

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Executive – 18 November 2020

A proposal for delivering future single rough sleeper and homelessness accommodation in SWT

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Fran Smith

Report Author: Simon Lewis, Assistant Director, Housing and Communities

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To propose an approach to identify our future requirements for single homeless and rough sleeper accommodation in SWT and to evaluate and bring back recommendations on the best options to deliver against this need. The solutions being developed will be twin-tracked with partnership work under the auspices of the Health and Wellbeing Board to commit to joined-up partnership support services and ultimately a jointly commissioned support service for rough sleepers that we accommodate.
- 1.2 Successful delivery of this approach will also ensure that we do not have to evict rough sleepers that were accommodated by the Council following the Covid 'Everyone In' government directive. It will also provide a big step towards helping the Council meet the government's objective to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end rough sleeping by 2027.
- 1.3 Adoption of the recommendations will trigger further work that will identify whether the current Canonsgrove Halls of Residence homeless provision should be part of a longer-term homeless solution and if not what alternative solution should be delivered. It will also consider future use of Lindley House and how best this should be utilised.
- 1.4 The approach sets out an ambition which will adopt a new voluntary responsibility on the council to house a greater number of rough sleepers which previous assessment through homelessness legislation deemed that we did not hold a statutory duty to accommodate. This will approximately double the number of Single homeless which the council are seeking to accommodate directly or through partners. The ambition will also significantly increase the proportion of homeless single customers with complex or specific housing requirements. There are obvious financial challenges and additional risks that this ambition will bring to the council and its partners.
- 1.5 The approach will also seek to identify and ultimately deliver new accommodation solutions for single homeless that avoids the need to place people in B&Bs.

1.6 It should be noted that further work is also taking place outside of the scope of this work to consider future provision for homeless families and ensure we have sufficient provision moving forward.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Executive notes the proposed steps and timeline outlined in 4.16 including the resource requirements to undertake the options appraisal proposed to bring back a recommended solution.

3. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

3.1 Failure to find a sustainable solution for the current single homelessness and rough sleeping demand could lead to the following:

- Needing to evict rough sleepers accommodated under Covid onto the streets
- Inability to address rising homelessness and related costs to the Council
- Failure to meet government rough sleeper reduction targets and poor reputation with MHCLG and generally

3.2 Adopting an inclusive approach to single homeless including rough sleepers will:

- Double the number of complex single customers which the council and its partners help in supported accommodation at any one time from around 60 to 120 (currently Lindley House, Canonsgrove and the Beach Hotel).
- Increase the proportion of complex cases which the council will house and who need both specialised and other accommodation
- Require our care and support partners in both Somerset County Council and third sector to align care and support to the accommodation provided. The Health and Wellbeing Board and partners have signed a memorandum of understanding and verbally committed intent to joint working and future joint commissioning of support and care, but in practice this could take some years to reach fruition
- Related to this point, provision of new accommodation will require capital funding to purchase this, but often a greater challenge is identifying ongoing revenue funding if the managing organisation requires this for the scheme to be viable. This solution can be complex and may require more than one partner to contribute to ensure viability
- Although many single homeless will be able to move on to more stable accommodation, others will have very complex needs and not achieve the level of independence to sustain a tenancy and therefore may remain permanently or long-term within council and partner supported accommodations
- Any accommodation solutions must be designed to consider alternative uses in case council priorities or legislation changes in the future
- A longer term Investment in Canonsgrove, if appropriate, would require planning consent. The planning process would consider community support as one of its factors and planning approval is never certain.
- Canonsgrove is not in the ownership of the Council. If it was deemed a preferred option then a joint or joint-venture approach would need to be considered for future use of site.
- Any option carries a risk of leading to poor community relations and public relations from communities who are unlikely to welcome new accommodation in their locality.

