

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 16th October 2023

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Update

1. Purpose:

This report outlines the current situation in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping.

This current homelessness situation is exacerbated by wider features of the national housing market and national policy context around housing. There is a national crisis in homelessness and rough sleeping that has seen a rise across the country in regard to homeless presentations, use of “bed and breakfast” and rough sleeping. Nottingham is more highly impacted than most other core cities. This is for a range of reasons explored in this report which includes past under investment. This is now being addressed as part of a wider review of homelessness including a major restructure within the service to provide capacity to undertake active preventative work to reduce the numbers of people becoming homeless in the first instance.

The issues will be presented in two parts: Homelessness generally and then rough Sleeping specifically. There is also reference to an emerging risk in regard to Home Office decisions in regard to asylum seeker determinations.

2. Homelessness in Nottingham

2.1 The Housing Act 1996, Part VII as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 sets out the council’s statutory duties to prevent and relieve homelessness and provide temporary and settled accommodation. Under this legislation, the council has a statutory duty to provide Temporary Accommodation (TA) to people in priority need who are facing homelessness and while they have their application for permanent housing assessed.

2.2 The council’s first approach to tackling homelessness is prevention. The council encourages households at risk of homelessness to contact Housing Solutions (formerly Housing Aid) at the earliest opportunity. This enables the statutory housing assessment to be completed and the personalised housing plan formed. There is an opportunity to prevent homelessness either by saving a tenancy or housing situation or moving a household into alternative accommodation before they become homeless, Housing Solutions can case manage an approach including referral to commissioned partners for housing related support and specialist services to meet support needs that could be contributing to the risk of homelessness. If homelessness cannot be prevented, the local authority has a duty to relieve homelessness and provide temporary accommodation if the household meets the relevant priority need criteria.

2.3 Despite the focus on prevention, activity to prevent homelessness within the Council’s Housing Solutions is limited by the capacity and number of officers. There are currently 2,540 open homelessness cases in Nottingham which is on average over 165 cases per officer. The government Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities advise that a caseload of 30 is needed to enable officers to engage in prevention work and has expressed alarm at encountering caseloads of 75 elsewhere. Despite this, in comparison to the other Core Cities and London, Nottingham is helping support large proportions of applicants to retain their homes and find alternative accommodation in the

Private Rented Sector. This success could be increased if officer caseload could be reduced and so free up more time to focus on further prevention opportunities.

2.4 Analysis of statutory homelessness statistical returns shows Nottingham is comparatively good at homeless prevention through helping people to stay in their homes¹. Nevertheless, the level of demand for homelessness support in Nottingham (and nationally) is extremely high and increasing and the Council is still having to place significant numbers of people into temporary accommodation to meet its duties. Though only around 16% of households that approach Nottingham City Council as homeless or threatened with homelessness go into temporary accommodation and the rate of temporary accommodation use in proportion to the size of the population is neither significantly higher nor lower in Nottingham than comparator areas, showing that councils throughout the country are facing demand issues.

2.5 The council has invested in a range of temporary accommodation including dispersed properties and staffed hostels with on-site support some of which is owned by Council subsidiary companies and some by third party partners. The council has increased family type temporary accommodation from 88 units in 2017 to 441 units in 2023 and additionally provides 430 units of supported accommodation for single homeless people, including rough sleepers. All provision is currently full and there are an additional 169 households in hotel accommodation which currently costs approximately £134 per room per night.

2.6 When homeless households are provided with temporary accommodation operated by a Registered Provider, then the accommodation costs can be largely met from exempt supported accommodation housing benefit charges. However, when this is not available and households are accommodated in hotels, the Council has to meet these costs from its budget. The Council is predicting a significant overspend this year on its temporary accommodation budget because of the high numbers of people being accommodated and because there is an imbalance between supply and demand with more households going into some form of temporary accommodation than exiting it. Over 12 months, 639 households exited temporary accommodation however around 800 moved in. The lack of available affordable housing as well as the unaffordability and high demand for properties within the private rented sector limits the options for permanently rehousing.

2.7 The length of stay in TA varies widely, as some people leave within days but with the longest being over 3 years in duration. The average length of stay across all TA has increased in the last 5 years (with the exception of 2020 which was down due to Covid) as shown in the table below.

YEAR	Average Length of stay in TA (days)
2018	147
2019	159
2020	149
2021	236
2022	256

¹ DLUHC comparative data for Oct-Dec 22 shows that for cases where a duty was ended at prevention stage, Nottingham supported 58% of households to stay in their existing homes compared to 31% in the East Midlands and 32% for England. Similar patterns were evident for 2021-22 data.

