

THURSDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2017

REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING SERVICES**COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR THE STARFISH WINTER NIGHTSHELTER FOR THE HOMELESS****EXEMPT INFORMATION**

N/A

PURPOSE

To outline arrangements for the provision of a Winter Night Shelter for homeless people for 3 months from December 2017 to February 2018 and to request that Council support be given to the setting up and running of the scheme. This includes releasing £6,000.00 of Homelessness Prevention Grant via a grant to the Starfish Project Trustees and the Tamworth Covenanting Churches to support the employment of a part time project co-ordinator. The co-ordinator will oversee the setting up and operation of the project until March 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet agree to the Council supporting the provision of a Winter Night Shelter for homeless people for 3 months from December 2017 to February 2018.

It is further recommended that £6,000.00 Homelessness Prevention Grant is provided as a grant to support the setting up and operation of the project to March 2018.

Additionally, it is recommended that outcomes from the project are reported to the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee following the close of the scheme in March 2018.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the successful Winter Night Shelter trial, run by the Starfish Project in February 2017, the Starfish Project Trustees and the Tamworth Covenanting Churches have decided to operate a Winter Night Shelter for 3 months in 2017/2018. The Shelter will be open to homeless persons and rough sleepers from 1st December 2017 through to 28th February 2018.

The February 2017 project was set up with external support from Housing Justice, an organisation that has considerable experience of helping to set up similar ventures in other areas. The pilot was deemed to be a success with, on average, six guests being provided with hospitality and accommodation on each night the pilot was in operation.

Evidence provided by Starfish demonstrates that relevant policies and procedures were developed with the support of Housing Justice to ensure risks, safeguarding and referral processes, including forms and procedures, were designed and in place. Additional public liability and property insurances were also arranged for all seven venues utilised in the pilot.

The Council did not formerly support the pilot project but did engage with the project steering team to ensure an awareness of arrangements for the operation of the pilot, to re-iterate the Council's statutory duties with regard to homelessness and to ensure effective liaison between the Housing Solutions team, other agencies such as the police and the project team during the operation of the pilot.

The Council received a report from Starfish in April 2017 (attached at **Appendix 1**) that provided information concerning the operation of the pilot scheme and issues that had arisen. The report concluded by outlining future plans for a 3 month scheme in 2017/18 and suggesting that it was their intention to seek support from Tamworth Borough Council to operate an extended scheme during the coming winter period.

Discussions with Starfish Project Trustees and the Tamworth Covenanting Churches regarding their proposals have been on-going since April 2017. In June 2017, the Council received a formal proposal (attached at **Appendix 2**) requesting support for the proposed 3 month scheme.

The scheme is now going ahead as planned it is proposed the Council support the project as requested. A project co-ordinator has now been appointed and preparations are now being made to ensure the Night Shelter is fully operational on December 1st as planned. Given the financial pressures this process has placed on the scheme organisers to date, the provision of financial and other support from the Council would assist in not only ensuring the scheme runs successfully this winter but will also ensure future plans can be devised that will assist homeless people in future years.

There are a number of benefits to the Council in agreeing to support the Night Shelter this winter. These can be summarised as follows:

- The Council supporting the scheme will ensure we can influence arrangements around safeguarding, appropriate training for volunteers and the setting up of project. This is especially important as we anticipate the project to take place regardless of Tamworth Council's financial support. Support from the Council will assist in solidifying joint working between Starfish / the voluntary and community sector and the Housing Solutions Team to ensure full appreciation of the Council's statutory duties, effective liaison with other agencies (i.e. police, medical practitioners, social care) and the development of a pathway approach that supports the needs of those assisted (including re-housing options and other support needs to sustain accommodation and wellbeing)
- Joint working would be strengthened and possible links to other initiatives in the community (e.g. food banks) could be further developed to support those in need
- Joint working would provide opportunities for further project development or voluntary and community sector delivery of homelessness prevention services on behalf of the Council (e.g. SWEP over the winter months to assist rough sleepers). This approach would be compatible with requirements around the role of partners as set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Council support would further enhance the positive profile of our focus on reducing homelessness by making it a priority of this Council
- Support would assist in building public understanding of the Council's roles and responsibilities regarding homelessness
- Council engagement with the project would support the Corporate priority "Living a quality life in Tamworth" especially with regard to "There will be fewer vulnerable people requiring specialised services".

