

## COUNCIL MEETING - 24 JANUARY 2017

### AGENDA ITEM 5 - QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

#### 1. Bob O'Neill to ask the Leader of the Council: Street Homeless in Reading

In view of the state of crisis that Reading has entered and with questions being asked whether past spending decisions were wise, would the Councillors and particularly those that have strong socialist or compassionate principles who want to find a solution to the street-homeless in Reading, agree to a Council motion to suspend their generous allowances which total somewhere in the region of £500k per annum? This money could be diverted to provide modest hostel facilities for the less fortunate until Reading's situation changes.

**REPLY** by Councillor Lovelock Leader of the Council

Can I thank Mr. O'Neill for his interest in homelessness.

I think it would be helpful to outline what the Council currently does to try and support those who are forced to sleep on the streets and who are made homeless through evictions etc..

The Council commissions a range of homelessness support services to a total value of £1,489,149 per annum currently. This includes:

- Homelessness Pathway accommodation provides 217 rooms for individuals/couples who are homeless in a range of schemes to help them to achieve independence which, where appropriate, may begin with an offer of intensive support in a hostel staffed 24 hours. They are then offered life skills support, usually in a smaller hostel or shared house, until they are ready for independent living in a shared house, bedsit or flat
- Street outreach services to support rough sleepers into treatment and accommodation throughout the year or to help reconnect them to their area of origin.
- Cross-tenure floating support enables individuals, couples and families to sustain their tenancies and supports homelessness prevention.
- The Council also finds temporary accommodation for those families and individuals for whom we have a legal responsibility.

A review of homelessness support services has been recently undertaken by officers. This will lead to a full competitive tender exercise and implementation of new contracts from 1 April 2018 (when current contracts end). As part of this process, it is proposed that all homelessness support services are reconfigured and a more flexible model of support service adopted to better meet the needs of individuals.

The Council also works with partners to help rough sleepers in the Winter months as overnight temperatures plummet, in addition to our year round services described above to help individuals into supported accommodation.

Extra emergency beds are made available and local services provided by St Mungo's, Launchpad Reading, social housing provider Riverside and the Salvation Army, work in partnership to ensure that anyone at risk of sleeping rough during severe weather is offered emergency accommodation. During this time, extra support and advice is also available with the aim that people do not have to return to rough sleeping. Whilst the council makes these services available all year round, people can be more likely to accept help during the winter months.

This Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) has operated in Reading for many years and is activated whenever the Met Office forecasts three nights or more with a minimum temperature of 0°C or below.

The 'Bed for the Night' (B4N) night shelter run by a consortium of local churches is also operating in the borough every night until the end of February - this offers a total 18 bed spaces for those who are verified as homeless and that have a local connection to the borough.

For any member of the public concerned about someone sleeping rough, I would urge people to get in touch via the StreetLink website, [streetlink.org.uk](http://streetlink.org.uk), to help connect someone with their local service as soon as possible.

In addition to the above, under the 'Narrowing the Gap' grant funding programme priority of 'Meeting Basic Needs' the Council also funds the partnership between Christian Community Action, the Churches in Reading Drop In Centre, Readifood/FAITH and Reading Refugee Support Group (total funding is £66k for 2016/17)\*\*. Collectively the partnership provide a range of services and support including a food bank; drop-in for homeless individuals; furniture/new home start-up packs; and other practical help to people in crisis who cannot afford to meet their basic needs. Those who are homeless are referred as appropriate to specialist services for support and health care.

As for Councillors' allowances, it may interest Mr. O'Neill to know that Reading's allowances are the lowest of any Unitary Council in the Country. Just comparing the Leaders' allowance with neighbouring councils the allowance on top of the basic in Berks is as follows:

Reading: £7,004

West Berks: £18,310

Wokingham: £20,000

Slough: £19,055

Bracknell Forest: £28,954

Windsor and Maidenhead: £23,760

Councillors give up a huge amount of time and often sacrifice promotion opportunities at work. The allowances offer some compensation, but not all, for this and most of us are not motivated by financial reward so I do not believe there should be no allowances.