

MINUTES OF MEETING URGENT DECISIONS HELD ON TUESDAY, 29TH SEPTEMBER, 2020, 1PM

PRESENT:

Councillors: Emine Ibrahim

ALSO ATTENDING:

49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

51. AMENDMENT AND EXTENSION OF THE ROUGH SLEEPER DISCRETION POLICY TO 31 MARCH 2021

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Estate Renewal considered the report which sought approval to adopt the amendments to the Rough Sleeper Discretion Policy as outlined in appendix 1 of the report; to delegate authority to the Director of Housing, Regeneration and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Estate Renewal, to amend the policy to give effect to changes in legislation or statutory guidance; and to extend the period of application of the policy until 31 March 2021, unless terminated earlier or extended beyond this date by Cabinet / Cabinet Member decision.

The Council adopted a Rough Sleeper Discretion Policy on 27 July 2020 in order to continue to provide accommodation to specified categories of vulnerable homeless people falling outside the Housing Act duty who present themselves to the Council. To date, twelve vulnerable people have been accommodated under this policy. Due to the continued threat of Covid-19, especially over the winter period, it was proposed that the Discretion Policy should be extended to 31 March 2021, and add homeless people with Covid-19 symptoms as an explicit category of people to whom discretion will be applied for the duration of their illness.

The call-in process had been waived by the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny as to delay the implementation of the decision would risk public health by leaving the Council without policy on the accommodation of vulnerable rough sleepers during a period from 30 September, when Covid-19 cases are rising. The waiver of the call-in process was in accordance with Part 4, Section H and Paragraph 18 (a) and (b) of the Council's Constitution.

RESOLVED that

- i. the Rough Sleeper Discretion Policy attached at Appendix 1 as amended in red be adopted;
- ii. authority be delegated to the Director of Housing, Regeneration and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Estate Renewal, to amend this policy to give effect to changes in legislation or statutory guidance, or directives or requests of a similar character issued by Government; and
- iii. the period of application of this policy be extended to 31 March 2021, unless terminated earlier or extended beyond this date by Cabinet / Cabinet Member decision.

Reasons for decision

On 27 July 2020, the Council adopted the Rough Sleeper Discretion Policy to ensure that where homeless people vulnerable in the context of Covid-19 asked the Council for assistance they would continue to be accommodated. This policy was in the first instance to run until 30 September 2020, in order to assess its impact on the numbers of people accommodated. Having assessed this, and with Covid-19 a growing and significant risk, extending the policy to 31 March 2021 is appropriate, as is adding another category of people to whom discretion will be applied: homeless people who have symptoms of Covid-19.

Alternative options considered

The first alternative option is to return to the approach that was taken from 26 March 2020 to 27 July 2020: that is, to offer accommodation to anyone in the borough who is sleeping rough, or at risk of sleeping rough. The reason this option is not recommended is that local authorities have been directed by MHCLG to adopt locally appropriate policies, and the cost of continuing to provide emergency accommodation and welfare support to everyone sleeping rough, or at risk of sleeping rough, would be unsustainable.

The second alternative option is to return to the approach taken prior to 26 March 2020: that is to offer accommodation *only* to those to whom the Council owes a statutory homelessness duty. The reason this option is not recommended is that this would mean that a number of very vulnerable people who are at high risk from Covid-19 would not be provided with accommodation; and that even though there are anticipated to be only a relatively small number of such people, this would constitute a risk to public health.

CHAIR: Councillor Emine Ibrahim

Signed by Chair

Date