

## **Community & Housing Recovery**

### **Introduction**

Our communities and the networks within them have shown themselves to be strong, self-reliant and often well organised. CDC wants to actively support communities as we move into recovery from the Covid crisis. We have been overwhelmed by the level of support offered for vulnerable people and want to capture that moving forward in case there is a second wave of Covid 19, or any other emergency situation where people need help and support.

Our established charitable and voluntary sectors have stepped up to the challenge, in particular StonePillow, Four Streets and HEART who have worked with CDC to support rough sleepers off the street, and VAAC who have co-ordinated the groups supporting vulnerable people to access food and other support.

We have identified, within the Housing and Communities Directorate, several strands that we believe are key to the recovery of our communities. These are focused on support for our communities and vulnerable people. Immediate, medium term and long term options have been considered and are included in the action plan but a summary is below.

### **1: Pathway for rough sleepers**

Covid 19 has provided a unique opportunity for CDC to address the issue of rough sleeping in the district. With effect from w/c 23rd March almost all of the known rough sleepers have been accommodated in private "nightly paid" accommodation. Despite lapses and absences most remain accommodated now. The stability provided during this period has enabled some of those accommodated to make significant and beneficial changes to their lifestyle.

The challenge of successfully sustaining these arrangements was always going to be greater than finding and securing accommodation in the first instance. The success of this lies in the commitment and partnership between CDC, Stonepillow, and other local homelessness charities.

The challenge now is to build on this progress by securing medium and long term arrangements for clients which allow them to move on from nightly paid placements. In the longer term we need to take the opportunity to consolidate the progress we have made and prevent a return to the levels of rough sleeping seen in Chichester at the end of last year.

Officers are working closely with MHCLG and have discussed the possibility of repurposing some of the Rough Sleepers Initiatives (RSI) Grant we received which came with very tight criteria over usage. The bid included an additional outreach worker, however, now the rough sleepers are off the streets the funding could be better used elsewhere. The Council is also in receipt of a letter from the Minister for Rough Sleeping & Housing asking us to share our plans with them by 11<sup>th</sup> June and asking us to:

- Encourage people to return to friends and family
- Find sustainable move-on options
- Put in place short term accommodation options where sustainable move-on options are available

- Recognise that for some people a voluntary return to their country of origin may be the best option
- Work with health partners to support clients physical and mental health, including substance abuse

A summary of proposed actions is below:

Immediate: Move rough sleepers from emergency “nightly paid” accommodation into temporary accommodation whilst long term solutions are found.

- Create a personal pathway for each Rough Sleeper in partnership with StonePillow, Registered Providers (RP) and Health partners
- Prioritise rehousing for those already in supported or temporary accommodation (e.g. StonePillow, Westward House) in order to free up capacity for those currently in emergency accommodation
- Stimulate additional supply from private landlords via Homefinder through more flexible promotion and use of the scheme
- Recruit into the Co-ordinator post funded by MHCLG Rough Sleeper Initiative funding
- Offer our support to StonePillow for their Housing First project, and consider repurposing funding from the RSI fund for an Outreach worker to this project
- Consider options for rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds
- Work with immigration to support those who wish to voluntarily return to their country of origin

Medium term: Establish pathways for rough sleepers

- Consider entering into agreements with local housing providers for longer term use of suitable properties as part of single homelessness pathway.
- Continue with joint commissioning of “Pathways Home” with WSCC
- Work with WS colleagues on the development of a pathway for complex individuals with multiple needs
- Ensure Diverted Giving messages are continued as people return to the High street

Long term: Establish longer term solutions

- Consider ‘trusted assessor’ nominations for key partners such as Stonepillow as part of a wider review of the Housing Register and Allocation Policy
- Consider what additional resources may be required to embed a successful Housing First approach for Rough Sleepers with challenging needs
- Continue with Freeland Close

## **2: Increased use of emergency and temporary accommodation and forecast increase in homelessness applications**

The number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) particularly B&B, due to Covid 19 is at an exceptional level and this is placing additional extra demand on the service, at extra cost to the Council. There is also an expected spike in homelessness applications due to increased unemployment, debt and family breakdown following lockdown. Having carefully considered how we can respond to the situation, officers have identified some

immediate actions and operational practices which can be improved to not only help us address the current situation but that will also contribute to improving the overall efficiency of the service.

A summary of proposed actions is below:

Immediate: Prioritise moving people out of TA (particularly B&B)

- Focus on moving people out of TA and Westward House by expanding HomeFinder, using discretions (in exceptional cases) in the allocations policy and encouraging RP's to prioritise moves for people leaving TA
- Cancel the fees chargeable for HomeFinder as an incentive to landlords to join the scheme and immediately seek new properties to add to the portfolio.
- Ensure appropriate level of staffing with focus on prevention and tenancy sustainment to include retention of 2 deployed workers and a senior agency worker.
- Review of Homelessness Prevention Fund to make it more flexible

Medium term: Ensure a focus on support & prevention to avoid use of B&B moving forward. Ensure fair access to social housing via the housing allocations policy.

