



**Minutes of the Homelessness Prevention Grant Panel
Meeting held on Wednesday 2nd September 2020 via
Microsoft Teams**

Present

Councillors:	Tony Boto Glenvil Greenwood-Smith Val Carter	CllrTB CllrGGS CllrVC
Officers:	Carol Conway, Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager	CC
Minutes:	Emily Scott, Housing Needs and Information Officer	ES

Councillor Glenvil Greenwood-Smith was nominated and elected as Chair of the Panel

1. Apologies

1.1. None

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 None

3. ENCS Night Shelter

3.1 A report was received from the Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager, see appendix.

The night shelter has been closed since March 2020 and is unable to reopen due to issues with social distancing and availability of volunteers to staff the facility. ENCS were already looking for new premises for the Night Shelter prior to the Covid19 pandemic and this is still the case.

89-91 Duck Street are owned by the council and currently leased to Mayday Trust who are going to invoke the break clause in their lease. These properties are suitable for use as a night shelter and would provide six individual bedrooms. It is anticipated that the shelter could be open late October/ early November.

It is estimated that there would be a funding shortfall (not paid by HB) of approximately £3,500 per month. Over a 5 month period from 1st November to 31st March the shortfall would be £17,500. There will also be some minor 'set up' costs to be covered.

The council has already allocated £5,000 from the Homelessness Prevention Grant funding towards the operation of the night shelter in the current financial year. There is a further £16,000 unspent in the fund which has been carried over by the Housing Team in recent years for contingencies. It is proposed that £15,000 of this funding could be made available to the night shelter up to the end of the financial year.

4. Resolutions and recommendations

The Panel resolved to recommend to Policy and Resources Committee:

- 1) When the properties at Duck St become available they are leased to ENCS (or to Longhurst and sub-let to ENCS) to provide a night shelter and supported accommodation, for an initial 18 month period, to assist longer term use.
- 2) Up to £15,000 of the remaining Homelessness Prevention Grant funds is allocated to ENCS as set up and additional running costs for the period to 31st March 2021.
- 3) The funding allocated for the SWEP is retained by ENC until proposals are in place on how this will be provided.

The Panel also recommends that the Shadow Authority urgently considers future homelessness provision and funding, as part of the budget setting process.

The meeting concluded at 12:15

Report to Homelessness Prevention Grants Panel 2nd September 2020

Rushden Night Shelter

Background

The Rushden Night Shelter (operated by ENCS) helps over 100 people per year, providing short term accommodation to individuals experiencing homelessness. When individuals arrive, they are assigned a bed which they can occupy for up to three months, and in that time, they are supported into accommodation. They are also supported in accessing benefits, with their paperwork and ID, finding employment, accessing debt advice services, and general tenancy sustainment services. They also see a counsellor. Over 50% of residents each year are helped into more permanent accommodation.

The council has supported the work of the Rushden Night Shelter for some years now through homelessness prevention grants as follows:

Contribution towards Night Shelter operating costs	£5,000
Contribution towards Counselling costs	£5,000
SWEP provision	£2,000

We have also been successful in a funding application under the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative for a joint project under which ENCS employ an Outreach Worker to assist rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping.

In recent years concerns have been expressed by Councillors about the standard of accommodation at the night shelter and this led to ENCS seeking alternative premises. It was hoped that they would be able to move into the Serve premises which would also have enabled them to provide day centre facilities. However, due to the high level of financial risk involved in entering into a 10 year lease, and changes in how provision for homeless individuals should be provided in the future, it was decided not to proceed.

The current position

As a result of the pandemic, the night shelter closed at the end of March 2020. The bedrooms and all other facilities are shared, and it would be a significant risk to staff and volunteers when working with the client group, particularly on the premises. The decision has since been made by the organisation that the night shelter will not reopen in its current premises. It is impossible to social distance in the premises; it is a difficult space to keep clean and sanitise regularly; there is an ongoing issue with resourcing of staff and volunteers and it would not be financially viable for the project to operate with a reduced number of clients.

