



Report to: Communities Committee, 30th January 2019

Report of: Corporate Director - Homes & Communities

Subject: PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE DELIVERY OF THE ROUGH SLEEPER DEATH REVIEW REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recommendation

1.1 That Committee notes the contents of this report and the progress that has been made in respect of the recommendations.

2. Background

2.1 This report brings together an update on progress in respect of the Rough Sleeper Death Review Report recommendations that were published in May 2018 as part of a council commissioned independent review into the death of a rough sleeper, referred to as (C) within this report.

2.2 The review was undertaken in line with relevant guidance released by Homeless Link in 2017 and focused on the effectiveness of all service interactions C had with agencies prior to their death. This approach is similar to that used by Worcestershire County Council's Safeguarding Adults Board when they are required to conduct a statutory safeguarding adult review (SAR).

2.3 The agencies that contributed to the review and had direct contact with C included MAGG's Day Centre, St Paul's Hostel and the YMCA. The review found that C was a transient rough sleeper and had travelled across the country since 1966. C's contact with services over the years was intermittent with 4 service interactions taking place in the 12 months prior to their death within Worcester, of which 3 were with the MAGG's Day Centre during April 2015 and his last known interaction taking place with the MAGG's Day Centre in March 2016.

2.4 The review's aim was to understand the nature and effectiveness of interactions between C and both statutory and non-statutory agencies in order to provide recommendations for improvement to all agencies engaging with rough sleepers. As part of the review a report was published that included 10 recommendations to be considered along with proposed timescales for completion which the council's Communities Committee endorsed on the 30th May 2018.

2.5 Each of the 10 recommendations are included in the next section of this report (**in bold**) along with their target date for completion, and includes an update on progress and a current status.

1. Audit of Staff skills and knowledge – Completion Date: June 2019

It is widely acknowledged that engaging with entrenched rough sleepers can be challenging particularly when the circumstances of some individuals means it is very difficult for them to communicate with and receive support from agencies. It is therefore critical that all frontline staff working across the field of homelessness in Worcestershire have the appropriate skills and knowledge to ensure that such engagement work is sympathetic to individual circumstances and effective.

Progress: In partnership with various voluntary sector services a training audit questionnaire has been produced and shared with partners for return (by end of January) so that a skills & training needs analysis can be produced. The results will be discussed with partners and a schedule of City-wide training will then be identified and delivered to upskill those who work with rough sleepers. Training will include amongst other things mental health awareness, the awareness and reporting of the Mental Capacity Act and self neglect. In the meantime as a Council the Housing Services team continue to receive training in respect of housing & homelessness that enable officers to effectively deal with the wide range of demand that is faced. To support furthering this and the other recommendations discussed in this report Members have previously approved £25,000 funding.

Status: In progress and on target for completion within timescale

2. Develop and implement a protocol for working with individuals that are transient, including an 'alert' system – Completion Date: November 2018

It is acknowledged that many rough sleepers are transient by nature and therefore it can prove very difficult to keep track on whereabouts in order to carry out engagement or even simply just 'check in'. Subsequently it proves difficult to identify who to inform or communicate with on arrival or /move on. An improved method of alerting relevant services within and outside of the county would reduce the chances of a rough sleeper becoming isolated and 'hidden'.

Progress: There is an existing bespoke system developed in accordance with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) that can be used for this purpose and which is operated by a number of Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) across the country. This referral system is called "Alert" which is a free web-based service that has been made available for all agencies to use on a national basis. Unfortunately this does not mean that all agencies have chosen to use this system.

In addition HRA which came into force on the 1st October 2018 placed a statutory "Duty to Refer" on a number of statutory agencies making it a legal requirement for them to refer individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, including rough sleepers. The use of the "Alert" referral system has been extended to all voluntary/charitable sector partners working with homeless and vulnerable individuals across Worcestershire. This is being used as the protocol. The "Duty to Refer" mechanism is being monitored across Worcestershire by Local Housing Authorities (LHA's) with a focus on agencies understanding the new approach and using it consistently.

The communication and transfer of information outside of Worcestershire remains a challenge however and is not straightforward. The Local Authority Homelessness Systems and statutory requirements will help to support access to and transfer of information from authority to authority but this always requires an individual's consent, which is not always provided. To address this particular challenge conversations are taking place at the West Midlands Safeguarding Adults Board and

best practice is also being reviewed from councils across London. It is important to point out that when a transient rough sleeper approaches the City Council for support, contact is made with the previous local council in which they resided to both alert that council that the individual has moved on and to ascertain further details about the individual that will aid us in providing the right kind of support.

Status: Completed – but being kept under review in line with best practice

3. Identify a local reporting mechanism (including out of hours) that can be used by members of the public to report the location of tents, squats, other places not designed for habitation, sleeping bags and any other items related to rough sleeping – Completion Date: November 2018

Statutory and non-statutory agencies alone are unable to identify every rough sleeper and it is therefore important that anybody can report a rough sleeper easily so that resources can be deployed more effectively leading to an increase in engagement work.