- A full review of the allocations Scheme
- Review of support / prevention provision.
- Full implementation of the new IT operating system for Homelessness and Choice Based Lettings and development of accurate flow of data.

Long term: Embed learning and review processes to ensure prevention is prioritised

- Analysis of all relevant data and service delivery methods.
- A full review of structure and staffing
- Training, development and succession planning
- Developing an ongoing review programme of policies, procedures and performance.
- Continue with Freeland Close

### **3: Financial support for affected individuals and businesses and debt recovery policy**

CDC has been given the following funding to support residents and businesses following COVID19:

- A Hardship Fund of £699,209; At present all residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction have been awarded a £150 Hardship fund payment. CDC still has £446k to spend this year supporting residents. The fund may be used flexibly and current options being explored include, but are not limited to, supporting residents who are in arrears with their Council Tax and where possible provide support to residents who fail to qualify for Council Tax Reduction within a certain amount
- £37m for businesses in receipt of Small Business Rates, also for those in Retail, Leisure & Hospitality has already been paid out
- Expanded Business Rate grants funding of £1.85m. The criterion for the expanded Business Rate grants scheme is being developed by the Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services Division and the Economic Development team. This work is also being undertaken in conjunction with other councils across West Sussex so that

there is one consistent approach for businesses whilst allowing some discretion depending on individual local authority priorities. The scheme is currently being drafted and will be subject to member approval. To ensure the scheme can be publicised and administered as quickly as possible it is proposed that the criteria for an award will be agreed using the Council's urgency powers.

- The Council also administers the Discretionary Housing fund and has additional funding already in reserves of £140k. The current policy is flexible enough to allow applications from residents affected by COVID19 without the need for any change.

A soft approach to recovery is proposed to be taken in June 2020 along with a return to full recovery from August 2020 onwards to maximise income to the Council. All officers working in Recovery will be using a supportive approach to debtors and will be advising of the full range of support mechanisms in place including but not limited to: encouraging claims for Council Tax reduction or other welfare benefits where appropriate, extending payment plans, signposting to the Citizens Advice Bureau and debt management agencies etc.

#### **4:Support for voluntary & community organisations (VCS) (inc Community Halls and Sports and Leisure Clubs) and businesses affected by Covid 19**

The Covid 19 crisis has had a number of impacts on the voluntary and community sector. The statutory sector support to the community has been enormously assisted by the number of community groups (new and existing) who have risen to the challenge of supporting their neighbours. However, depending on their scale and the level of use, some have or will be incurring costs that they will need to address somehow.

Lockdown has also affected the sector including sports clubs and village halls. Some are sustaining or increasing their services but their income has reduced, some have had to cease operation but they continue to incur costs. There is some support from the government, but not all groups are eligible and others still need to replace lost income.

It is proposed that members consider setting up a one-off fund of up to £250k as a Community Recovery Grants fund for 20/21 only to support established VCS organisations and groups who have either been financially impacted by Covid 19 and require funding to maintain levels of service or meet increased demand, or require funding for innovative projects to support recovery in the community.

Members will also be aware of the huge financial impact Covid has had on local businesses. Whilst there have been several sources of support, including the Business Grants for small businesses, retail, leisure and hospitality grants, and the subsequent expanded Discretionary Business Grants, there may be businesses that have failed to qualify. It is proposed that members consider setting up a one-off fund of up to £250k as an Economic Recovery Grants fund for 20/21

Funds could be administered via the Grants Panel and if agreed it is proposed that the next Grants Panel discuss the criteria for such grants at their next meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June. This funding should be quick to access and a fast track process is proposed. Criteria could include that groups/businesses should not be able to access funding elsewhere and funding should not be given to organisations that are unlikely to survive the current crisis. Any unspent funding at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 could be returned to reserves.

It is proposed that the £500k is top sliced from future NHB funding and that the balance of funding is reviewed after 3 months with flexibility to move funding between the two pots.

