper Pathway Plan.

Financial Implications: The capital spend for the second bid will be £1,776,000, which will be partially offset by £530,000 capital grant funding secured through the RSAP bid. The homes sit in the General Fund and considerations are in that context.

Legal Implications: The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will govern the work undertaken on this project

Equalities Impact Assessment: See Attached at Appendix A

Data Protection Impact Assessment: The impact on Data Protection will be undertaken for each individual project at the appropriate time.

Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement): Risk assessments have been undertaken on each of the properties being taken forward and are appropriately assessed by officers within the relevant teams involved in the projects. Further risk assessments will be undertaken on each individual property at the correct time.

Sustainability Implications: The properties will be sought mindful of the Council's ambition for carbon neutrality and the programme of 'de-carbonisation' within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) stock, though these homes will sit in the General Fund. Each acquisition, particularly so with the proposed conversions, will be individually assessed to include the potential costs and benefits of carbon neutrality.

Other Material Implications: Design and construction standards will comply with Ashford spatial standards (complying with Residential Space and Layout SPD), Lifetime Homes (a standard the Council has set out for Registered Social Landlords) and Code for

Sustainable Homes level 3 (which has been committed to for Page 17 Homes England purposes), and level 4 on energy. Emphasis on the building envelope will deliver the greatest benefits for landlord and tenant

**Exempt from
Publication:**

No

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Report Title: Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme

Introduction and Background

1. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a directive to accommodate all rough sleepers (or those threatened by rough sleeping) under the Government's "Everyone In" initiative. This was achieved and full engagement from the Council's partners in the last year has proved invaluable in bringing rough sleepers indoors and sustaining their current accommodation.
2. Levels of single homeless placements in temporary accommodation, though, increased as a consequence and there is a real need to look at 'move-on' accommodation for this client group. Move-on accommodation denotes homes that rough sleepers can live in on a short-term basis before they literally move on to more secure tenancies having stabilised their situation. These 'move-on' homes therefore remain as move-on accommodation, helping the next rough sleepers on their own pathways to stability.
3. Earlier this year, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) agreed to allocate capital and revenue grant funding under the Rough Sleeper Accommodation programme (RSAP). This was to form part of the broader aim of eliminating rough sleeping by 2027 and providing suitable supported housing solutions for rough sleepers with complex needs.

Advantages to the Council and individuals

4. The RSAP programme has the benefit of offering an opportunity to select self-contained homes in the right location with good proximity to support services for individuals – to ensure the best outcomes for highly complex cases. It provides the intermediate supported accommodation within an existing rough sleeper framework to tackle levels of single homelessness that obviously increased during the pandemic.
5. The programme effects real change in the lives of individual rough sleepers with a variety of complex needs (including mental and physical health, those with addiction issues and others who could have offending histories). The revenue, which supports the capital grant received, funds the close management of these individuals. It is part of a defined pathway linked to each individual's personal housing plan and underlying support needs.
6. There is also a cost saving for the Council. For example, at an average cost of £38 per room per night (though the cost can be as high as £60 per night for emergency placements), a weekly cost of £266, and a net income from housing benefit of £116.88, there is a net cost to the borough council of £149.12 per client per week in one of the paid-for nightly accommodation premises the Council uses. Therefore, for 10 clients based on these current costs, the weekly cost to the council would be £1,491.20 and the annual cost would be £77,542.

Ashford's bids to the RSAP fund

7. The Council has submitted two bids to the RSAP programme – both of which have been successful in cycles one (June 2021) and three (September 2021). This will enable the Council to acquire a total of 12 x 1-bed homes and 4 x 3-bed homes that can be converted to make 8 x 1-bed homes, meaning 20 x 1-bed homes will be provided in total.
8. As part of September's Financial Monitoring Quarterly Report, members approved the capital spend of £1.7m in the first cycle (including the grant award of £764,235) and agreed that a subsequent bid should be made for further funding to the programme. This report, in addition to detailing the outcome of that bid seeks approval for the capital spend to double the number of move-on homes the Council will have available for rough sleepers in the borough from 10 to 20 as outlined in the above paragraph.
9. Given where the Council was when the first bid had to be made quickly, there was no time to push forward a site that could accommodate modular construction. The Government were seeking certainty over delivery as a key element in order to award the funding, so any major sites not yet in the Council's ownership or that required extensive planning permission were likely to be unsuccessful. Therefore, the Council's programme is primarily aimed at street purchases, on which it has a proven track record having acquired over 100 homes since the beginning of the 2019-20 financial year.