Although the trend of increasing length of stay exists across all types of TA, there is a marked difference in the average time in hostels (where support staff have direct access to support households with moving on) and dispersed properties, where it is harder for support staff to maintain contact and where there is less incentive for households to pro-actively seek to move on.

2.8 Wider issues with the national and Nottingham housing market have made this crisis acute, including very high rents in the private sector, well above Local housing allowance (LHA) levels, and a shortage of affordable homes. Average incomes in Nottingham are well below national averages while rent increases in the East Midlands over the last 12 months have been higher than in any other English Region². Even lower quartile rents within the private sector market are higher than LHA limits. At the same time, the private rental market within our boundaries receives pressure from the expanding student market and city professionals, further limiting supply. Affordability issues are worsening as the cost-of-living crisis continues and utility and food inflation impacts on a broader spectrum of household income levels, including owner occupiers who have also been significantly affected by the increase in mortgage interest rates.

2.9 There are now over 10,100 households on the waiting list (called Homelink) for affordable housing. Although Nottingham City Council has invested in new affordable housing over recent years, the cities tight geographical boundaries are limiting land supply for new affordable housing development and limiting options for providers. Right to Buy sales in Nottingham have also been extremely high. Between 2019-2023, there were 988 RTB sales completed while in the same period the Council completed building and purchasing 374 new permanent affordable homes and Register Provider partners completed a further 126 homes, totalling a replacement supply of 500 affordable homes. The problem has been compounded by the reduction in Register Provider development programmes³, further limiting new supply. Recent price drops in the value of owner occupier homes are also affecting private developer confidence to build and increase general housing supply, including the Section 106 affordable homes that come along with this. Between 2019-23 the council has delivered 436 replacement homes through building and acquisition programmes. The limited supply of affordable housing in the private and social rented sector leads to a situation where people are not moving out of temporary accommodation at sufficient speed to make room for new demand.

3. Actions to tackle homelessness

3.1 The Nottingham [Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy](#) was developed in 2019 by a cross sector partnership who made pledges identifying their involvement in preventing and responding to homelessness, addressing the causes of homelessness and tackling rough sleeping. The Strategy Implementation Group (SIG) meet bi-monthly to ensure the focus remains valid and activity is progressed and are currently conducting a Homelessness Needs Assessment to fully understand the context and needs in the city, benchmark against other areas (in terms of investment, delivery and types of services available) and inform the next strategy.

² Source [Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

³ Due to a combination of lower grant rates, rising costs of borrowing, increased build costs and reduced rental income.

3.2 In response to the increasing and consistent use of hotels as temporary accommodation for homeless households the council developed a B&B reduction plan which focussed activity in three areas as follows:

a) Preventing homelessness and the need for temporary accommodation.

This includes:

- reviewing the contract management and operational partnership processes with commissioned support services
- expanding the NPRAS service into an all-inclusive private rented sector access service
- using predictive analytics to target households at risk of homelessness and understanding how community services can help to stem the flow of people needing support from the council
- targeting support to landlords considering eviction and extending eviction prevention protocols across sectors
- understanding more about evictions by family members (where are they living and how can they be supported to stay and move in a planned way)
- assisting people who are experiencing financial hardship and linking households in temporary accommodation into employment support.

b) Responding to homelessness to minimise duration of time in temporary accommodation

This includes:

- devising comprehensive personalised housing plans and ensuring these are tracked and fulfilled
- applying a reviewed regime of contract monitoring and management to ensure accommodation providers and commissioned services are prioritising move on and housing related support and evicting when duty is discharged
- increasing the number of Private Rented Sector Offers to households under relief duty and in temporary accommodation
- increasing the number of Private Rented Sector Offers outside of the city boundary
- reviewing the allocations policy to ensure that homelessness is not a route to council housing and enabling the allocation of flats to families

c) Increasing the supply of temporary accommodation to respond to the growing demand

This includes:

- Delivery of properties secured via devolution funding
- Completing a temporary accommodation call off from the homelessness procurement framework and consideration of out of area commissioning options
- Concluding decisions about the conversion of council owned former care homes into temporary accommodation
- Completing a commissioning review for the procurement of nightly paid providers
- Delivery of the projects for complex needs singles under the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) funding and enhanced contract and operational management of commissioned supported accommodation
- maximising availability of temporary accommodation by minimising voids

