



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

**Rural and Communities Overview
and Scrutiny Committee**

10 September 2020

Report of: Councillor Robert Reid

Cabinet Member for Housing and
Planning



SKDC Review of Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy and Impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017)

Report Author

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Corporate Priority:	Decision type:	Wards:
Administrative	Administrative	All Wards

Reviewed by:	Helen Clarke, Head of Housing	14 August 2020
Approved by:	Chris Stratford, Interim Assistant Director - Housing	21 August 2020
Signed off by:	Councillor Robert Reid, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning	28 August 2020

Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s)

- Notes the contents, comment and feedback to officers and/or Lincolnshire County Council, as necessary.**

1 The Background to the Report

1.1 It is two years since the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) came into force in England on the 3rd April 2018. The main changes were:

- the definition of homelessness changed from being threatened with homelessness within 28 days to 56 days;
- the introduction of prevention and relief ‘duties’ rather than ‘powers’
- a new ‘duty to refer’, which required certain statutory agencies to refer homeless and potentially homeless people to housing authorities (this was introduced in October 2018)

The National Picture

1.2 A Local Government Information Unit (LGUI) report ‘Briefing: The Homelessness Reduction Act: is it making a difference’, published on the 7th May 2020, incorporates the findings from two reports: Foot in the Door by Crisis and Caught in the Act by Shelter (two of the major national homelessness charities). The main findings from these reports are:

- People are more likely to receive personal assistance from local authorities, especially single adults
- Councils help about two in five households to resolve their homelessness problem
- Just one in five households assisted through the prevention duty end up staying in their existing home
- ‘Digital gatekeeping’ and other barriers exist at some local authorities
- Personalised plans are too general and not always followed up by councils
- The duty to refer is having limited success but does not include enough public bodies

1.3 The report states how MHCLG statistics show:

1) The number of households assessed as owed one of the two new duties rose between the second and third quarters of 2019: households assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty – up 5% from Q2 to Q3 in 2019

SKDC situation: prevention and relief duties - 2018/19: 815 and 2019/20: 620

2) The number of households offered the main homelessness duty (s.193 of the Housing Act, Part VII where we have accepted the household as eligible; homeless; priority need; unintentionally homeless and have a local connection) is down by about a quarter as a result of the new duties, with 9,650 households accepted as owed a main duty between July and September 2019.

SKDC situation: 2018/19: 56 and 2019/20: 112

Although this amount doubled between 2018/19 and 2019/2020, there is still a reduction in comparison to 2016/17: 197 and 2017/18: 199

3) In 2018/19, 85,260 single people were found to be homeless, up from 13,790 the previous year. Shelter states “this increase suggests that, rather than being told they are not in priority need for rehousing, single people are being assessed and recorded”.

SKDC situation: SKDC already assessed and recorded all people who approached as potentially homeless as well as homeless. The national increase in approaches and the recording of these is also likely to be due to people referred under the Duty to Refer.

SKDC total number of approaches from homeless and potentially homeless people:

2019/20: 1460

2018/19: 1561

2017/18: 1233

2016/17: 1339

- 4) MHCLG figures show that households without children (including single adults) make up two thirds of households offered one of the two new duties.

SKDC situation: Mirrors the national picture – households with single people:

2018/2019: 439 (54% of households offered one of the two new duties) and 2019/20: 390 (63% of households offered one of the two new duties).

- 5) Shelter advisors found onerous requests for proof of homelessness and identity, requiring people to make an online application and not accepting referrals until the last minute, such as the day a person is released from prison.

SKDC situation: Prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, customers would be seen immediately by a triage officer in person to set up a new case and take an application. Now we are remote working, customers are able to complete the process over the phone with a triage officer. They are also able to make an application online via our website.

- 6) Shelter states “despite the potential for earlier intervention, just 21 per cent of households threatened with homelessness are remaining in their existing home”.

SKDC situation:

2019/20: 8%

2018/19: 11%

2017/18: 3%

2016/17: 6%

- 7) The number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) has risen and length of time spent in TA risen.