RSAP bid one – in figures

10. As indicated above, the first part of the project will therefore use the capital grant receipt of £764,235 to purchase 10 General Fund properties (with £1,011,765 borrowed as agreed) to deliver:
 - A total of 10 self-contained bespoke units drawn from a mix of selected or acquired properties (when the bid was submitted we stated that we have 10 completions by June 2022)
 - There will be 6 x 1-bed and 2 x 3-bed units (the latter will be renovated [requiring planning permission] to become 4 x 1-bed units)
 - A staffed, supported framework to ensure rough sleepers can access all relevant services – this is to be achieved through a revenue grant funding award of £35,000 p.a. for three years for the first bid that will provide enhanced support for those given housing. The Council will then be funding this specialist intensive housing officer for rough sleepers in its entirety after the end of the 2023-24 financial year

Specialist support

11. Of course, it is not the case that a rough sleeper's situation is resolved once a roof is over their head. The recruitment of the intensive housing officers is vitally important to this project and the process is already underway. Specialist officers creating pathways that enable the placed individuals to move on will create resilience in the 20 homes we are buying and converting.
12. The specialist support is fundamental to the success of the scheme. Each placement will have a tailored plan of wrap-around support and intensive

housing management to ensure that any issues are addressed quickly and dealt with professionally. Central to this is the Council continuing to foster the successful partnership working arrangement it has built up with colleagues in health and police agencies, for example, to tackle rough sleeping.

13. Although the revenue costs supporting the recruitment are for a three-year period, with no funding currently available after 2024, and though the posts will be funded by the borough council after that point, this is still viable as the scheme will provide a saving overall, compared to the current cost of homelessness which are £290,000 since March 2020. This is largely as the Council has been supporting the “everyone in” scheme, but homelessness costs have been increasing year on year since 2016-17.

Ashford’s second bid for RSAP funding

14. The search for properties began in late July 2021. The Council stated to Homes England that it would aim to have some starts on site around September 2021 (we currently have three) and would aim to complete on all properties to be acquired by June 2022.
15. Again, given the timeframe and the need for certainty over delivery, the Council put forward an identical programme concentrating on street purchases to ultimately secure a further 10 homes.
16. This final bidding round saw Ashford secure:
 - Capital grant funding of £530,000 to part-fund the acquisition of a further eight units (6 x 1-bed and 2 x 3-bed homes that can be converted to become 4 x 1-bed homes) in order to provide a further 10 units of supported housing. The capital expenditure therefore is £1.776,000 and the cost to the council is therefore £1.246,000 – the feasibility for this was built on a 40-year annuity with payback within that period
 - £87,500 revenue funding, which was also granted to fund another officer who will work alongside the rough sleepers and support them along the pathway into more secure accommodation in the HRA or the private rented sector where appropriate, thus freeing up a move-on placement for subsequent rough sleepers. Whereas the revenue grant funding was £35,000 for each of the three financial years up to the end of 2023-24, the breakdown for this funding is £17,500 for the current financial year and £35,000 for the two subsequent years
17. This will again help the council to tackle the increased levels of homelessness experienced during the pandemic. It will also help the council make significant savings as outlined in paragraph 6.
18. Members should be advised that when the Council made its second bid to Homes England it was advised that the grant awards would not be as generous as for the first round, given the funds remaining. However, pleasingly the sums above are meaningful and exceeded expectations.

19. The project to secure more homes has already begun in earnest and we have stated to Homes England that we would have starts on site throughout 2022, with completions in October 2022.

Additional considerations

20. To be clear, the programme is for Ashford's rough sleepers. It will not import rough sleepers from other areas. Although there is a clear thought process at the current time on the size of accommodation required, should this not be required in the future then there is a simple exit strategy in transferring the homes to the HR, or it could sell the homes.
21. The viability and surveys for each acquisition, particularly so with the proposed conversions, will be individually assessed to include the potential costs and benefits of carbon neutrality. The homes will be maintained and repaired by our relevant in-house teams and contractors and conversations have already begun between internal departments to ensure that for the conversions these will be undertaken in a way that is easily maintainable.
22. The properties need to be in fairly central locations so that the rough sleepers placed within the homes have access to amenities. This means that rural locations are not suitable and that the locations selected will focus on central Ashford locations. It is important from a management perspective that these are not all in one cluster and every effort will be made to ensure these are sensitively chosen locations and that the homes blend in and balance with the local community.
23. One such property, a three-bedroom semi-detached house at 240 Beaver Road, is already in the Council's ownership, and was about to be sold due to it no longer being required to assist in the delivery of Adler's Yard. However, there is now an opportunity to convert the property into two one-bed homes.
24. The owner of the adjoining property has just accepted an offer on its sale and although the council has enquired we will not be able to acquire that home too. In any case, converting both semi-detached properties to create four one-bed homes in the same location would not be ideal from a management perspective, and so was unlikely to be considered. Members are asked to agree that the use of this general fund property be agreed for the RSAP programme instead of being sold.