4. Background and Full details of the Report

Background

- 4.1 Prior to Covid, the MHCLG was engaging with the Homelessness Service requesting the Council and its partners to determine a longer term view on homeless and rough sleeper accommodation and support provision. Recent events following Covid has promoted the urgency for this work and multiagency partnership support is currently strong, creating an opportunity to progress this quickly.
- 4.2 Following the government's "Everyone In" mandate, the Council secured the 66 bed Quantock Hall at Canonsgrove Halls of residence initially on a 3 month lease and then renewed on a month by month basis. The lease is between YMCA Dulverton Group (YMCADG) and Bridgwater and Taunton College (BTC). YMCADG are managing the site with their own staff plus support from the Rough Sleeper Coordinator and other SWT staff.
- 4.3 The purpose was to offer self-contained accommodation to all rough sleepers and to reduce the population density at Lindley House where social distancing was not possible. We currently have around 52 people accommodated at Canonsgrove and a further 24 at the Beach Hotel. A further 40 are at Lindley House, with part of the hostel staying empty. Rough Sleeper demand is again increasing within the area and this is also being experienced across other Somerset Districts.
- 4.4 As part of the Canonsgrove Offer, we brought in support from Open Door, Salvation Army, RAFT, SCC, the Police, Probation, the local Rotary, Go Create, SOMPAR mental health services, SDAS drug and alcohol services, the local church and others. The 'hub' model of support where tenants have a personalised housing and support plan and agencies work with them, has made a big difference and received significant recognition for what it is achieving. We have moved on around 40 people from Covid accommodation since April (16 from Canonsgrove; the rest from the Beach Hotel).
- 4.5 Canonsgrove is largely funded through Housing Benefit, as agreed with the Benefits Service. However YMCADG also tops this up through use of charitable donations and SWT initially contributed around £24k per month funded by Covid grants, which included £11k per month room retainer for Lindley House and monies for staff retainer, alcohol, tobacco, transport and miscellaneous costs. From September, we will no longer be funding Lindley House for retainers and will be expecting clients to fund their own tobacco and will be providing alcohol only for those classified as alcohol dependent and participating in addiction programmes. This will reduce our monthly cost to around £8k per month which we are bidding into MHCLG grant pots to cover for the rest of 2020/21. Much of the additional operational staffing we have provided to support this is already funded through the government's Rough Sleeper Initiative, although significant management time and officer capacity has needed to be diverted from other priorities within existing resources. The reason we can no longer support retainers for Arc is the MHCLG grant does not cover this. Arc have confirmed they will remodel their operational budgets to cover this in the short term.
- 4.6 Homelessness legislation only gives us a responsibility for having a homelessness duty for those with a local connection to Somerset West and Taunton. For other people who arrive in the district seeking help, we will work to reconnect them with the District where they have a local connection and can receive the necessary support and assistance. There are exceptions (those fleeing violence or harassment or domestic abuse) but the majority of people who approach us for accommodation who don't have a local connection are refused.

Providing a sustainable solution for the future

- 4.7 The government is challenging councils to use this opportunity to end rough sleeping and to keep rough sleepers off the streets. We believe that now is a good opportunity for SWT Council to consider its accommodation requirements for current and future homeless and rough sleeping demand and plan for how we can meet and deliver this. As a minimum we would look to ensure we could provide enough accommodation to avoid returning Covid accommodated rough sleepers back to the streets.
- 4.8 To date we have facilitated two workshops with Providers and partners to agree a vision and for Providers to share early proposals and thinking on how they could meet this vision. An excerpt from the 'Vision', setting out future requirements is shown at Appendix A.
- 4.9 In short, we require a range of accommodation solutions that will include a sizable supported housing offer for complex rough sleepers requiring 24/7 management and wrap-around support. Our preference is a 'hub' type facility (ie space for meetings and support from a range of partners to be directly provided and accessed by tenants) on site or in a separate site, but easily accessible by rough sleepers, homeless and other vulnerable adults. Alongside this is requirement for a mix of other accommodation needs that would normally be provided in other settings, such as B&B, move-on (singles and HMOs), high risk offender units, disabled access units, 'first-night out' accommodation, step-down 'trainer' flats etc. Additionally we know we also have demand for family accommodation.
- 4.10 Both Arc and the YMCA responded to the workshop with offers on how they could meet these requirements. YMCA shared their values and approach and expressed a willingness to work with us to meet future requirements. Arc demonstrated strong flexibility with a range of options, including a hub at Lindley House; purchase of new accommodation, reconfiguration of Lindley House to reduce numbers; converting to B&B, HMOs, training flats or a combination. They have been clear in their commitment to our district and expressed a willingness to be flexible in how they can support us meeting future need.
- 4.11 It should be recognised that past accommodation delivery and move-on in the SWT area for rough sleepers, whilst having some success has been limited in its effectiveness at providing sustainable support and move-on, particularly to more complex clients, due to a disjointed approach to assessment and support on mental health, social care, addiction services, learning difficulties etc. A real success from Covid has been how agencies have worked together to provide this to clients within their accommodation. This success has been recognised and the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) agreed a joint protocol in September 2020 – "A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to improve health and care through the home in Somerset". This is a commitment for health and care to work collaboratively with housing services and there is commitment from SCC to work with us to develop a joint commissioned approach for support services to rough sleepers. It also recommends a new Homeless Reduction Board to report to the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- 4.12 We have also considered whether Canonsgrove could be part of a longer term solution, either a long-term lease, direct purchase or possibly through a new Housing Company. More work is required, specifically around defining whether the site is best placed to meet our needs; how the site would be used; and the optimum