SKDC situation: The way in which our temporary accommodation figures are recorded for households occupying our own TA stock, we are not able to separate households in TA from one month to the next. This makes it difficult to ascertain the total number of households per year. However, we can see from our B&B spend that there has been an increase in the number of households needing TA.

2019/20: £89,985

2018/19: £75,094

2017/18: £45,437

2016/17: £25,104

- 8) The Crisis research found that local authorities helped households to resolve their homelessness problem in 39 per cent of cases. A further 31 per cent reported they had either supported themselves or received help from family or friends, while 30 per cent said the problem was still ongoing.

SKDC situation: The number of households assisted in either preventing or relieving their homelessness:

2019/20: 283 (20% of total approaches)

2018/19: 323 (21% of total approaches)

2017/18: 138 (11% of total approaches)

2016/17: 135 (10% of total approaches)

- 9) Councils are required to provide more personalised assistance. There has, says Shelter, been some culture change in how people are treated when they approach homelessness services. Mystery shoppers working for Shelter audited six councils and found that advisers were generally empathetic and helpful. But 48 per cent of Shelter advisers felt that personalised housing plans (PHPs), a requirement under the act, are rarely tailored to clients' needs. "Many plans fail to recognise people's support needs, and instead provide information about how unaffordable the local area is," says Shelter.

SKDC situation: The opinion of the Senior Housing Options Advisor was sought and he said "PHPs can be very impersonal and consist of the same questions that we ask every customer. It feels more like a tick box exercise than a tool which is genuinely useful to us and the customer to prevent/relieve homelessness".

1.4 The report asks the following questions:

1.4.1 What does the act reveal about causes of homelessness?

The MHCLG's statistics for last July to September show a quarter of households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness identified 'friends or family no longer willing or able to accommodate' as the main reason for losing their last settled home. The second most common reason was termination of an assured shorthold tenancy (20 per cent). Relationship breakdowns, both violent and non-violent, also accounted for about one in five cases.

SKDC situation: For the 2 years prior to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the two years since, the three main reasons for homelessness have all been the same, with 'termination of assured shorthold tenancy' being the most common reason, 'family no longer willing or able to accommodate' being the second and 'non-violent relationship breakdown with partner' the third most common reason.

1.4.2 How can implementation of the act be improved?

Both Shelter and Crisis are adamant that the solution to homelessness does not lie in better legislation, but more social and affordable housing and an increase in local housing allowance (LHA) rates for households renting from private landlords. *Both charities' reports were published before the government returned LHA rates to the 30th percentile of local private rents in response to the coronavirus crisis*.

SKDC situation: The LHA rates do not cover the cost of private rented accommodation in the south of the district and Grantham rents are starting to rise, although the LHA rate for a room in a shared house in Grantham has vastly increased in this year's LHA rates.

14 Council properties were completed in 2019/20 and we have 160 planned starts in 2020/21.

There were 125 affordable housing homes (affordable rent and shared ownership) delivered by our registered provider partners in 2019/20.

The following themes emerge from the two reports, indicating where local authorities can implement the Homelessness Reduction Act better and how its scope might be widened:

1.4.3 Help more people to remain in their home

Shelter found that, in four out of five cases, households owed the prevention duty did not end up staying in their existing home. It praises councils that make fuller use of discretionary housing payments to help with rent problems and so prevent eviction, or that negotiate with landlords on behalf of tenants.

SKDC situation: Less than four out of five households remain in their current home. The total number of homeless prevention and reliefs were 20% for 2019/20 and 21% for 2018/19.

At SKDC we do prevent homelessness through negotiation with landlords and make use of Discretionary Housing Payments.

1.4.4 Reduce ‘digital gatekeeping’ at local authorities

Some people surveyed by Shelter said they were frustrated in their attempts to seek assistance because they were unable to speak to a housing officer in person or by phone until they made an online application.

SKDC situation: As stated in section 5, prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, customers would be seen immediately by a triage officer in person to set up a new case and take an application. Now we are remote working, customers are able to complete the process over the phone with a triage officer.