3.3 Whilst there has been progress to deliver the plan, the full impact is largely dependent upon the completion of the Housing Solutions restructure and growth project. This will bring staffing levels closer to those of peer authorities and will provide the capacity for enhanced prevention and the ability to offer tailored housing options for households. Early prevention activity will be targeted at high risk households, with officers having access to a “prevention toolkit” to help people remain in their homes. A reduction in households reaching homeless application/duty stages will have a big impact on temporary accommodation numbers. This will be coupled with a step change in the provision of move-on and temporary accommodation. The Council will look to use the private rented sector for both temporary and settled homes, thus further reducing the use of expensive nightly paid and hotel accommodation. This will need a more proactive approach to securing a larger and consistent supply of PRS homes, through procurement, leasing or institutional investment. The Housing Solutions team will have increased ability to tackle spurious applications and provide robust defence of decisions in the case of challenge; something that has not always been possible in recent years. The new Housing Solutions service will deliver a communications plan to provide stakeholders and citizens with information about self-help support and who to seek support from in what circumstances, as well as the realities of the process if they do require the local authority’s support.

3.4 The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy is owned by a cross sector partnership. However, plans are underway to elevate this joint working through the development of a senior homeless board to deliver the changes and interventions required and to ensure that homelessness is seen as a problem for the city, not just the Council. There are a significant number of organisations that deal with homelessness, either as the sole purpose of their activities, or as a part of them. Many of these organisations are not funded by the Council for homeless purposes. Information, targets and performance can be shared so that resources can be deployed in ways that will contribute to overall success in reducing homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation.

4. Rough Sleeping in Nottingham

4.1 Since 2018, the government has published a cross party parliamentary strategy backed by various funding programmes, including the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). During the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, additional funding was provided to support the Everyone In initiative to ensure rough sleepers were protected from infection and had the ability to isolate and recover. Consequently, rough sleeping numbers rapidly decreased in 2020. However, numbers have begun to increase again nationally. The latest government data estimates an increase of 35% in the number of individuals rough sleeping on a single night since the same period in 2022. The comparable figure for Nottingham remained the same, however in recent months there has been a more significant increase and the latest street count (September 2023) found 47 individuals, which is an increase of 42% from September 2022 and close to the pre-pandemic peak.

4.2 The increasing number is in part a legacy from the Everyone In initiative as people are attracted to the city because of the comprehensive services, retained joined up approach that ensures wider needs can be met and the belief or hope that hotel accommodation might be offered. This is compounded by the prolific use of city centre hotels for single homeless individuals by other local authorities (including the surrounding districts and boroughs) which leads to some of these individuals remaining in the city when the support ends or duty is discharged. The rough sleeping increase is also impacted by the

factors causing homelessness pressure generally, including the financial crisis and housing market.

4.3 Of the 47 individuals counted in September, around 80% were male and 20% were female. 20% were new to street homelessness in Nottingham that month. Over half reported substance misuse and/or mental health support needs. 80% were from Nottingham. 25% of all people found refused to provide any information about themselves and 3 individuals were confirmed as having housing available.

4.4 The September count shows a snapshot typical night, but the city also collects data on the number of different individuals found in Nottingham each month. This number is also high and increasing and comprises of those who are new to rough sleeping in the city and those who have been found rough sleeping before (often multiple times and/or over extended durations). Flow into the city from other areas is significant, in 2022/23 over one third of all rough sleepers found in the city were not from Nottingham. Migration into the Nottingham is also due to the accessible central location within the country, tight boundaries within the county as well as the effect of being a core city with more extensive infrastructure. Whilst processes are in place to work in partnership with HMP Nottingham and minimise street homelessness following prison release, there is pressure from many other regional and national prisons releasing into the city.

4.5 Despite the real increase in rough sleeping, the perception of rough sleeping has been compounded by begging from individuals who present as rough sleeping but who are in fact housed. Further to this, consistently around one in ten individuals found rough sleeping in Nottingham are not homeless and have an accommodation option. Many of the individuals who continue to sleep rough when they have accommodation are experiencing Severe and Multiple Disadvantage (SMD) meaning they have a complex combination of at least 3 of the following issues: homelessness, substance abuse, mental health condition, history of offending and domestic violence. It is common for these individuals to form alliances and communities on the streets and remain with these networks despite having housing available.

4.6 Although, so far in 2023, 141 individuals have been supported into accommodation, engaging people to accept support and accommodation can be a challenge as a number of rough sleepers will refuse to be assessed. A large proportion of rough sleepers move through the city and are not seen again after they have initially been counted. However, there are entrenched rough sleepers, often with SMD and backgrounds of trauma who are disillusioned with services and distrust that support is going to deliver what they determine to be a positive outcome.