### **5: How to capture community networks for future emergency planning**

The Covid 19 crisis has seen a volunteer response in the district on a scale like no other. Numerous small un-constituted groups have grown up in many areas of the district, some stand alone and others aligned to existing volunteer groups, Parish Councils or Residents Associations. This has resulted in the majority of areas in the district having access to volunteer support often in excess of the current need. There is a concern that once the lockdown period is over and the country goes back to some form of normality the numbers of volunteers and momentum could significantly reduce and impact those still required to self isolate. Also the unprecedented response of community networks has demonstrated that if retained these groups could act as a key resource if a second wave of Covid were to occur, or indeed any other crisis. The options recommended, summarised below, try to capture this and make the groups more established moving forward:

- Signpost these small groups to VAAC for support to potentially formalise their offer and make contact with other volunteer groups. Encourage all the groups to sign up to Chichester Community Network our online platform for community support and issues.
- Task the web team with mapping all the offers of volunteer support across the district and overlay this on to a map of the district to identify any gaps in provision. Raise the gaps in provision with volunteer groups in the proximity and encourage some expansion of recruitment and reach. A copy of this map along with contacts for all the volunteer groups could be held in the emergency planning room for reference.
- Work with the Parish Councils to raise awareness of the groups in their areas and encourage them to include them in reviewing and practising their emergency plans.

### **6: To tackle the backlog of DFG**

We have built up a DFG backlog as the Occupational Therapists have been using the lockdown period to clear their waiting lists of requests for simple adaptations. The team have, however, been doing lots of preparation work, including getting cases to approval, to ensure we are in the best position to clear the back-log once we are able to start visiting again. We plan to start progressing external works (ramps) etc immediately.

The team feel we are in a good position and have capacity to deal with the back-log. We will be doing this in a measured manner so not to overwhelm our contractors and cause the backlog further down the chain.

## Recovery Action Plan – Community Recovery

1: Immediate action (0-3 months) 2: Medium term actions (3-6 months) 3: Longer term actions (6 to 12 months)

What	Who	Timescale	Member Engagement	Community / Partnership Engagement	Financial Implications	Comments/ actions needed
<b>Pathways for Rough Sleepers</b>						
1: Move rough sleepers from emergency “nightly paid” accommodation into temporary accommodation (TA) whilst long term solutions are found.	DM for Housing	Sept 2020	Cabinet member	Stonepillow WSCC MHCLG Registered Providers Private Landlords Health partners	Current cost of emergency accommodation is approx. £5.5k per week  Loss of income if HomeFinder fees cancelled £20k/annum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a personal pathway for each Rough Sleeper in partnership with StonePillow, RP and Health partners</li> <li>• Prioritise rehousing for those already in supported or temporary accommodation in order to free up capacity for those currently in emergency accommodation</li> <li>• Stimulate additional supply from private landlords via Homefinder through more flexible promotion and use of the scheme. Consider removal of fees.</li> <li>• Recruit into Co-ordinator Post funded by MHCLG Rough Sleeper Initiative funding and work with MHCLG to agree priorities and plans</li> <li>• Offer our support to StonePillow for their (6 month) Housing First project &amp; consider repurposing the Outreach Worker funding from RSI to this project.</li> <li>• Consider options for rough sleepers with no recourse to</li> </ul>

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>public funds</li> <li>Work with immigration to support those who wish to voluntarily return to their country of origin</li> </ul>
2: Establish Pathways for Rough Sleepers	DM for Housing	Dec 2020	OSC Cabinet	Stonepillow WSCC MHCLG Registered Providers Private Landlords	May be some residual costs if rent exceeds LHA. Will depend on any agreement. Budget agreed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider entering into agreements with local accommodation providers for longer term use of properties as part of single homelessness pathway.</li> <li>Continue with joint commissioning of "Pathways Home" with WSCC</li> <li>Work with WS colleagues on the development of a pathway for complex individuals with multiple needs</li> <li>Ensure Diverted Giving messages are continued as people return to the High street</li> </ul>
3: Establish longer term solutions	DM for Housing	Jun 2021	OSC Cabinet	Stonepillow WSCC Registered Providers	<p>Costs unknown – potential capital or revenue cost.</p> <p>FC £2.8m</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider 'trusted assessor' nominations for key partners such as Stonepillow as part of a wider review of the Housing Register and Allocation Policy</li> <li>Consider what additional resources may be required to embed a successful Housing First approach for Rough Sleepers with challenging needs</li> <li>Continue with Freeland Close</li> </ul>