Safeguarding, Community Safety and Strategic Housing Officers have continued discussions with the project steering group and have worked to ensure that if support is agreed, the scheme will operate in accordance with the Council's requirements

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

<p>Option 1: The Council does not support the scheme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No expense incurred by the Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No TBC influence on running of the scheme • Potential for adverse publicity a) for not supporting the scheme or b) if issues arise
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased demand on the Housing Solutions team & resources arising from lack of understanding of TBC role & responsibilities • Partner organisations' financial resources depleted
<p>Option 2: The Council defers it's support & continues to work informally with Starfish</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No expense incurred by the Council • Additional time to make plans for potential support in 2018/19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No TBC influence on running of the scheme • Potential for adverse publicity a) for not supporting the scheme or b) if issues arise • Increased demand on the Housing Solutions team & resources arising from lack of understanding of TBC role & responsibilities • Voluntary & community sector less likely to work in partnership with TBC • Potential to stifle development of innovative solutions & comprehensive, joined up approach to homelessness prevention • Partner organisations' financial resources depleted
<p>Option 3: The Council provides support as requested</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council influence running of the scheme • Enhanced provision for homeless people • Enhanced joint working arrangements • Partner organisations retain financial stability & ability to undertake other projects • Greater public awareness of homelessness & prevention approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for adverse publicity if issues arise • Potential duplication of provision & cost if not run in tandem with SWEP • TBC expend prevention grant when resources are limited & SWEP provision is in place • Still potential for increased demand on Solution Team • Potential for legal challenge from those assisted and / or volunteers

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The Project steering group have requested that the Council meet the costs of employing a

part time project co-ordinator. This will equate to £6,000.00 to cover employment to this role from 1st October 2017 to 31st March 2018. If agreed, this amount can be paid as a retrospective grant (given a co-ordinator has already been appointed) and be met from existing Homelessness Prevention Grant funding. It is considered the one off contribution of £6,000.00 will be sufficient to cover the period to March 2018. The use of the Council's funding will be monitored and outcomes from the scheme reported to the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee following the close of the scheme.

As a budget of £3,000.00 has previously been allocated from Homelessness Prevention Grant to support the SWEP programme from October through to March 2018, £1,500.00 can be re-diverted to support the Night Shelter scheme to cover the 3 months when the shelter is operational (and subsequently providing shelter as per temporary accommodation provided under SWEP) with the remaining £4,500.00 coming from the main Homelessness Prevention Grant.

The many benefits of supporting the scheme (as highlighted above) outweigh the increased cost of supporting the project and resourcing emergency SWEP accommodation over the winter months when the project is not operational. Evidence from the pilot scheme last year suggested that the scheme had made an impact as Council statistics clearly demonstrated a reduction in the number of rough sleepers in the town. Should the project be delivered in partnership with the Council successfully this year then future plans may involve SWEP provision being run on the Council's behalf by the voluntary and community sector via a further extended Night Shelter scheme that operates from October through to the following March.

Additionally, there is a clear expectation as set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 that the voluntary sector will be engaged in the delivery of wider homelessness prevention activities. Working in partnership on the Night Shelter project will strengthen the Council's relationship with third sector colleagues and provide a firm basis via which to develop other joint work streams in line with requirements of the new legislation.

It should also be noted that officer time devoted to supporting this project has already been substantial and that during the operational phase, the Housing Solutions Team will be required to fully liaise with the project to ensure statutory duties continue to be applied and future housing pathways are devised to assist those people supported into sustainable accommodation.

Again, the wider benefits of supporting the scheme, combined with the fact that in all likelihood the Solutions team will be required to intervene regardless of what temporary accommodation is provided, will not adversely affect the services delivered by the Council and longer term are likely to enhance that provision as previously discussed.

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND

Should the Council agree to support the Night Shelter project, there are possible legal implications for the Council concerning:

- Health and Safety (accommodation utilised; service users and volunteers; residents residing in the vicinity of the church buildings utilised to deliver the scheme)
- Complaints / challenges from those assisted should incidents occur / safeguarding / the accommodation be sub-standard / DDA / deterioration in health and wellbeing / equalities and diversity
- Possible challenges from volunteers and members of the public

However, as highlighted above and within the appendices to this report, Council officers have worked with the project steering group to ensure identified risks have considered in order to reduce the potential for harm to individuals or legal challenge to the Council's involvement with the project.