Risks to the General Fund

25. The Financial Monitoring Quarterly Report was clear in its reporting to members that "it is important to note that due to the high level of grant funding and transfer of tenants from expensive temporary accommodation, the RSAP will not add any financial burden to the General Fund over a 40 year model."

Other options considered

26. The Council could choose not to seek to acquire this accommodation and carry on its current path. However, aside from the significant financial savings there is a real opportunity to positively affect the lives of those rough sleepers whom we place in these homes. The Council has a proven track record in

acquiring homes through its street purchase programme so the expertise to do so is already in-house. The only additional expertise required will be the work that the intensive housing officers for rough sleepers will provide on an ongoing basis.

Equalities Impact Assessment

27. Members are referred to the attached Assessment. There are no negative impacts identified within the assessment.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

28. The individual properties bought will follow the process for street purchase acquisitions. However, where a three-bed property is purchased with a view to conversion we will contact the relevant ward member and notify them of our intention prior to the planning application being made. As with any planning application, where a property is to be converted, this will be subject to the planning application process and stakeholders will be invited to comment.

Next Steps in Process

29. Work to secure the homes has begun and subject to members agreeing the additional capital spend, 20 such homes can be provided. Those homes requiring conversion will be submitted to planning as soon as is possible to meet the deadlines required by Homes England.

Conclusion

30. There are many benefits to the Council, but more importantly the individual. This programme provides a significant amount of both capital and revenue grant (around £1.5m) across its two allocations to Ashford and will be another example of the Council's commitment to reducing homelessness and providing meaningful support for any rough sleepers in our borough.

Portfolio Holder's Views

31. The Council's success in securing funding through the rough sleeper accommodation programme extends the Government's continued recognition of our successful housing delivery. Here, we have an opportunity to create real housing pathways, literally supporting some of our most vulnerable people from the street to a secure housing tenancy, getting them back on their feet at what is undoubtedly a traumatic time.
32. In agreeing to this capital spend, which will help to alleviate the ever-increasing costs of homelessness to the authority, we can be proud that we are not only providing shelter but, furthermore, are wrapping support around these individuals to help them rebuild their lives.

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Equality Impact Assessment

1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a document that summarises how the council has had due regard to the public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) in its decision-making. Although there is no legal duty to produce an EIA, the Council must have **due regard** to the equality duty and an EIA is recognised as the best method of fulfilling that duty. It can assist the Council in making a judgment as to whether a policy or other decision will have unintended negative consequences for certain people and help maximise the positive impacts of policy change. An EIA can lead to one of four consequences:
 - (a) No major change – the policy or other decision is robust with no potential for discrimination or adverse impact. Opportunities to promote equality have been taken;
 - (b) Adjust the policy or decision to remove barriers or better promote equality as identified in the EIA;
 - (c) Continue the policy – if the EIA identifies potential for adverse impact, set out compelling justification for continuing;
 - (d) Stop and remove the policy where actual or potential unlawful discrimination is identified.

Public sector equality duty

2. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the council, when exercising public functions, to have due regard to the need to:
 - (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (ie tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups).

Appendix A to Rough Sleeper Accommodation programmer Cabinet report

3. These are known as the three aims of the general equality duty.

Protected characteristics

4. The Equality Act 2010 sets out nine protected characteristics for the purpose of the equality duty:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Gender reassignment
 - Marriage and civil partnership*
 - Pregnancy and maternity
 - Race
 - Religion or belief
 - Sex
 - Sexual orientation

*For marriage and civil partnership, only the first aim of the duty applies in relation to employment.

Due regard

5. Having 'due regard' is about using good equality information and analysis at the right time as part of decision-making procedures.
6. To 'have due regard' means that in making decisions and in its other day-to-day activities the council must consciously consider the need to do the things set out in the general equality duty: eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This can involve:
 - removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics when these are different from the needs of other people.

- encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where it is disproportionately low.
7. How much regard is 'due' will depend on the circumstances. The greater the potential impact, the higher the regard required by the duty. Examples of functions and decisions likely to engage the duty include: policy decisions, budget decisions, public appointments, service provision, statutory discretion, decisions on individuals, employing staff and procurement of goods and services.
8. In terms of timing:
- Having 'due regard' should be considered at the inception of any decision or proposed policy or service development or change.
 - Due regard should be considered throughout development of a decision. Notes shall be taken and kept on file as to how due regard has been had to the equality duty in research, meetings, project teams, consultations etc.
 - The completion of the EIA is a way of effectively summarising this and it should inform final decision-making.

