

# Executive Member Decision



**REPORT OF:** Executive Member for Adult Services and Prevention

**LEAD OFFICERS:** Strategic Director of Adults and Health (DASS)

**DATE:** Friday, 19 March 2021

**PORTFOLIO(S) AFFECTED:** Adult Services and Prevention

**WARD/S AFFECTED:** (All Wards);

## **SUBJECT:**

EMD Homeless Pods Closure

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 To make a decision on ending the use of the homeless pods and the future pathway for the rough sleepers at the end of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) period.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That the Executive Member formally agrees to the closure of the homeless pods and also agrees to the proposal to move the rough sleepers into a housing first style model of accommodation through a third sector partner.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Local Authority has a moral/humanitarian duty to provide emergency accommodation to rough sleepers during nights of extreme cold weather when the temperature is forecast below zero degrees for consecutive nights. This is done via the SWEP. In Blackburn with Darwen we have always provided accommodation throughout the months November to March irrespective of the temperature.

3.2 Due to the pandemic, accommodation this year has had to be on an individual basis unlike previous years when it was communal style. This year's SWEP provision has consisted of individual rooms at the Salvation Army and Bodum Court (formally known as Shadsworth House) and supplemented by the homeless pods located adjacent to the now closed Shadsworth Leisure Centre.

3.3 The 'pod village' comprises of 10 self-contained units for rough sleepers and 3 additional pods for staff use, undertaking interventions and food preparation. These have proven to be an expensive form of accommodation and although they have not incurred a direct cost to this authority as they have been funded through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) they have cost in excess of £100,000 for the 4 months of operation. These costs have included the hire of the pods, delivery and installation, the provision of electricity, maintenance, food and security. That said, the pods have been a useful addition to the SWEP provision and have helped to ensure that the most chaotic rough sleepers who are excluded from all other forms of accommodation have been kept safe throughout the winter months.

3.4 Work has been undertaken to move the residents of the pod village on to other forms of accommodation, utilising a third sector organisation who secured funding to provide tenancies and

support for chaotic individuals. We have been in discussions with MHCLG and have been granted funding to utilise this organisation to provide further properties and increased support for the most chaotic of the rough sleepers.

3.5 Properties will be part of a Housing First model that is based around provision of accommodation followed by support being offered to the individual. This is different to current models whereby chaotic individuals are not offered accommodation until they show that they can improve their behaviours. A Housing First approach offers a tenancy to an individual irrespective of their support needs, problems and behaviours; once in the accommodation the support is offered but the tenancy is not dependent upon the person accepting support.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS**

- 4.1 We aim to have offers of accommodation for those in the pods by the end of March 2021, either in Housing First properties provided through the third sector partner, private tenancies or a room in one of the supported Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO). However there is always a risk that some individuals will return to rough sleeping and we cannot force them to take up offers of assistance.
- 4.2 The pod rental period is due to end on 31 March 2021 which coincides with the MHCLG funding coming to an end. Any extension of the pods would need to be funded directly by the authority at approximately £18,000 per month.
- 4.3 MHCLG have awarded us funding to pilot a Housing First approach giving us for the first time the finances to set up and test this sort of model in an attempt to provide a real pathway to rough sleepers coming off the streets.

#### **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy recognises that we consistently have a cohort of rough sleepers on the streets of both Blackburn and Darwen and it aims to tackle this problem. One of its aims is to explore funding to operate a Housing First approach.

#### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Currently the costs of the pods have been paid for from MHCLG funding and if they are to end on the 31 March 2021 no costs will have been incurred by the Local Authority. Continuation of the pods would cost the authority in excess of £18,000 per month.
- 6.2 The Housing First style model being operated by the third sector is funded from a grant they have received and an extension to this model will be funded from a mixture of MHCLG funding streams, Protect Plus, Rough Sleeper Initiative and the Emergency Uplift funding.

#### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There is a legal duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to have a homelessness strategy and review it on a regular basis. There is no legal duty to provide SWEP just guidance and best practice examples.

#### **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 No resources will be required from the authority and all costs will be covered from MHCLG funding and the funding that the third sector partner has received from Homeless Link through the Homeless Transition Fund.

#### **9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

**Please select one of the options below.**

Option 1  Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2  In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

No formal consultation is required however we have consulted Health partners, our commissioned substance misuse services and support providers as well as the rough sleepers in the pods.

## **11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE**

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

## **12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published.

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<b>DATE:</b>	16 March 2021
<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	None