

Canonsgrove – temporary Covid-19 accommodation response for Rough Sleepers and Homelessness

What is the new accommodation provision, where is it, & who is it for?

The Council and its partners have been working to identify and provide self-contained accommodation for rough sleepers and tenants of homeless hostels who find it difficult to self-isolate and social distance, within their current environment. The government recognises rough sleepers as particularly vulnerable to coronavirus and we are doing all we can to provide suitable accommodation quickly, that will enable them to keep safe during this outbreak.

The Bridgwater and Taunton College have offered use of their Canonsgrove halls of residence in Trull, and as of Friday, 3rd April rough sleepers and tenants of homeless hostels have been moving into Canonsgrove to keep safe during this outbreak. There are 68 one bedroom en-suite units of accommodation available, however we would not anticipate reaching this number.

Why is it needed?

The Council has been working with a range of other organisations to meet the following objective:

To identify Rough Sleepers with symptoms of, or most at risk of Covid-19 (e.g. with underlying health conditions), prioritise and provide appropriate self-contained accommodation and support to allow successful self-isolation.

A letter from the Government's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (26 March) to Councils stated the following principles and actions for the Council to urgently address:

"It is our joint responsibility to safeguard as many homeless people as we can from COVID-19. Our strategy must be to bring in those on the streets to protect their health and stop wider transmission, particularly in hot spot areas, and those in assessment centres and shelters that are unable to comply with social distancing advice.

This approach aims to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on people facing homelessness and ultimately on preventing deaths during this public health emergency. Given the nature of the emergency, the priority is to ensure that the NHS and medical services are able to cope and we have built this strategy based on NHS medical guidance and support".

The basic principles are to:

- ***focus on people who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, and those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate, such as shelters and assessment centres***
- ***make sure that these people have access to the facilities that enable them to adhere to public health guidance on hygiene or isolation, ideally single room facilities***
- ***mitigate their own risk of infection, and transmission to others, by ensuring they are able to self-isolate as appropriate in line with public health guidance***

The government has advised that we take the following steps::

1. Convening a local coordination cell to plan and manage your response to COVID and rough sleeping involving the local authority (housing, social care and public health) and local NHS partners together. This would then report in to wider local COVID structures.

SWT response: We have this in place in Somerset West and Taunton and report into a countywide group

2. Seeking to stop homeless people from congregating in facilities such as day centres and street encampments where there is a higher risk of transmission.

SWT response: We have ceased operation of our night shelters

3. Urgently procuring accommodation for people on the streets if you have not already done so – MHCLG will support you to do so if you are struggling to procure sufficient units.

SWT response: We have secured premises at Canonsgrove and the Beach Hotel in Minehead

4. Triaging people where possible into three cohorts driven by medical advice:

- those with symptoms of COVID19;
- those with pre-existing conditions but without symptoms; and
- those without any of the above.

SWT response: We are taking this approach in how we manage the site to manage the associated risks and keep people safe.

5. Getting the social care basics such as food, and clinician care to people who need it in the self-contained accommodation. It is likely that you will need to utilise your commissioned homeless services to provide support to people in this accommodation and we urge you to work with the commissioned and non-commissioned sector to make sure there are adequate levels of support provided.

SWT response: We have a strong support multi-agency approach to this and have engaged with organisations such as Turning Point, Somerset Partnership, Somerset County Council, Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, GP Practices and others.

6. If possible, separating people who have significant drug and alcohol needs from those who do not.

SWT response: This forms part of our consideration in allocating rooms.

Who is running it?

The YMCA, Dulverton Group, have at short notice, stepped in to manage this site on the Council's behalf as well as making their Beach Hotel in Minehead available. The team managing this site have many years of experience in running sites for people who find themselves homeless.

Arc, who manage Lindley House on East Reach, Taunton, will also be supporting us to speak with their tenants to encourage them to move to

Canonsgrove. Unfortunately, the design of Lindley House makes self-isolation and social distancing a major challenge to continue with the current number of tenants in this building.

What services are available there?

We will provide the residents with three meals a day and support services tailored for their needs, working with many of the aforementioned agencies. Our intention is to ensure that we are able to provide for the needs of the tenants on site to prevent the need for them to leave.

How is it being funded?

A combination of diverting existing Housing Benefits funding, and significant external funding from government made available in response to Covid-19.

How are risks being managed?

A thorough process of risk assessment has been undertaken by the Council, its delivery partners, and other supporting agencies – including Police and Fire Services - and is continually under review through a dynamic risk management approach.

Control measures are in place to:

- minimise the risk of infection and spread of Covid-19 to clients, staff and visitors to the site, as well as residents in the immediate vicinity of the site and Trull village - for example:
 - o Social-distancing measures and enforcement of guidelines on site
 - o Provision of all requirements on site to minimise the necessity for clients to leave the site
- manage site safety and security risks for staff, clients, visitors and the neighbouring community, for example:
 - o 24 hour security staff presence
 - o CCTV and installation of security sensors (PIRs)
 - o fencing erected to dissuade tenants encroaching on neighbouring properties
- manage Health and Wellbeing needs of clients and staff – for example:
 - o Access to phones, wi-fi and TVs for all clients
 - o Access to all necessary support services (ie Mental Health, GP/medical healthcare, Prescriptions, management and awareness by professional staff of alcohol and substance use,

What SWT staff are involved?

A dedicated project team has been established involving:

- a Senior Council Officer to co-ordinate and lead the project (and liaise with external agencies and the Govt)
- Project leads for Accommodation (sourcing and delivery), Support Services, Homelessness, Rough Sleeper engagement and support, plus general project support (risk management, communications etc)
- Senior management team from YMCA

SWT Council elected Members, Ward Councillors, Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team are all kept regularly informed on the project's progress.

And who else is involved?

An extensive list of key stakeholders and partners has been created, and on-going dialogue with the relevant project team member is happening as required.

The Council is continuing to work with a whole range of other organisations who continue to donate their time and support to make all of this possible and to ensure the new residents of Canonsgrove receive the right support once they move in. These include Raft, the Salvation Army, Open Door, Turning Point, Arc and many statutory bodies.

Can we enforce Social-Distancing

We will do everything we can to ensure that tenants at Canonsgrove adopt a sensible approach to self-isolation and social distancing, both while they are on the site and if they leave the site to exercise.

Our approach is to ensure that all of their needs will be met on site and therefore to minimise the need for them to leave Canonsgrove. This will continue to improve as we get more support services in place.

However we cannot prevent people from leaving the site and we cannot enforce social distancing as we do not have powers to do so. We do have regular visits from the police and the police beat patrols have been enhanced to provide a more regular presence in the area. The police will address inappropriate social distancing when they encounter it.

The MHCLG have clarified that poor social distancing is not a good reason alone to evict a tenant back onto the streets.