Progress: The Streetlink system was implemented by Central Government in 2012 and is co-ordinated at a national level. It is available for use 24 hours a day by any member of the public. In Worcester 114 referrals have been made during the first 3 quarters of this year. As part of a Task and Finish Group that was convened to take forward the recommendations it was agreed that a localised version of this would only confuse matters further for the public and following the Government's Rough Sleeper Strategy, a commitment was made to further promote the Streetlink system with the public.

It is also pleasing to report that Worcester City successfully submitted a bid to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for 2 x Rapid Response Officers (RROs) for the winter of 2018/2019. RROs are officers whose core role is to engage with entrenched rough sleepers (proactively and reactively) in order to provide them with support and signposting with a view to them breaking their cycle of rough sleeping. RROs also work outside of core hours to enable more timely responses to Streetlink referrals during the coldest months of the year.

Status: Completed

4. Launch a targeted publicity campaign – Completion Date: November 2018

The death of C had the impact of raising awareness around the subject of homelessness & rough sleeping and therefore a targeted publicity campaign in and around this period letting people know how they can report and support rough sleepers would have led to increased reach.

Progress: The use of "Streetlink" is regularly promoted to the public by the City Council and its partners, particularly during cold weather snaps and implementation of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

Particular campaigns include the [5 things you can do to help the homeless campaign](#) which was run prior to Christmas. The Facebook Worcester post was used on the campaign on 20 December, which included the Streetlink details and reached just under 27,500 people and was shared 235 times. [Worcester News](#) also included Streetlink details in their reporting of the story.

Raising awareness of rough sleeping, the services available and Streetlink has been one of the key objectives of the Worcester Cares campaign which was launched in July 2018 and is jointly owned by agencies across Worcester. In addition the City Council has a webpage of information on rough sleeping including the support services available to rough sleepers and agencies but also importantly how members of the public can access Streetlink in order to report a rough sleeper.

The cold weather provision (SWEP) service is widely promoted prior to opening to all agencies and to the public via facebook and twitter.

The regular street walks conducted by MOATS regularly inform rough sleepers about the services available and encourage them to share concerns about others also living on the streets.

The Task and Finish Group agreed that publicity is an ongoing piece of work and not time-limited and requires a planned rolling 12 month publicity campaign. This will be built into existing Forums and partner agency communication mechanisms.

Status: Completed – but clearly an ongoing need for such communications

5. Introduction of regular welfare checks on individuals sleeping rough across the city – Completion Date: August 2018

Given the vulnerability and sometimes poor health conditions of those sleeping rough it is important that where possible regular welfare checks are undertaken so that issues arising can be discussed with individuals with a view to support being put in place.

Progress: Regular welfare checks of individuals who sleep rough commenced in May 2018 and are undertaken by the MOATS service hosted by Maggs Day Centre. The joined-up pathway across services for both new to the streets and entrenched rough sleepers will enhance this action further. Furthermore a multi-agency local intelligence meeting has commenced and convenes fortnightly in order to share knowledge of existing and new rough sleepers and develop multi-agency support plans. This pooling of information is used to ensure the welfare and needs of individuals sleeping rough is known by all the relevant agencies.

More recently a Rough Sleeper Agency Guidance Toolkit has also been created and will be shared with partners shortly. This toolkit is designed to initiate and co-ordinate action to resolve the needs of rough sleepers in Worcester.

Status: Completed

6. Develop service transition guidelines to inform future decommissioning and commissioning – Completion Date: November 2018

Reason for recommendation:

As Lead Authority for the current Single Persons and Childless Couples Prevention Service Contract it is imperative for the Council and those it works with in respect of commissioning a new contract, to ensure that there is an effective handover and transition period built into the process so that there is no negative impact on service users.

Progress: The contracts used by the City Council clearly define the ownership of data and the transfer of this data at the end of a contract period. This is in place with the current service. In discussions with partner local authorities, Worcester City Council aim to have a clear transition between homelessness services that the Council commissions, and this will be set out in the necessary procurement/commissioning exercise. A report regarding the existing contract and future commissioning arrangements will be presented to Communities Committee on 4th February 2019 and will emphasise the need for an effective handover so that service users are not negatively impacted.

Communication with each of the partners contributing to the existing contract commenced within the 6 months of this recommendation timescale. Decisions regarding the funding have had to be taken through the formal budget setting processes which has meant that it has not been possible to confirm the transition guidelines publicly at this stage.

Status: Not completed – in progress

7. Undertake an audit of a sample of rough sleepers case files across the county to analyse record keeping – Completion Date: February 2019

It is clear that the way in which agencies record, retain and share information about their interactions with rough sleepers is fundamental to achieving the joining up of what each agency is doing for the benefit of the individual. Auditing such records therefore will prove useful to how effective agencies are in respect of this area and highlight where the gaps are that require focus.

Progress: A journey mapping exercise of 12 individuals across the county (of which 5 were from Worcester) was carried out during December 2017. This exercise provided clear markers for intervention at an earlier stage, the vast majority of which were put into place.

