

Our homelessness/ complex needs journey

In spring 2018 SBC were invited to co-produce a funding bid with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) from the newly launched Rough Sleeper Initiative.

We were successful in securing £425,000 for the winter of 2018/19 for a range of initiatives including;

- 6 additional assertive outreach officers,
- personal budgets to increase engagement opportunities and allow individuals to access accommodation/appointments/comfort,
- the formation of a 'sit-up' service, providing 6 additional overnight beds as an immediate means of taking people off the street,
- funding a full time rough sleeper coordinator post
- facilitating 20 additional move-on units to free up first stage shelter spaces
- funding the co-ordinator and a training program for the Church Winter Night Shelters

As a result of this funding and the strength of the multi-agency partnership in Southend, the number of rough sleepers documented in our annual count dropped from 72 in autumn 2017 to 11 in autumn 2018.

In recognition of the success of our program and the crucial piece the initiatives play in sustaining these outcomes for local rough sleepers, we secured an additional £513,000 to continue the Rough Sleeper Initiative program into 2019/20. It has been noted that the impact of this funding has been key in stabilising and providing sustainable options for some of the most entrenched and vulnerable individuals in the borough.

A further key element of Southend's journey is the Severe and Multiple Disadvantage Service (Complex Needs service including assertive outreach; complex needs MDT panel approach and dedicated hostel). This operates through the use of wraparound and link worker provision on both a residential and outreach basis, and through the delivery of a housing first model of supported accommodation for a small number of people facing S&MD.

The hostel provides 9 bedrooms for service beneficiaries to live under licence. A key link to this work is the wider Complex Needs Panel which is a fortnightly multi-disciplinary panel drawing experience from partners in mental health services, criminal justice services, DWP, homelessness services including local churches, drug/alcohol services and supported housing providers etc. This is also a MEAM (Making every Adult Matter) accredited approach.

Our partnership working in the realm of homelessness, rough sleeping and complex needs extends into many other areas such as:

- Rough Sleeper Initiative Case discussions meeting (Chaired by SBC), Multi agency approach and case discussions to work with and find housing solutions for rough sleepers.
- Criminal Justice Partnership (Chaired by SBC), - includes representation from Change Grow Live (STARS), Young Peoples Drug and Alcohol Team, Police, Probation services, Essex Police, Southend on sea Domestic Abuse Project and Chelmsford prison.
- Mental Health Forum- Chaired by EPUT, attended by broader local partners.

- Southend Homeless Action Network (volunteer run multi-agency/multi faith group, regularly attended by various council teams, soup kitchens, Street Pastors, Police etc.)

Furthermore, in autumn 2018 a Southend High street summit brought together business partnerships through Southend's BID (Business Improvement District) as well as local services (police, community safety team, commissioned services) and elected members. A town centre action plan was developed and implemented to improve the look and feel of our town centre. This included working with the Community Safety Partnership, Highways Teams and also our media team to educate the public/community and raise awareness around alternative ways of giving to street beggars and rough sleepers through the 'Make a Change Campaign'.

This ongoing commitment to bring partners and services together in order to tackle/ alleviate/ manage rough sleeping and the wider homelessness/ complex needs environment is far reaching and has stakeholders in a range of organisations.

Late 2018 also saw the adoption of a new corporate Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper strategy which sets five, high level aims contributing to tackling homelessness within the borough:

- Prioritise the supply of safe, locally affordable housing,
- Regeneration and growth to create inclusive, healthy places to live and thrive
- Encourage good quality housing design, management and maintenance
- Support people to live independently in their own homes and avoid homelessness
- Any instance of homelessness to be brief and non-recurrent.

The strategy makes a number of commitments to achieve these aims, including revising planning policy, working in new ways with health and social care partners such as the NHS & CCG, developing our own affordable housing, growing our ability to engage with people with lived experience of homelessness to shape services, reviewing our governance/public boards, promoting a 'housing and homelessness are everyone's job approach' and using the best evidence of 'what works' when tackling homelessness.

Until now we have concentrated our efforts on rough sleepers, emergency housing and high support services. But those who are successfully off the streets then need to move on to a more permanent housing situation so those emergency and high support services are available to others who need it.

To enable this move in to settled accommodation we identified a need for greater tenancy sustainment support and a range of longer term supported/ move on options for the most complex were still a challenge.

To address this we successfully bid for additional funding for MHCLG under the Rapid Rehousing Pathway initiative.

We were awarded slightly under £250,000 which will be targeted at employing 4 Navigators and 2 support staff to help previously homeless people to move out of temporary accommodation, increase their skills to live independently and sustain settled accommodation.

Other services commissioned by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council for current and former rough sleepers include:

- specialist help in drug and alcohol based services,
- night shelter spaces at HARP, and supported housing at YMCA, Sanctuary Supported Living, Homegroup, and Southend-on-Sea Domestic Abuse Project.

To support us in our continuing journey of understanding, and evidencing 'what works' we have been forging a relationship with the new Centre for Homelessness Impact, facilitating knowledge sharing events between this exceptional new organisation, the council and multi-agency/sector partners in the borough.

We will use this work to help inform the future commissioning of our services, so that we can meet Central Government's and the council's shared aim to make any instance of homelessness brief and non-recurrent.