Risks associated with the project are highlighted in the Options Considered table above and

again, Council officers have worked with the project steering group to ensure these identified risks have been recognised and provisions have been put in place to lessen those risks. This process has included the Council's Safeguarding Officer working with the project steering group to:

- amend relevant policies to ensure they are up-to-date and fit form purpose
- provide assistance to the newly appointed project co-ordinator in terms of the provision of safeguarding training for volunteers
- review individual Church risk assessments in addition to specific, project related assessments
- seek assurance that appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service checks have been completed

Although the Council has worked with the project to reduce risks it is not possible for risk of harm to individuals to be entirely mitigated. Clearly, if an individual accommodated by the project were to be harmed then the Council involvement in the scheme would be subject to scrutiny. However, this must be set against the risk of harm to individuals who may, because the scheme is not available, sleep rough or be accommodated by the Council elsewhere. It is considered that on balance the risk of harm to individuals is lessened by the operation of this scheme.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

There are significant beneficial implications of supporting the Night Shelter project as listed above. These include:

1. Assisting rough sleepers who are exposed to winter weather conditions
2. Preventing homelessness in Tamworth
3. Contributing to healthier outcomes for those assisted by the project
4. Enabling vulnerable residents to access sustainable and good quality accommodation
5. Further developing a multi-agency response to rough sleeping / homelessness prevention to assist the effective implementation of new legislative requirements

These and other associated outcomes would contribute towards the delivery of key priorities identified by the Tamworth Strategic Partnership and adopted by Tamworth Borough Council. Specifically, Council engagement with the project would support the Corporate priority "Living a quality life in Tamworth" especially with regard to "there will be fewer vulnerable people requiring specialised services".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following the successful trial Winter Night Shelter run by the Starfish Project in February 2017, the Starfish Project Trustees and the Tamworth Covenanting Churches have decided to operate a Winter Night Shelter for 3 months in 2017/2018. The Shelter will be open to homeless persons and rough sleepers from 1st December 2017 through to 28th February 2018.

The overall responsibility for the operation of the Shelter will rest with the Starfish Trustees working through a Steering Team Further details of the individuals involved are provided at **Appendix 2**).

Lessons learned from the pilot project last winter have been applied and the need for an effective project co-ordinator remains central to the success of the extended, 3 month scheme this winter. The Trustees have appointed an appropriately qualified co-ordinator who will have day to day responsibility for the running of the scheme, in conjunction with the Steering Team. The Co-ordinator will be paid £10 per hour and will be employed from 1st October 2017 to 31st March 2018.

As was the case with the pilot project in February 2017, each of the seven Churches participating in the scheme will provide the shelter accommodation on one night per week, on a rotating basis. In each of the churches there will be teams of volunteers working in three shifts. The church buildings that will be utilised to provide accommodation are:

- ❖ St John's Catholic Church, Tamworth
- ❖ Baptist Church, Belgrave;
- ❖ St Barnabas Church, Mile Oak
- ❖ Elim Church, Glascote
- ❖ St Peter's Church, Glascote Heath
- ❖ Holy Trinity Church, Wilnecote
- ❖ St Andrew's Methodist Church, Leyfields

Evidence provided by Starfish demonstrates that relevant policies and procedures were developed with the support of Housing Justice to ensure risks, safeguarding and referral processes, including forms and procedures, were designed and in place. Additional public liability and property insurances were also arranged for all seven venues utilised in the pilot.

Re-assurance around relevant points pertaining to health and safety; safeguarding, insurance, financial management and compliance with applicable legislation are included in **Appendix 2**. In addition, relevant policies and procedures are in place that have been both updated and assessed by Council officers as now being "fit for purpose". Further, Council officers have worked with the project team to ensure the policies and procedures utilised to run the pilot scheme have been implemented effectively and backed up with the required training and risk assessments.

Specifically, the project team were asked, in addition to relevant policies and procedures, to provide:

- more detail on how these have been / are to be implemented
- further detail on training that has been undertaken with volunteers / future training requirements
- Detail on risk assessments and evidence on how identified risks are to be mitigated
- Safeguarding – how this will be applied to both volunteers and those people assisted
- More detail on the co-ordinator role (e.g. experience, training)

Whilst risk can never be eliminated from any project of this nature, it is considered that arrangements are now in place that diminish those risks and lessen the likelihood of challenge against the Council. Indeed, should support for the project not be forthcoming, it remains the intention of the Board of Trustees to go ahead with the project regardless of the stance adopted by the Council. Consequently, the Council would arguably be at even greater risk of challenge as highlighted previously within this report should issues arise and we had been seen not to assist in helping deliver the scheme.

It is therefore recommended that the Council support the Night Shelter project as detailed above and continue to work with partners to develop a comprehensive approach to homelessness prevention in Tamworth

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

APPENDICES

1. **Starfish Report on Pilot Scheme**
2. **Formal Scheme Proposal**

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