Case law principles

9. A number of principles have been established by the courts in relation to the equality duty and due regard:
- Decision-makers in public authorities must be aware of their duty to have 'due regard' to the equality duty and so EIA's must be attached to any relevant committee reports.
 - Due regard is fulfilled before and at the time a particular policy is under consideration as well as at the time a decision is taken. Due regard involves a conscious approach and state of mind.
 - A public authority cannot satisfy the duty by justifying a decision after it has been taken.
 - The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind in such a way that it influences the final decision.

- The duty is a non-delegable one. The duty will always remain the responsibility of the public authority.
- The duty is a continuing one so that it needs to be considered not only when a policy, for example, is being developed and agreed but also when it is implemented.
- It is good practice for those exercising public functions to keep an accurate record showing that they have actually considered the general duty and pondered relevant questions. Proper record keeping encourages transparency and will discipline those carrying out the relevant function to undertake the duty conscientiously.
- A public authority will need to consider whether it has sufficient information to assess the effects of the policy, or the way a function is being carried out, on the aims set out in the general equality duty.
- A public authority cannot avoid complying with the duty by claiming that it does not have enough resources to do so.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has produced helpful guidance on "Meeting the Equality Duty in Policy and Decision-Making" (October 2014). It is available on the following link and report authors should read and follow this when developing or reporting on proposals for policy or service development or change and other decisions likely to engage the equality duty. [Equality Duty in decision-making](#)

Lead officer:	Mark James
Decision maker:	Cabinet
Decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy, project, service, contract • Review, change, new, stop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note that work has already begun to secure the move-on homes and the intensive housing support officer after the first successful bid • Note that the council has been successful in securing capital grant of £530,000 and revenue grant of £87,500 through its second bid to the RSAP programme • Agree the capital spend of £1,246,000 to supplement the capital grant • Agree that the General Fund owned property at 240 Beaver Road not be sold but instead converted to be part of the RSAP programme • Agree that the programme be reviewed towards the end of the three-year cycle
Date of decision: The date when the final decision is made. The EIA must be complete before this point and inform the final decision.	25 th November 2021
Summary of the proposed decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims and objectives • Key actions • Expected outcomes • Who will be affected and how? • How many people will be affected? 	Note that work has already begun to secure the move-on homes and the intensive housing support officer after the first successful bid Note that the council has been successful in securing capital grant of £530,000 and revenue grant of £87,500 through its second bid to the RSAP programme Agree the capital spend of £1,246,000 to supplement the capital grant Agree that the General Fund owned property at 240 Beaver Road not be sold but instead converted to be part of the RSAP programme Agree that the programme be reviewed towards the end of the three-year cycle
Information and research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline the information and research that has informed the decision. • Include sources and key findings. 	Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Policy, including the Rough Sleeper Pathway Plan.
Consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What specific consultation has occurred on this decision? 	Consultation has taken place with colleagues in Finance and ICT, the Housing Development Team, Housing Options and Corporate Property Services. Consultation will take place with Ward members for those wards with conversions proposed to take place in their ward.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the results of the consultation? • Did the consultation analysis reveal any difference in views across the protected characteristics? • What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis on how the decision will affect people with different protected characteristics? 	<p>Planning applications for converting the proposed 3-bed homes will see other residents also consulted on the proposals as part of the planning process</p> <p>No issues should be identified with regards applicants with protected characteristics.</p>
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Assess the relevance of the decision to people with different protected characteristics and assess the impact of the decision on people with different protected characteristics.

When assessing relevance and impact, make it clear who the assessment applies to within the protected characteristic category. For example, a decision may have high relevance for young people but low relevance for older people; it may have a positive impact on women but a neutral impact on men.

Protected characteristic	Relevance to Decision High/Medium/Low/None	Impact of Decision Positive (Major/Minor) Negative (Major/Minor) Neutral
<u>AGE</u> Elderly	None	Neutral
Middle age	Medium	Positive (major)
Young adult	High	Positive (major)
Children	None	Neutral
<u>DISABILITY</u> Physical	None	Neutral
Mental	High	Positive (major)
Sensory	None	Neutral
<u>GENDER RE-ASSIGNMENT</u>	None	Neutral
<u>MARRIAGE/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP</u>	None	Neutral
<u>PREGNANCY/MATERNITY</u>	None	Neutral
<u>RACE</u>	None	Neutral
<u>RELIGION OR BELIEF</u>	None	Neutral
<u>SEX</u> Men	None	Neutral