accommodation mix. This would also need to consider how the site would be blended with other accommodation offers and how it could be flexible dependent on changing demand, alongside considering its position as part of a sustainable community / neighbourhood. Discussion would need to progress with the land owner and if a long term solution is to be progressed a planning application in advance of purchase or long lease. Work would also be required around the quality of the design including thermal comfort and a financial plan produced to progress either directly by the council or through a council company/SPV.

- 4.13 Other options that we plan to follow up on and consider, once we have clarity on the required accommodation mix, include fully exploring how Arc could meet our accommodation requirement; whether the HRA could provide more accommodation as part of its remit to address housing need; what opportunity there is to purchase additional properties through a council company / SPV; and a review of other Council owned assets as part of a solution; along with evaluating market opportunities that become available such as the recent marketing of the Royal Ashton hotel.
- 4.14 A limited budget of 10k is required to support the initial options appraisal study primarily to assess the current accommodation at Canonsgrove. It is proposed that this be funded from the Homelessness Prevention Reserve and appointment will be carried out in accordance with the Council's normal procurement procedures.
- 4.15 Should the Canonsgrove scheme emerge as a preferred and viable option and initial discussions with the owner are successful in agreeing a shared vision for the site, the proposal would need sufficient resources to create designs and progress planning permission. This would include architects, engineers and a suite of consultants which would be used in any significant development. This would incur further costs at risk, at an estimated cost of £130k in 2021/22 which we would seek to mitigate through a negotiated joint venture approach with the owners. Further detail on this would follow the Options Appraisal if this became a preferred option.

Next Steps and timeline

- 4.16 Our plan to establish single homeless and rough sleeper accommodation requirements (including reducing reliance on B&B) and a proposal to deliver this is set out below
- (i) YMCADG to request extension of lease with Canonsgrove for 6 months to allow time for a clear decision on future use. A further extension will then be required for a transition period. **October 2020**
 - (ii) To await outcome of and then if successful deliver on Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) funding bid for 2020/21 to provide revenue funding for Canonsgrove and for capital to YMCA to purchase accommodation units in Minehead to allow step-down from Beach Hotel. **September 2020 onwards**
 - (iii) Establish and set out best estimates for accommodation requirements based on evidence for next 2, 5, 10 years (quantum, mix etc) **October 2020**
 - (iv) Undertake detailed Options Appraisal of accommodation solutions
 - o Do nothing, ending current temporary accommodation arrangement once Covid risk reduces and returning tenants to the streets

- Canonsgrove within the core offer plus other accommodation
- Lindley House and Arc accommodation as core offer plus other accommodation
- Hybrid of above / other provider options

Initial Options Appraisal timeline December 2020

Proposed Investment Route for Council consideration February 2021

- (v) To work with Homes England and the MHCLG on a further bid into the Next Steps Accommodation Project for capital funding in 2021/22 to support deliver of our preferred accommodation options. **November 2020 onwards**
- (vi) Further development of joint commissioning approach with SCC and partners. The new Somerset Homelessness Reduction Board (HRB) will lead on this with members including housing, health, and care services, along with providers. This will provide strategic coordination of service delivery (including an oversight to commissioned projects such as Pathways to Independence, Positive Lives etc.) and will be established during the early part of 2021. The HWBB and HRB will ultimately seek to influence service delivery through an 'integrated commissioning' approach across health, care and housing. This is a complex piece that will require a lot of data analysis (including a clear understanding of 'system wide' costs). **Jan 2021 onwards.**

5. Links to Corporate Strategy

5.1 The proposal strongly supports our 'Homes and Communities' corporate priority and in particular our ambition to "work to end homelessness and rough sleeping in the District."

