

## Cabinet - 5 September 2018

### Recommendations from the People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Meeting held on 4 July 2018

#### **Homelessness in Dorset: Review of Evidence**

35 The Committee considered a report by the Senior Assurance Manager which provided evidence about homelessness in Dorset. Supporting the report, the Committee also received a joint presentation by the Senior Assurance Manager and Councillor Clare Sutton, Lead Member for the review.

The evidence showed that homelessness was on the increase in Dorset but this was not an even trend, with some district areas having a peak in 2012/13, and a more steady increase in the Weymouth and Portland area. The District and Borough Councils' Dorset Homelessness Strategy provided a vigorous approach to try to prevent homelessness.

In 2017 there were 18 rough sleepers in Weymouth at the time of the annual count, a rate of 0.62 per 1000 households - the 17th highest rate in the Country. Nationally, 70 rough sleepers died on the streets in 2017, a number that had more than doubled in 5 years, three of whom were living in Weymouth. Rough sleepers were much more likely to have substance abuse issues, be the victims of violence or traffic accidents, more prone to suicide and to infections or hypothermia, all of which had an effect on the wider community. These figures did not show how many more people were on the edge of homelessness, for example through sofa surfing or sleeping with strangers.

Members were provided with a brief outline of the District and Borough Councils' duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 (HRA) - to get involved at an earlier stage, and to provide meaningful personalised support in order to prevent homelessness, regardless of their priority need. The new duty to refer would result in an increased workload for housing officers. These duties would be inherited by the new unitary Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Councils following Local Government Reorganisation in April 2019.

Funding of £72.2m over three years was to be provided for local authorities. This would mean an additional £90k for the district and borough councils in Dorset.

Housing officers welcomed the Act's introduction as it strengthened councils' duties to intervene and provided more solutions for those at risk of homelessness.

There was some exploration of the possible reasons for homelessness and its causes. An explanation of current interventions was given, including the Weymouth bus which could accommodate up to seventeen people and its positive effect in Weymouth.

Members then discussed the information shared in some detail including: the fact that Universal Credit could not be paid direct to landlords so they were less likely to take tenants on benefits; that some local authorities provided grants for rent in advance and deposits in certain circumstances; some local authorities were looking at effectively acting as letting agents for private sector landlords, taking on all the associated risks; the shortage of appropriate housing with registered providers building 2, 3, or 4 bedroom properties when more single accommodation was needed; members' individual experience of people becoming homeless; that support was largely only provided on a Monday to Friday basis; that HM Services support organisations did not always maintain contact with ex-service personnel; the needs of gypsy and traveller communities when they were no longer

transient; that rough sleepers could be depressed or had mental health issues or complex needs and, if not local, were unable to use the Weymouth bus; the need for the new Dorset Council to continue with the current initiatives; the potential for modular housing to provide flexible solutions; that housing was currently a District and Borough Council responsibility so it was important for County Council officers to continue to engage with them to reduce duplication of effort and not create obstacles; the only way to stop homelessness was to build more council houses with affordable and controlled rents; and the need for housing and planning to work together under the new Shadow Authority.

With regard to recommendations, members agreed unanimously that the evidence clearly showed the benefit of the Emergency Local Assistance Funding and that they wanted this to be renewed. The Cabinet Member for Health and Care, and as a member of the Shadow Executive, agreed to champion this.

Looking at private rentals and underwriting the risk, the Cabinet member for Health and Care explained that this did not fall within the County Council's remit. However, funding of £1.5m had been identified for modular housing on County Council land for those with mental health issues. This needed to be completed before any extension was considered. County Councillors who were on the new Shadow Executive would be able to take this forward as a priority

Members were unsure as to whether the rent deposit scheme was also operated by East Dorset and Christchurch Borough Councils but paid tribute to the dedication of Dorset Council Partnership staff who operated the scheme.

There was some discussion about the low Local Housing Allowance which made it difficult for people to access private accommodation, that any increase might lead to rent rises and the need to increase the buy to let market for small private landlords. It was agreed that Central Government should be lobbied on both accounts and that this should involve local MPs. The wording for this recommendation would be drawn up outside of the meeting and circulated to the Committee for agreement. It was noted that the Local Housing Allowance was not necessarily based on rent in a local area.

#### **Recommended**

That the County Council's Cabinet and Dorset Shadow Executive consider the Committee's recommendation that the Emergency Local Assistance Funding be renewed.

#### **Resolved**

1. that Central Government be lobbied as set out in the minute above with the involvement of local MPs.
2. the wording of the letter to MPs be drawn up outside of the meeting and sent to members by email for agreement.
3. that Councillors David Walsh and Graham Carr-Jones, as members of the Shadow Dorset Executive, take forward recommendations and priorities as set out above.

### **Social Isolation: Final Report of the Member Working Group**

38 The Committee considered the final report of the Member Working Group on Social Isolation.

The Lead Member of the Group explained that as social isolation was a big topic Beaminster and Blandford had been selected as areas to investigate what problems they experienced and how they were being tackled.

The review discovered that there were a number of common issues which were raised consistently - the lack of transport, lack of knowledge about available transport, and people

not being aware of what was available. It also showed that isolation and loneliness could be experienced not only in rural areas but also in towns and communities. Information gained through the Young Researchers' Survey was highlighted as this had given a picture young people's lives and their issues.

The Group had made recommendations which they thought would address the issues and they hoped this work could progress and not be lost through the forthcoming local government reorganisation.

Members recognised that the County Council could not solve loneliness and isolation, but by creating caring communities and looking after neighbours isolation and loneliness could be reduced.

### **Recommended**

1. That the Committee agreed that the key issues identified in the report and addressing them at a strategic level across council activities and expenditure will combat social isolation and was recommended to the Cabinet (as set out in Appendix 1, paragraph 4.3 of the report).
2. That the Cabinet's attention be drawn to the potential benefit of further action being taken on a corporate basis informed by the toolkit of the Campaign to end Loneliness (as set out in Appendix 1, paragraph 6.1b of the report).
- 3, That the Cabinet consider the recommendations with a view to drawing these findings and associated action to the attention of the Shadow Executive for the new Dorset Council and to the Health and Wellbeing Board (as set out in Appendix 1, paragraph 6.2 of the report).