ENCS are still looking for new premises to provide a homelessness service in the area, although plans for a day centre are on hold until more suitable premises can be found, most likely separate from a new homelessness service premises. They hope to provide an element of short term or temporary night shelter provision, but also to include longer term supported accommodation for up to 2 years.

In recent years, there have been many individuals who face significant challenges in maintaining housing; the reasons for this vary but the main challenges are mental health, addictions, difficulty in managing money, bills and 'life admin'. The aim of the supported accommodation would be to help individuals access support whilst they reside there, so that they succeed in their next step of their journey. The concept of this supported accommodation will follow housing first principles which has worked very well within ENCS's Corby project and works on the basis of providing accommodation first and then sorting the rest out from there. The temporary element of the accommodation would continue to provide emergency accommodation to individuals and move them on to somewhere more permanent.

89-91 Duck Street

These properties are owned by the council and are currently leased to the Mayday Trust. Following discussions with the Mayday Trust it has been agreed that they should be allowed to invoke the break clause in their lease. The properties are in an ideal location for a night shelter and as such could be a good medium term use for them until any further development plans are put in place for the adjacent land which is also in the council's ownership.

The properties comprise of 6 individual bedrooms, 3 in each property, together with living rooms, kitchens and bathrooms in each. One property also has office/sleep in space for staff. The properties are accessed by a shared porch. As such they are considered suitable for the 2 separate uses of night shelter and supported accommodation with staff based in the night shelter but being on hand if needed next door.

The properties are currently let at a rent of £1,300 per month. The council would need to decide whether to continue to charge rent to the night shelter and if so at what level. The majority of the rent could be claimed back by ENCS in Housing Benefit payments. However the council would not receive full subsidy for these payments as ENCS are not a registered provider. Discussions are also underway with Longhurst to establish whether a head and sub lease could be entered into so that full subsidy could be claimed. (A similar arrangement is in place for the Recovery House).

Timescale

The properties are not immediately available as there are a couple of residents still there. They have been given notice by the Mayday Trust and the Housing Options Team are assisting them with rehousing. We cannot be sure when or if they will be rehoused. There is also some repair work which needs doing and potentially CCTV will need to be installed. However, we would anticipate that the shelter could be open late October/early November. This would enable us to have a winter shelter provision to the end of March 2021, whilst longer term arrangements are considered, either at Duck St or elsewhere, by the Shadow Authority.

Finance

Due to the decline in volunteers to staff the night shelter, and the sustainability of staffing with volunteers due to the current pandemic, it would only be viable if it could be staffed overnight. It is estimated that this would cost approximately £7,300 per

month including on costs. Daytime staff provision would be similar to the current operation at approximately £3,500 per month.

It is estimated that there would be a funding shortfall (not paid by HB) of approximately £3,500 per month. Over a 5 month period from 1st November to 31st March the shortfall would be £17,500. There will also be some 'set up' costs to be covered.

The council has already allocated £5,000 from the Homelessness Prevention Grant funding towards the operation of the night shelter in the current financial year. There is a further £16,000 unspent in the fund which has been carried over by the Housing Team in recent years for contingencies. It is proposed that £15,000 of this funding could be made available to the night shelter up to the end of the financial year.

ENCS would also undertake their own fundraising to make the project sustainable in the longer term.

It is currently uncertain how the SWEP will be provided in the district this winter but it may need to be through bed and breakfast.

Recommendation

The Panel is requested to recommend to Policy and Resources that

- 1) When the properties at Duck St become available they are leased to ENCS (or to Longhurst and sub-let to ENCS) to provide a night shelter and supported accommodation, for an initial 18 month period to assist longer term use
- 2) Up to £15,000 of the remaining Homelessness Prevention Grant funds is allocated to ENCS as set up and additional running costs for the period to 31st March 2021
- 3) The funding allocated for the SWEP is retained by ENC until proposals are in place on how this will be provided
- 4) The Shadow Authority is requested to urgently consider future homelessness provision and funding as part of the budget setting process.