Women	None	Neutral
<u>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</u>	None	Neutral
Mitigating negative impact: Where any negative impact has been identified, outline the measures taken to mitigate against it.	Where the assessment has been carried out above it is on the basis of the fact that it is anticipated that the majority of those whom the Council will house will be younger adults requiring the placements and intensive housing support to sustain their tenancies. Whoever is housed will be find this service of major benefit to them.	
Is the decision relevant to the aims of the equality duty? Guidance on the aims can be found in the EHRC's Essential Guide , alongside fuller PSED Technical Guidance .		
	Aim	Yes / No / N/A
	1) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation	N/A
	2) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	Yes
	3) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	N/A

<p>Conclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how due regard has been had to the equality duty, from start to finish. There should be no unlawful discrimination arising from the decision (see guidance above). Advise on whether the proposal meets the aims of the equality duty or whether adjustments have been made or need to be made or whether any residual impacts are justified. How will monitoring of the policy, procedure or decision and its implementation be undertaken and reported? 	<p>Due regard has been considered throughout this proposal to each protected group.</p> <p>No unlawful discrimination has arisen from the decision.</p> <p>The effect on those placed in these homes will be positive due to the aims of the programme delivery. No adjustments required.</p> <p>The programme will be monitored through monthly meetings with Homes England, through regular contact with finance colleagues by housing , and through regular updates to our Portfolio Holder and Cabinet.</p>
EIA completion date:	15 th November 2021



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Rough Sleeper Pathway

Procedures 2020

**Sylvia Roberts
Housing Options Manager**

Procedures for the Rough Sleepers Pathway for Ashford Borough Council

Contents

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3. Staffing
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6. Housing Led Model
7. Social Lettings Agency

Appendix A Starter Packs flowchart

Appendix B Pathway flowchart



1. Context

The implementation of HRACT in April 2018 has seen a rise in approaches from single persons threatened with homelessness who are owed either a prevention or relief duty [or occasionally both]. In light of individual housing needs and circumstances, this client group will often require more intensive casework. They often present with complex health needs such as financial constraints, economic inactivity and other identifiable barriers to accessing available housing options.

The Prime Minister put tackling homelessness and rough sleeping firmly at the heart of the government's agenda and initially awarded a total of over £260 million for local homelessness services. The Government published a strategy on 13 August 2018 to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. This government has committed to ending rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament in 2024 – 3 years earlier than the previous commitment.

Ashford has seen a steady increase in rough sleeping in the Borough and in November 2019, the official figure reported to Government was 25. This is an increase from 20 the previous year. We have seen an increase in migration of rough sleepers from neighbouring boroughs with 7 of the 25 being from other areas in Kent.

Due to the rise in this client group, it was evident that we had to take a different approach and do things differently. Previously Ashford Borough Council funded Porchlight to operate an outreach service in the borough. This was only a part time position and was unable to offer the “blue light” reactive service that is required for this client group. We therefore appointed a new position within the team for a Housing Options Officer specialising in Rough Sleepers and Single Homelessness. In addition, we applied for additional funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG] and were successful in securing funding of £257,000. This money was ring fenced for additional staffing resources and training, personalised budgets for clients and the refurbishment of a building to make it an assessment hub and emergency bed space.

During 2020, a global pandemic broke out and the world was forced into a “lockdown” situation. This caused significant delays in our project and again, made us rethink how we could do things differently.

On March 26th 2020, The Government launched an “Everyone Campaign” instructing all local authorities to provide temporary accommodation for all those sleeping on the streets and Dame Louise Casey was drafted in to lead the Government's task force to support rough sleepers during the pandemic. Additional funding had been provided by the Treasury to help rough sleepers secure their own tenancies as well as provide short-term housing while delivery of long-term homes continue at pace.

2. Introduction

When the “Everyone in” campaign was launched in March 2020, Ashford accommodated 10 rough sleepers in one day, with an additional 14 being brought in over the subsequent days. Being forced into this situation meant that the emergency bed space that we had acquired funding for [as part of the £257,000 funding] was no longer needed and this money was repurposed to help pay for the temporary accommodation provided.



Additional staff were recruited, as per funding criteria. A Rough Sleeper Coordinator, 2 Tenancy Sustainment Officers and 2 Community Navigators. We had already identified the absence of fully formed pathways tailored for rough sleepers with other forms of intermediate housing and assistance. This funding will allow us to fully develop direct and seamless “real time” delivery of statutory HRACT assessments and Personalised Housing Plans with ready access to accommodation solutions. With the additional dedicated resources, we will also be able to bridge the gaps that we currently have in other specialist services e.g. mental health, addiction services etc. to ensure they are readily accessible for rough sleepers.

3. **Staffing**

Rough Sleeper Coordinator

In order to achieve our goals the coordinator will pull all strands of the rough sleeper project together. This is a more strategic role and will coordinate rough sleeper and homelessness services for single people in the area, working closely with key partners and stakeholders to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, rough sleeping in Ashford.