1.4.5 Introduce a statutory code of practice

A statutory code of practice that provides “a clear and enforceable set of standards for local authorities” would raise standards of homelessness services across the country, says Crisis. The existing code of guidance could also be strengthened. Changes might include more guidance on amendments to allocations policies, advice and information for specific groups, determination of affordability, and regular contact and progression within 56 days.

1.4.6 Widen partnership working, including the duty to refer

Both charities doubt whether other public bodies, including those covered by the duty to refer, are taking up their responsibilities fully or even aware of their obligations.

SKDC situation: South Kesteven is part of the Lincolnshire wide Duty to Refer protocol and an online portal is in place across Lincolnshire for agency referrals to be made. In setting up the protocol, Lincolnshire local housing authorities worked with other agencies, in addition to the statutory agencies, to raise awareness to refer any homeless people to them.

SKDC has received 75 referrals in total since the Duty to Refer came into effect. We have received referrals from: DWP, P3 charity, Cygnet Hospital Harrogate, LCC, HMP Stafford, Probation, EDAN, Social Service Authority, Adult Social Care, Lincolnshire Police, Army, NHS Lincolnshire and Shelter.

Prison services told Shelter that, while they made referrals as soon as they were aware that someone could be homeless once leaving prison, local authorities would not accept an application or attempt an assessment until a person had actually been released.

SKDC situation: We have a system whereby triage officers are booking the appointments for the Homeless Prevention Officers within the 5 days of referral and so this should not be an issue in South Kesteven.

1.4.7 **Provide local authorities with more money**

In 2017, the MHCLG provided councils in England with £73m over three years in 'new burdens funding' to implement the act. But a Local Government Association survey of councils a year ago found that almost one third did not think it was enough. Councils also said they were short of staff.

SKDC situation: Received £27,536 in New Burdens Funding. To implement the changes required from the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, this funding is considered to have been sufficient. However, we have seen an increase in the number of households requiring temporary accommodation and this has incurred additional expense.

The report states how the Covid-19 crisis makes building more social housing even more unlikely. At the same time, pressure on local government funds will be even tighter.

SKDC situation: We are not anticipating any major issues due to Covid-19 on our planned Council housing delivery; any impact will be around materials and labour. Contractors to date, feel confident they can meet demand, but this is being reviewed continually.

However, the delivery of affordable housing from our partner registered providers will not be as good this year, as development sites are only just starting up again. At present, there are 44 estimated completions. As we move through the year, other sites will commence, although it is unlikely that they will complete by March 2021 to be counted in this year's affordable housing delivery statistics.

Homes England is currently looking at ways in which more affordable housing can be delivered.

Covid 19 has had an impact upon us though in terms of demand and supply for housing as a result of the 'Everyone In' approach (Government funding for an emergency scheme to keep rough sleepers off the streets amid the coronavirus pandemic). We placed 30 rough sleepers/people at risk of rough sleeping into temporary accommodation. We have supported 27 households into more settled accommodation and we are still providing temporary accommodation to 3. Plans are in place to also support them into settled accommodation.

Achievements of the Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy (2017 – 2021)

1.5 South Kesteven is part of the countywide Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy (2017 – 2021). The main achievements against the delivery plan so far are:

- Developing and maintaining strategic relationships and partnerships – achieved: Terms of Reference are clear with links to the District Housing Forum and Health and Wellbeing Board.
- Contribute to the Housing and Health Care Delivery Group (a sub group of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Housing Joint Strategy Needs Assessment) – achieved: this was a specific group set up to shape the new contracts, which have been issued.
- Implement a countywide process to meet the new requirements of the Duty to Refer under the Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017 – achieved: a Duty to Refer protocol is in place and a countywide online process for agencies to refer is in place.