6. Finance / Resource Implications

6.1 The proposal has a range of financial and resource implications as follows:

- Ongoing operational running costs of Canonsgrove. Based on current expenditure, the Council is contributing an additional £8k per month to this, however we have had confirmation of our successful bid into the MHCLG Next Steps Accommodation Fund for revenue funding for 2020/21, therefore this cost should be fully funded.
- There is no MHCLG revenue funding beyond April 2021, therefore this would cost the Council £96,000 to continue to fund Canonsgrove for the full year in 2021/22. We don't have timescales yet of how long it would be needed, however it is prudent to assume funding required for the whole year and therefore this £96k will need to be built into the budget setting process for 2021/22 as a one-off growth item, and will be approved as part of that cycle.
- The £10k required for the initial options appraisal of Canonsgrove in 2020/21 will be funded from the Homelessness Prevention Reserve.
- If the MHCLG Next Steps Accommodation Fund capital funding is approved for 2020/21, then we would be required to make capital contributions towards the viability of this. These will be picked up through normal approved delegation routes. (approved separately through portfolio-holder, director and S151 Officer). The same would apply for a future capital funding bid in 2021/22 into the MHCLG NSAP.

- There are potential additional costs of circa £130k, if a full accommodations options appraisal is required for Canonsgrove in 2021/22, following the initial options appraisal. However this request will come back through the Committee cycle in February 2021 and we would look to mitigate these costs through a joint venture and should be able to capitalise these costs if the project is delivered. There is flexibility within the Financial Procedure Rules for the Director of Housing and the S151 Officer to approve a supplementary budget for this.
- The final proposal will then come back through the committee cycle for approval (including financials) and will include any capital and / or revenue funding required.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 SHAPE legal services have reviewed this report and advised that any procurement will need to comply with the Council's procurement procedures. Any future commissioning of support services will require further legal advice if Somerset West and Taunton Council is the lead commissioner of these.

8. Climate and Sustainability Implications

8.1 We are seeking a 'hub' solution so that support services are close to the residents in whichever accommodation solution we choose. A town centre solution is likely to be more sustainable from a climate perspective than an out-of-town solution however this will need to be weighed up with other factors, such as access to public transport routes (such as local buses).

9. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

9.1 The proposal for a sustainable accommodation and support hub solution for rough sleepers will enhance our ability to safeguard a group of very vulnerable adults. The average life expectancy of a rough sleeper is 47 which indicates the extent of risks faced from living on the streets which this proposal will help mitigate. The proposal greatly promotes the welfare of adults at risk.

9.2 Any accommodation that hosts a number of rough sleepers can expect some level of noise nuisance and related anti-social behaviour, particularly where tenants have poor mental health, learning difficulties and addictions. The impact of this and measures to mitigate this will need to be considered as part of any long term proposal.

10. Equality and Diversity Implications

10.1 The three aims that we must have regard to when considering our Public Sector Equality Duty are:

- *Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation;*
- *Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- *Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

In terms of the legislated protected characteristics, in the **Equality Act** a **disability** means a physical or a mental condition which has a substantial and long-term impact on your ability to do normal day to day activities. There is a substantive body of evidence that shows that homeless people are disproportionately affected by poor physical and mental health. Evidence

includes <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-homelessness> which cites that 80% of homeless people in England have reported poor mental health with 45% having been diagnosed with a mental health condition.

Our proposed solution will provide more and better accommodation and support to the homeless and rough sleeping population which will help address inequalities.

The Council has also recognised locally the following characteristics when developing policy: - Carers, Military status, Rurality, Low income, Economic and Social Disadvantage, Digital Exclusion. The people we are seeking to support with this initiative will all have one or more of these characteristics.