This post is employed by Ashford Borough Council and the officer is seconded from the Housing Options rough sleeper specialist position. This means they will participate in some outreach work with rough sleepers and enable the other Housing Options staff to directly deliver HRACT assessments and Personal Housing Plans [PHP] working flexibly to ensure a greater outreach service where needed.

The officer will work closely with the Housing Options Manager. They will actively access further grant funding for the delivery and development of rough sleeper outreach services.

2x Tenancy Sustainment Officers

Currently, Ashford has low level or intermediate floating support provided for homeless households which is delivered by Riverside as part of a Kent wide regional Homeless Connect service. This service has been limited to people who are vulnerable and at risk of eviction. We are keen to extend this coverage to address identified gaps in service delivery.

The key purpose of the tenancy sustainment role is to provide a high standard of housing advice in order to keep customers within their homes and prevent them from becoming street homeless. The role is required to deal with more complex tenancy sustainment cases by conducting in-depth casework on a range of areas. In addition, the officers will also support those rough sleepers through their transition into longer term, secure tenancies.

We will utilise one of these officers for the private rented sector, including our own Social Lettings Agency, and one for social housing.

These roles are employed by Ashford Borough Council and both officers are seconded from other posts.



2x Community Navigators

These roles are employed by a proven identified support provider in Kent [Riverside].

The two navigators will assist clients in accessing all the services and advocate on their behalf, where appropriate, regarding their welfare rights, health needs and other issues affecting their health and wellbeing.

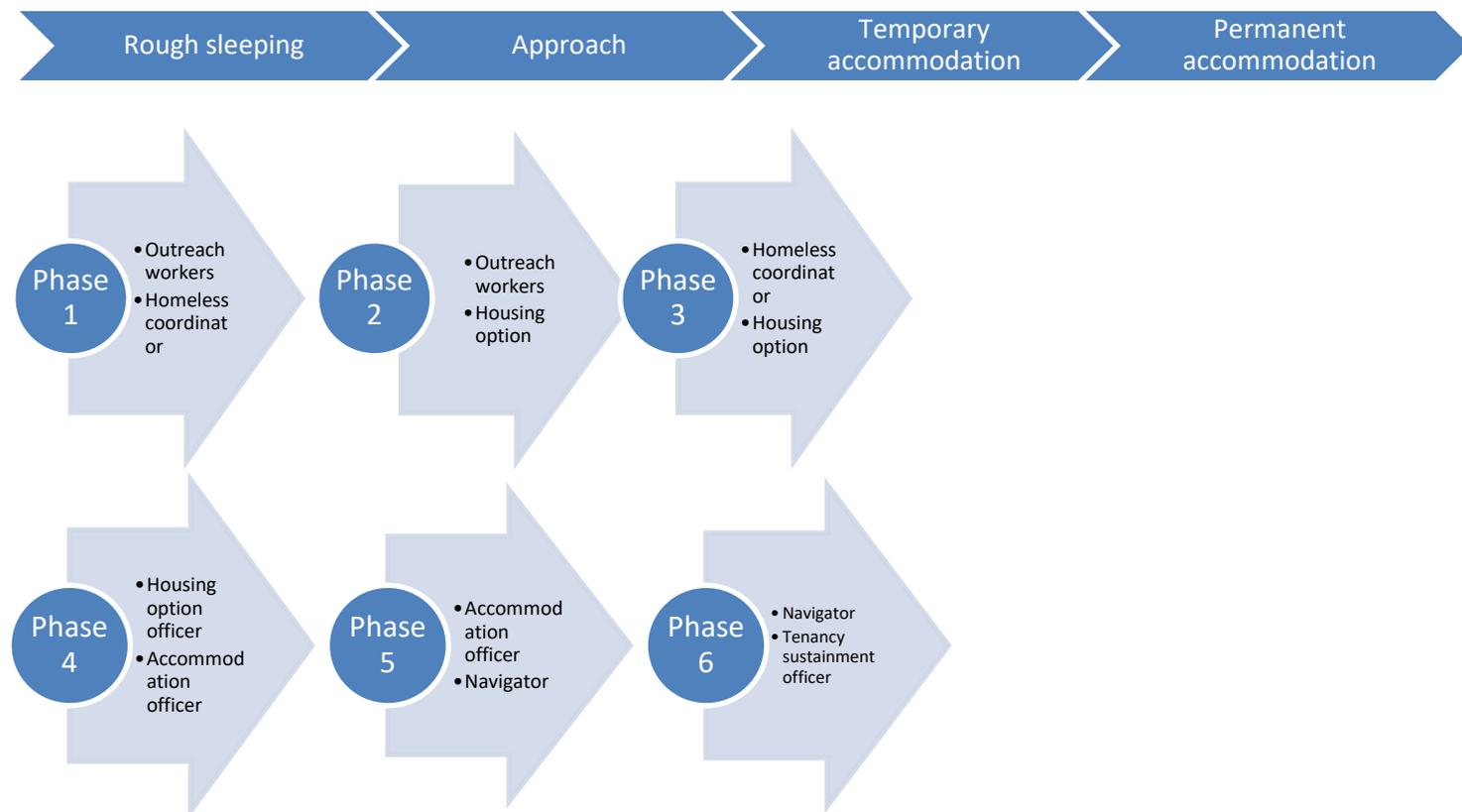
Rough sleepers may on occasion be unable to claim mainstream social security benefits such as Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and require immediate assistance to remedy this.