Address the increased use of emergency & temporary accommodation (inc B&B) and forecast increase in homelessness						
1: Prioritise moving people from temporary accommodation into permanent accommodation	DM for Housing	Sept 2020	Cabinet member	Registered Providers Private Landlords	As above.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on moving people out of TA and Westward House by expanding Homefinder, using discretions on the allocations policy for exceptional cases and encouraging RP's to prioritise moves for people leaving TA.</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate level of staffing with focus on prevention and tenancy sustainment to include retention of 2 deployed workers and a senior agency worker.</li> <li>• Cancel the fees chargeable for HomeFinder as an incentive to landlords to join the scheme and immediately seek new properties to add to the portfolio.</li> <li>• Review of Homelessness Prevention Fund to make it more flexible</li> </ul>
2: Ensure a focus on support & prevention to avoid use of B&B moving forward. Ensure fair access to social housing via the housing allocations policy.	DM for Housing	Dec 2020	OSC Cabinet	Registered Providers Private Landlords		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A full review of the allocations Scheme.</li> <li>• Review of support / prevention provision.</li> <li>• Full implementation of the new IT system for Homelessness and Choice Based Lettings</li> </ul>
3: Embed learning and new processes to ensure prevention is prioritised	DM for Housing	Jun 2021	OSC Cabinet			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of all relevant data and service delivery methods.</li> <li>• A full review of structure and staffing</li> <li>• Training, development and</li> </ul>

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>succession planning</li> <li>Developing an ongoing review programme of policies, procedures and performance.</li> <li>Continue with Freeland Close</li> </ul>
<b>Financial support for affected individuals and businesses and debt recovery policy</b>						
<p>1: Financial support for individuals via a Hardship Scheme and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP).</p> <p>Approach to recovery of debt owed to the Council</p>	DM for R&B	<p>July 2020 Cabinet</p> <p>Hardship Scheme to continue for 20/21</p> <p>DHP's ongoing</p>	Cabinet Council		<p>Hardship fund of £699k funded by Government</p> <p>Additional funding of £140k for DHP's already in place.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction have been awarded a £150 Hardship fund payment.</li> <li>Remaining £446k to spend this year</li> <li>Options being explored include: supporting residents who are in arrears with their Council Tax, support to residents who fail to qualify for Council Tax Reduction</li> <li>The Council also administers Discretionary Housing Payments and has additional funding already in reserves of £140k. Flexible criteria should be used to allow applications from residents affected by COVID19.</li> <li>It is proposed that a soft approach to recovery is taken in June 2020 with a return to full recovery from August 2020 onwards to maximise income to the Council.</li> <li>Recovery Officers should use a supportive approach to debtors and advise of the full range of support mechanisms in place including: encouraging claims for</li> </ul>

						CTR or other welfare benefits, extending payment plans, signposting to the CAB and debt management agencies etc.
1: Financial support to small and micro businesses via the Discretionary Business Grants	DM for R&B	June 20 and ongoing	Cabinet member Leader Chair of OSC		Gov funding of £1.85m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West Sussex framework in place</li> <li>• Criteria has been agreed by urgent decision</li> <li>• Application deadline is 14<sup>th</sup> June and payments should be made as soon as possible</li> </ul>
<b>Support for voluntary &amp; community organisations and businesses affected by Covid19</b>						
1: Financial support to Voluntary/Community groups (VCS) and businesses affected by Covid19.	DM for Communities	Sep 20 for 20/21	Cabinet Council Grants Panel		£250k one off funding for VCS  £250k one off funding for businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members to consider setting up a one-off fund of up to £500k as a fund for 20/21. £250k for VCS and £250k for businesses.</li> <li>• Grants to be agreed through the Grants Panel process but via a fast track to enable quick assessment and payment</li> <li>• Grants Panel to consider criteria for VCS who have either been financially impacted by Covid 19 and require funding to maintain levels of service or meet increased demand, or require funding for innovative projects to support recovery in the community.</li> <li>• Grants Panel to consider criteria for businesses impacted by Covid 19</li> <li>• Organisations that can access other grants or are unlikely to</li> </ul>

						<p>survive should not receive funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider limits on individual awards</li> <li>• Funding to be time limited to the 20/21 financial year and any remaining funds to be returned to reserves.</li> </ul>
<b>Capturing community networks for future emergency planning</b>						
1: Offer support for groups to formalise themselves	DM for Communities	Sep 20 for 20/21	Cabinet member			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signpost groups to VAAC for support to potentially formalise their offer and make contact with other volunteer groups.</li> <li>• Encourage groups to sign up to Chichester Community Network our online platform for community support and issues.</li> </ul>
2: Capture this resource by embedding community groups into future emergency plans	DM for Communities & DM for Environmental & Health Protection	Dec 20	Cabinet member	Local groups & networks Parish Councils SRF WSCC		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task the web team with mapping all the offers of volunteer support across the district and overlay this on to a map of the district to identify any gaps in provision</li> <li>• Consider how best to fill any gaps in consultation with Parish Councils and/or local groups</li> <li>• A copy of this map along with contacts for all the volunteer groups to be held in the emergency planning room for reference.</li> <li>• Work with the Parish Councils to raise awareness of the groups in their areas and encourage them to include them in reviewing and practising their emergency plans.</li> </ul>