11. Social Value Implications

- 11.1 Ultimately we are seeking to jointly commission with partners support services for our rough sleeping community which will have clear social value implications socially but also economically for this group. We have engaged with the DWP to see how they can support our work so that not only can we help people address social and health issues, but can help move them ultimately to greater independence with a focus on improving skills and ideally accessing employment opportunities.

12. Partnership Implications

- 12.1 The success of any future accommodation proposal will require strong partnership working with accommodation providers such as the YMCA, Arc and others as well as a wide range of support services partners including SCC (Social Care, Public Health), NHS, Somerset Partnership, Turning Point (drug and alcohol service), Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Second Step, Salvation Army, Probation, Open Door and local church and voluntary and community groups.
- 12.2 The principle approved through the Health and Wellbeing Board is that we should develop a joint commissioning approach for support services and we will continue developing this approach alongside the work we do on accommodation.

13. Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 13.1 The project objectives have the support of the Health and Wellbeing Board and this includes the proposal from the Board to create a Homelessness Reduction Board that will report into the Health and Wellbeing Board. There are clear links between people being healthy and being suitably accommodated so there is a strong alignment between the objectives of this report and improving health and wellbeing. One of the three Health and Wellbeing priorities for Somerset is "Somerset people are able to live independently" and therefore this provision will be key to enabling this.

14. Asset Management Implications

- 14.1 The project will have asset management implications and the detail of this will be outlined in the next report alongside the recommended proposal.

15. Data Protection Implications

- 15.1 None at this stage. We will require information sharing agreements between the Council and any providers and support services that we use.

16. Consultation Implications

16.1 We will need to consult with local communities through appropriate bodies such as parish councils to ensure we make decisions having listened to their concerns and taken appropriate steps to mitigate these where possible. We are aware that Trull Parish Council, Queens College and some members of the Trull community have expressed misgivings over Canonsgrove and are concerned that this will be part of a long-term solution. We have met with the parish council in August and are putting in place further measures to try and address current concerns. We will continue to engage with them as the project progresses. Alternative sites will likely raise similar concerns with local communities, so the principle of open dialogue will be important whatever sites are considered.

17. Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s)

17.1 The following recommendations were made by the Scrutiny Committee:

17.1.1 That the Scrutiny Committee notes the proposed steps and timeline outlined in 4.16 including the resource requirements to undertake the options appraisal proposed to bring back a recommended solution.

17.1.2 The Scrutiny Committee expects the Executive to take full regard of the comments and concerns raised at Scrutiny and to take these into account when making a full decision on this matter. In particular, any options appraisal must be open, transparent and a forward looking review of all potential sites. Any appraisals involving Canonsgrove should be communicated with both Trull and Comeytrowe Parish Councils as well as local residents.

17.2 The Scrutiny Committee had a number of questions and comments (and a more detailed outline will be available in the minutes) but in summary these were the key comments:

- An emphasis on strong communications with the community and parish council was important (Trull and Comeytrowe both being mentioned)
- Strong partnership working with the YMCA and police was important and should continue
- The options appraisal should consider all options and sites and reach an objective and fair conclusion
- Dealing with incidents and antisocial behaviour was important (officers were able to show that interventions by SWT, YMCADG and police working together had reduced the incidents and concerns to a minimal level in recent weeks).
- The town centre should be considered and had advantages, although there was also discussion on the benefits of more rural / semi-rural locations.

17.3 The Committee was ideally seeking engagement with all communities at all potential sites, however officers highlighted that pragmatically this would be difficult due to in some cases commercial confidentiality and that the purpose of the options appraisal was to objectively appraise which sites would best meet the councils strategic homeless accommodation and support requirements for the whole district – whereas local communities would be more focussed on their immediate neighbourhood impact. The Committee settled on the recommendation in 17.1.2, with an emphasis on Trull and Comeytrowe parish council and residents.

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny Yes** (4/11/20)
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes** (18/11/20)
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency: **Executive report on Proposed Investment Route Feb 2021**

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix A	Vision for Rough Sleeping provision in SWT (from Partnership workshop June 2020)
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