Rough sleepers, particularly those with high support needs, will face challenges in gaining employment or identifying opportunities to enter training/education. It is known that clients will want to consider securing employment/training in the longer term and we would wish to support vulnerable homeless people towards work. Links to our partners and effective signposting with homelessness organisations, and hostels would assist in providing employment advice, training and other opportunities for homeless people.

There is a £5000 budget allocated within the funding for training for all five of these posts.

4. Pathway

Rough sleeper into accommodation timeline



These two timelines work parallel to one and another, having two Main Rough sleeper supported services working together in each phase with handover period to the new phase. With other agencies (probation, mental health, social services, drug and alcohol agencies) being brought in if and when necessary.

Appendix B shows the flowchart of a client's pathway.

In summary:-

- Phase 1 - outreach workers [Riverside] to complete regular walkabouts and to investigate any reports of rough sleepers. They will also work in conjunction with the homeless coordinator and the church groups to engage with rough sleepers. This is to start and build a working relationship with the aim to foster a good understanding of the client's situation and build trust with them. The homeless coordinator will then the feed information back to relevant bodies and organisations.
- Phase 2 - outreach worker to encourage the rough sleeper to start working with the relevant organisations, depending on support needs, and working with housing options officers. Once the application has been made the housing option officer will assess all housing and support needs and produce a PHP (personal housing plan)
- Phase 3 - housing option officer to look at the most appropriate accommodation during this period and whether there is appropriate temporary accommodation. The homeless coordinator to track all current organisations involved with the client.
- Phase 4 - accommodation officer to look at appropriate permanent solutions in conjunction with housing option officer and homeless coordinator.
- Phase 5 - clients move into permanent accommodation with assistance from accommodation officer and homeless navigator, which could be a room in a shared house, one-bedroom social housing flat or supported accommodation. This may involve sourcing furniture and/or cooking utensils and anything else that would be appropriate for the accommodation they will be moving into.
- Phase 6 - navigator to check that all relevant supported agencies are in place at the beginning of the new tenancy and keeping track that the client is engaging. The navigator will then start to withdraw their support when appropriate. If things start to break down for client at any point of the tenancy we can put in place a sustainment officer.

5. Personal Budgets

A proportion of our funding is allocated for personal budgets for rough sleepers and can be used to set a person up in their home. This can be anything from rent in advance and deposit to furniture, white goods and food. This is flexible and could, for example, be used to purchase a birth certificate for a client to enable them to set up a bank account or rent account. It is worth exploring other options first before using this one.



Food Assistance

Open Arms, Ashford Together and other voluntary organisations provide food assistance to those in need and this can readily be accessed by rough sleepers. Assistance takes the form of hot meals, food packages, and access/referral to 'food banks' on a twice weekly basis. This is reliant on donations and sometimes stock supplies are low and need to be topped up.

Starter packs and furniture project

We are setting up a project to be able to provide ready prepared boxed starter packs for rough sleepers who secure or are provided accommodation [crockery, toiletries, towels etc.] as well as certain items of furniture. This has been solely reliant on donations and often there is no stock to be able to provide items. Our funding allows us to purchase items in preparation for donating when needed. Information on how this process works can be found at Appendix A.

Rent in Advance and/or deposits

When accommodation is secured the landlord will require either rent in advance and/or a deposit. People often do not have the means to finance this and as a result, lose that accommodation.

6. Housing Led Project

We are keen to broaden the provision for rough sleepers and are looking to start a housing led project in the borough. We see this as being part of a pathway from temporary accommodation into more stable long term accommodation. We are in talks with Riverside to support us in the project and would be able to utilise both the Tenancy Sustainment officers and the navigators.

Ashford is a stock holding authority and it has already been agreed that we can use a unit within our own stock for this project.

We also have the agreement from partner agencies to support the project and ensure the correct support is in place for each individual.

