

Full Council

17 October 2018

NOTICE OF MOTION 1 - MOTION ON TACKLING HOMELESSNESS AND SUPPORTING THOSE AT RISK

Mover Councillor Lamb and Seconder Councillor Jones

MOTION ON TACKLING HOMELESSNESS AND SUPPORTING THOSE AT RISK SUBMITTED BY THE LABOUR GROUP

This Council is extremely concerned about, and wishes to express the strongest opposition possible to, the proposals coming from West Sussex County Council ("WSCC") to cut the housing support grant, which will have a harmful impact on our communities, as well as placing additional financial pressures on this Council as the local housing authority, that it would struggle to meet given the financial pressures and funding cuts already imposed on it by national government.

This Council notes that 2018 has seen the number of people sleeping rough in West Sussex reach its highest level since modern records began. Furthermore, it recognises and values the work of charities and voluntary sector organisations across the Borough and beyond, such as Crawley Open House, YMCA Downslink, Southdown Independent Living Scheme and Safe In Sussex, who support some of our most vulnerable residents who are either homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless.

Without this support, the Council expects to see a rise in homelessness across the Borough, including families, with associated social and health costs. Crucially, it will also deny local councils like ours the opportunity to secure government funding in tackling these major social problems.

The Council believes the end of such services is likely to result in a sharp increase in rough sleeping in the town centre, public places and open spaces, with an associated increase in anti-social behaviour that can accompany it, including street begging and street drinking. In addition, the "floating support" services at threat are a key tool for promoting social inclusion and stable communities through tenancy sustainment, community engagement and a reduction in anti-social behaviour. This council believes the negative impact on community safety will inevitably place severe pressures on our already stretched local Police resources, and the council's own community wardens.

The termination of housing support for young people over 18, through such initiatives as the YMCA Downslink Foyer in West Green, will move vulnerable young people from a relatively stable and secure environment which they can use as a stepping stone into living independently, to being immediately forced into temporary accommodation or sharing in the private rented sector.

If funding is withdrawn and refuge accommodation for women and their children subjected to domestic abuse is no longer available in the county, this will put Crawley women's lives and their children's lives directly at risk, as well as taking away specialist support for their recovery and helping to rebuild their confidence and self-esteem.

If WSCC funding is removed from our Older Persons Services the opportunity for preventative work in ensuring adequate support is available will simply mean that budgets elsewhere will rise. This will include WSCC's own duty of care as well as NHS budgets. Other extra care preventative service models in Crawley for vulnerable older people whose disabilities, frailty or mental health make ordinary housing unsuitable, will be at risk of losing that opportunity to live independently for longer, and may be forced to move into elderly residential care, causing stress and upset for those people affected and their families.

This council further notes the proposals coming from the council's opposition group to maintain Open House's finances from the annual £260,000 WSCC funding with a replacement contribution from this Council. It also notes that the annual funding that it provides Crawley Open House currently comes from the annual grant programme.

The Council expresses its deep concern that given the £1.3 million budget gap being projected for its finances over the next three years, together with the annual additional costs to the Borough in temporary accommodation costs currently estimated at £103,000, means such a replacement contribution would almost certainly be unaffordable, and that the only realistic way to find the money would be to force this Council to cut funding from the grants budget to at least some of the other worthy charities and voluntary societies that rely on this Council for support. This Council rejects outright any proposals which puts it in a position where it is forced to cut grant funding it provides other vital public services such as Citizens Advice, or going to other good causes.

Neither does the proposal take into account the impact of significant additional pressure on Open House's services from those in need outside the Borough who would be coming to use it, if and when other District councils in West Sussex decide not to support their own local facilities, nor would that replacement contribution mitigate the impact on the other local organisations already referred to in this motion, whose services will also end without replacement funding.

For eight years West Sussex County Council happily took tens of millions of pounds of Government money to fund these services via a dedicated grant, awarded to the county due to the services for vulnerable people fell within the county's adult social care remit. While the ring-fencing ended in 2011, with the county council now free to spend the money on whatever they choose, they retain the same duty to provide for these residents as when there was dedicated funding. The current proposal amounts to a choice to no longer meet this duty to residents across West Sussex, including here in Crawley. That is the wrong choice.

Therefore this Council stands with thousands of residents across West Sussex and demands that West Sussex County Council rejects the proposed cuts to Housing Related support, which will cause misery for the most vulnerable members of our society, and instead maintains this vital support for our local homeless.