- Develop online information on how to get help or give help for homelessness in Lincolnshire – achieved: via the Duty to Refer online portal and each Council’s website.
- Reduce evictions in social housing and the private rented sector – partially achieved: the housing related support contracts state to notify the relevant local authority of pending evictions, more needs to be done with other registered providers.
- Reduce rough sleeping – in progress: although rough sleeping has increased, this mirrors the national picture. South Kesteven District Council co-ordinated a bid for the MHCLG year 3 Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding in partnership with three other Lincolnshire local authorities, resulting in a successful award. The Change4Lincs project commenced on the 1st July.
- Deliver the Social Impact Bond project ACTion Lincs – achieved: project successful.
- Review and improve SWEP provision across the county – achieved: we now have a countywide document stating what other agencies can expect from each district.
- Identify opportunities to work with EEA nationals with no recourse to public funds – achieved: Boston Borough Council received funding to administer on behalf of county via P3 charity.
- Improved access to private rented accommodation for those on benefits or a low income – in progress: funding for assistance with private rented accommodation is incorporated in the awarded RSI funding.
- Understand the need for accommodation to allow districts to fulfil their full housing duties – in progress: being addressed at a local district level.

Lincolnshire Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-2021)

1.6 South Kesteven is part of the [Lincolnshire Rough Sleeping Strategy \(2019-2021\)](#)

This identifies:

- The continued challenges in tackling rough sleeping in Lincolnshire
- The response to the challenges so far
- What we still need to do
- The current barriers and challenges
- Each local authority area priorities

A countywide action plan will be drawn up to tackle these challenges.

MHCLG Rough Sleeping Initiative Year 3 Funding

1.7 MHCLG advertised an opportunity to bid for the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) year 3 funding. A bid was submitted due to a double in the amount of rough sleepers in the South Kesteven area and potential for more, as experienced across the rest of the county and the UK. Also, the funding is to prevent rough sleeping and not just to assist those currently rough sleeping. The bid was submitted in partnership with the 3 other Lincolnshire local authorities of South Kesteven DC; North Kesteven DC; South Holland DC and West Lindsey DC.

We were successful in receiving an award of £595,523.00. This funding will enable the recruitment of the following posts and pots of money to be used across the four local authority areas:

- 1 x FTE Co-ordinator/Navigator
- 4 x FTE Outreach Worker(s)

- 4 x FTE Supported Lettings Officers
- 1 x FTE Physical health professional
- Rent Top Ups for Improved Access to Private Rented £31,200
- Rent Guarantee Scheme - £ 50,000
- Enhanced Bond Payments - £30,000
- Emergency Access Accommodation- £30,000
- Proposed Funding for Rough Sleeper Support - £6000
- 2 x FTE Intensive Support Workers
- 2 x FTE Local Lettings Officers

This funding will assist in enabling the actions in the Lincolnshire Rough Sleeping Strategy to be met.

2 Consultation and Feedback Received, Including Overview and Scrutiny

2.1 Consultation with the Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy Manager and South Kesteven District Council's Housing Options Team Leader and Senior Housing Options Officer.

3 Available Options Considered

3.1 N/A – The report is for information only

4 Preferred Option

4.1 N/A – The report is for information only

5 Reasons for the Recommendation (s)

5.1 This is information only for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6 Next Steps – Communication and Implementation of the Decision

6.1 N/A – The report is for information only

7 Financial Implications

7.1 In respect of the Rough Sleepers Initiative that is referenced in the report, the financial arrangements and governance for the funding allocation has been set out in a separate officer delegation decision report.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Richard Wyles, Interim Director of Finance

8 Legal and Governance Implications

8.1 No legal implications.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Shahin Ismail, Director of Law and Governance

9 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

9.1 No equality and safeguarding implications.

10 Risk and Mitigation

10.1 N/A

11 Community Safety Implications

11.1 N/A

12 How will the recommendations support South Kesteven District Council’s declaration of a climate emergency?

12.1 N/A

13 Other Implications (where significant)

13.1 None

14 Background Papers

14.1 Link for [Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy 2017-2021](#)

Report Timeline:	Date of Publication on Forward Plan (if required)	Not required
	Previously Considered by: Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Not applicable
	Final Decision date	Not applicable