We have a number of entrenched rough sleepers that are suitable for this scheme. We are currently trying to identify the correct property to enable to move this forward. Careful consideration is needed to ensure people have accommodation which provides stability, affordability, quality and can be integrated into the local community.

7. Social Lettings Agency

Ashford Borough Council have a dedicated Social Lettings Agency (ABC Lettings) which have previously been able to successfully provide housing solutions for homeless families.

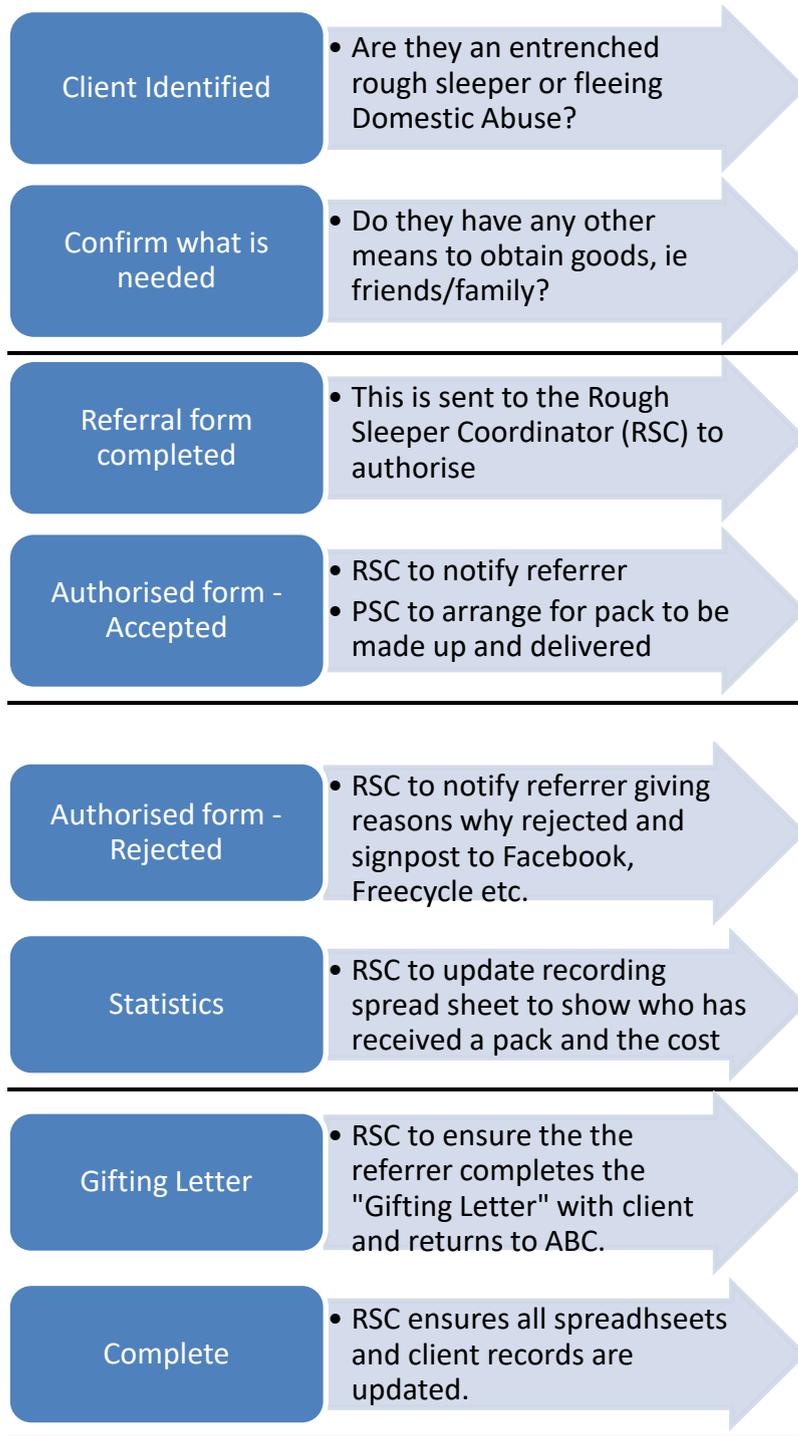
ABC Lettings have developed an excellent reputation locally with landlords, having recently been commended at a Private Sector Landlord Forum in June 2019 for their work with vulnerable households. They perform a full management function for landlords and are fully appreciative of the need to ensure that lettings are handled sensitively to maintain the good relationships they have built up with over 100 landlords.



The tenancy sustainment officers are able to assist this team for single households, to prevent those becoming street homeless. This will include the development of independent living skills for clients together with managing tenancy conduct and rent payments, budgeting skills and access for pathways into employment and/or training.



Starter Packs Procedure



Pathway