In response to this particular recommendation it was intended to supplement this previous piece of work with a programme of work known as 'Connecting Families'. This programme facilitates change through helping partners analyse current issues within service provision and the root causes. This programme of work involved four processes of which the scope was completed and the check stage (study the system in depth, including service user experiences) was planned for the 14th January 2019. Completing this project will be a focus of the next Task & Finish Group meeting.

It should be noted that the recent introduction of The General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR) stipulates that any customer information held has to be with the permission of the customer and can only be retained for a reasonable period of time. This will prevent the ability to retain information on rough sleepers for longer than the legal requirement and will make reviews of this kind more difficult in the future.

Status: Commenced, in progress but unlikely to be completed within timescale

8. Worcester City Council commit to launching any further reviews as soon as possible following the death of an individual – Completion Date: Immediately

The Council recognises that the effectiveness of any review is enhanced by the timeliness of it being carried out, without prejudicing any other investigation that may be being carried out by agencies such as the Police or the Coroner.

Progress: Worcester City is absolutely committed to undertaking such reviews in a timely fashion in the interests of openness and transparency but also to identify whether there is any learning for the Council or its partners to prevent such situations recurring.

Malvern Hills District Council is setting up a Task Force Meeting to look into the recent rough sleeper deaths that occurred in their area. Worcester City has been asked to attend to offer advice and share our learning with them to help inform their approach.

Status: Complete

9. A procedural document to be developed and agreed with partner agencies outlining the processes that will be followed in the undertaking of a rough sleeper death review – Completion Date: August 2018

The Council acknowledges when undertaking such a review, that all relevant parties need to be clear on how that review will take place. Furthermore the Council recognises that given the collaborative nature of working in respect of homelessness and rough sleeping the workings of such a review need to be both jointly developed and jointly owned.

Progress: The Worcestershire Strategic Housing Officers Group agreed initially to use the Homeless Link guidance as a basis for undertaking any future reviews should there be a death while actions are being completed for this current review.

Following the conclusion of the current review, a further review with partner agencies will be undertaken to see whether the Homeless Link guidance is robust and provides the basis we need to complete reviews, or whether we need to develop a bespoke procedure.

Status: Completed – but further review to be undertaken

10. A multi-agency task and finish group be set up to translate the above recommendations into an achievable action plan that is reviewed regularly - Completion Date: August 2018

As outlined at the start of this report there is much multi-agency collaboration in respect of the work around homelessness prevention and rough sleeping both formally and informally with jointly commissioned services and a variety of multi-agency forums representing the interests of both statutory and non-statutory agencies. The recommendations that have been discussed in this report require input from several organisations if they are to be achieved successfully and more importantly sustained

Progress: A Task & Finish Group has been set up and consisted of each of the agencies who provided information for Independent Review Report. It also included officers from Worcestershire County Council who had been involved in safeguarding and commissioning of single persons services.

The first meeting of the group was held in October 2018, however the Council works with the task & finish group agencies on a regular basis. All the improvement areas with a 3 month timescale were completed and a number of the other improvement areas were in progress without the need to hold a meeting. One such example was the introduction of regular early morning street walks and the fortnightly local intelligence meetings.

The group is scheduled to meet formally at 9 and 12 months and will review progress to date and provide direction & support on the completion of the recommendations.

Status: In progress until completion of recommendations have been signed off as complete

- 2.6 A detailed operational action plan has been produced tracking the progress of work and planned timescales for further outputs. This delivery of actions is also being taken to the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership meeting in January 2019. The Independent Review Report and action plan was also an agenda item at the Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board meeting during December 2018.
- 2.7 It is important to note that delivery of all the recommended improvements were required within a 3- 12 month period. Many of the improvements are not one-off actions but require the commitment of all agencies to make safeguarding an integral part of their working processes, procedures and day-to-day practice. The most important message is "safeguarding should not be seen as someone else's responsibility". The improvement work is on track to be delivered as prescribed by the Independent Review Report or re-defined by the T&FG but all actions require continued individual agency ownership, commitment and responsibility.
- 2.8 Since the Independent Review Report, the range and number of services available to support rough sleepers has increased and a summary of these are included at **Appendix 1**. As mentioned already a draft rough sleeper's agency toolkit has been developed and will be signed off at the next T&FG meeting on 20th February 2019 providing clear guidance to any agency working with a rough sleeper. For a person sleeping rough this has the positive impact of services being more readily available to them and being engaged with more regularly
- 2.9 There is improved intelligence and agency co-ordination for each of the rough sleepers who are actively engaging with support services and a support plan is created. The multi-agency and joined up approach is being used to make sure that every contact with a rough sleeper counts and where an individual has progressed to a point where living with a roof over their head becomes a possibility, a pathway is provided to enable them to have the best chance of doing so sustainably.
- 2.10 A further and final update on progress with the review report recommendations is proposed to be presented to Communities Committee in September 2019.

Ward(s):

All Wards

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Background Papers:

Independent review into the death of an individual sleeping rough – 30th May 2018