5. Actions to tackle rough sleeping

5.1 A focus of the Nottingham Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping strategy is to prevent people from reaching rough sleeping in the city by tackling the causes of homelessness. Homelessness is not a condition but a symptom of other underlying issues. If housing is provided in isolation from further wraparound support it is likely that the individual will become homeless again as their needs are still not met. Therefore, it is recognised that a coordinated response to address severe and multiple disadvantage as well as lower level complexity in need is required. In conjunction with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Nottingham City Council has produced an Ending Rough Sleeping plan and further gap analysis.

5.2 All investment in rough sleeping is dependent upon the cities success in bidding into government funding programmes. Through bids to the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) and Accommodation for ex Offenders (AfeO) programme, Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment (RSDAT) grant and in partnership with Registered Provider partners to the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) and Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP), Nottingham has achieved one of the highest combined award outside of London totalling over £20m from 2021 to 2025

5.3 The government funding has enabled the development and delivery of a comprehensive system of over 20 services delivered by public and community sector partners ranging from prevention, identification, engagement, support, accommodation and resettlement under the coordination of a dedicated officer. The local programme includes:

- specialist roles within the outreach team to target engagement, reconcile people with their accommodation and navigate services
- specialist navigators to prevent rough sleeping from hospital, prison and mental health facilities
- a 20 bed accommodation and assessment hub
- around 200 units of supported accommodation
- a prevention and resettlement team providing inreach support to people in their tenancies
- focused roles within the statutory homelessness service to assess, support move on and increase access to the private rented sector
- a unique service to support people with histories of rough sleeping into employment

5.4 The system of services incorporates other community and faith partners as well as public sector specialist support. This includes teams and services working in partnership with outreach and delivering inreach to accommodation settings to support with substance misuse, access to mental health assessments and treatment and primary care services. the work to tackle rough sleeping is directly connected to Changing futures and the Integrated Care Partnership workstream to address severe and multiple disadvantages.

5.5 Annually, the city produces a Winter Plan to outline the support that is available for rough sleepers in the cold weather. Nottingham City Council has a responsibility to provide shelter when the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is activated. Arrangements have been made to secure locations for sit-up services when the temperature is zero degrees. The council will not be offering hotel placements and will be sending people with no local connection back to their area of origin after one night. A series of frequently asked questions will be produced and available on the councils website to provide information about the support available including Street Aid, Nottingham's alternative giving service which the council has supported the community sector to develop.

5.6 Finding ways to engage with rough sleepers and offering a variety of support and options to meet their needs is the primary approach and is consistently offered regardless of how often it is rejected. The council has recently arranged for joint outreach operations involving a range of specialist partners but also the police to help support in circumstances where behaviours such as persistent and aggressive begging and offending are contributing to the barriers to exiting rough sleeping.

5.7 Ongoing work is required to change perceptions that people begging are homeless people and to help the public to understand what the council is doing to support rough sleepers and where there are limitations in achieving this.

5.8 Dependency on government funding for rough sleeping services is short term and limits the ability for cross sector collaboration and joint investment to meet needs causing homelessness whilst resolving housing issues.

6. Emerging Risk

In July 2023, the Home Office changed its policy in relation to the housing of newly recognised refugees and survivors of trafficking. Previously, following a 'notice to quit' before being evicted from Home Office accommodation, these people had 28 days to find alternative accommodation. This has now been reduced to just 7 days and the government is targeting resource to expedite decisions on a significant backlog of cases. If any of these households are families or have some other form of vulnerability, they will be in priority need and the Council will have a duty to rehouse these, which will add further pressure to our services and budgets. It is likely that there will also be some applications in Nottingham from refugees from other authority areas. Although the Council can advise these people make an application in the authority area in which they were accommodated, the council will still need to initially take an application and potentially accommodate for up to 14 days prior to the referral back to another authority area being accepted.

7. Summary

Whilst Nottingham is experiencing similar challenges to other major cities, there are a combination of factors locally that are amplifying the risk of homelessness and have caused difficulty in preventing and responding to it. Despite this, Nottingham City Council has identified needs, projected impact, reviewed the required resources and is developing and implementing workable plans with thorough oversight to address the issues and continue to work towards the cities aims to support people before they are made homeless and reduce the number of rough sleepers and families in temporary accommodation. nevertheless, the impact of plans fulfilled will take time to embed whilst the pressure continues and mounts and any delay to plans has a financial cost to the council. The wider housing market pressures related to rent affordability and imbalance of housing supply and demand, against the background of the cost of living crisis, will likely exacerbate demand for homelessness services even as we work to reduce them. Whilst every effort will be made, numbers of homeless households, use of temporary accommodation and costs to the council are projected to continue to increase in the short-term pending the achievement of the longer-term outcomes.