

TITLE – Homelessness Update

FOR CONSIDERATION BY – Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny on Monday 3 October 2022

WARD – None Specific;

LEAD OFFICER – Zulfiqar Mulak/Steve Moore

LEAD MEMBER – Stephen Conway – Executive Member for Housing

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To provide an update on the levels of homelessness within the Borough and the planned/ongoing actions to help address the situation.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee note the information contained within this report and offer comment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reducing homelessness remains a key priority for the Council, given the devastating impacts this can have on families and individuals in terms of their health, employment and education. In recent years, Wokingham has seen fluctuating levels of homelessness, for example, presentations stood at 298 in Q2 2021 and fell slightly to 239 in Q1 2022. The main reasons for homelessness presentations continue to be the end of ASTs (Assured Shorthold Tenancies) via section 21 notices, family and relationship breakdowns.

In line with the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, there are a number of strategic directives to address homelessness including ensuring the Council maximises affordable housing delivery where possible, increasing the provision of temporary accommodation, engagement with the private rental sector via a newly established landlord forum, as well as taking early intervention and prevention wherever possible.

Other incentives are also helping residents and the reducing the demand for temporary accommodation. For example, new staff have been recruited within the Housing Service to ensure full compliance with the Homelessness Reduction Act. Similarly, a new Young Person's Homelessness Prevention Officer is now in post to work exclusively with young people under the age of 25 who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Council's new Allocations Policy is reducing imported demand to the Borough and includes incentive for households to make their own temporary accommodation arrangements to avoid use of emergency and temporary accommodation.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, Wokingham has seen fluctuating levels of homelessness, for example, presentations stood at 298 in Q2 2021 and fell slightly to 239 in Q1 2022. The main reasons for homelessness presentations continue to be the end of ASTs (Assured Shorthold Tenancies) via section 21 notices, family and relationship breakdowns.

At the current time there are 323 open homelessness cases, 195 of which the Council owe a statutory homelessness duty to. Homelessness Prevention Officers are on average holding a caseload of approximately 50 applicants.

Historically the Council has relied heavily on temporary accommodation. There are currently 37 households in emergency nightly let accommodation and 75 households in temporary accommodation. The current demand for temporary accommodation stands at 34 families and 41 single applicants. Homelessness demand is forecasted to continue to increase year on year, with interventions needed to manage the demand and reduce spend on emergency accommodation. There are a number of strategic directives to address homelessness including ensuring the Council maximises affordable housing delivery where possible, increasing the provision of temporary accommodation, engagement with the private rental sector via a newly established landlord forum, as well as taking early intervention and prevention wherever possible.

Whilst the Council continues to look at options of increasing the provision of temporary accommodation, the construction of 46 new units of temporary accommodation at both Crown House and Grovelands has led to a decrease of £97,924 in Bed and Breakfast running costs for the Council from 2021-2022 with forecast spend for 2022/23 on budget at £680,000.

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE:

- Adoption and delivery of the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy and new allocations policy.
- Delivery of additional temporary accommodation has reduced the use of private Bed and Breakfast accommodation, with important sites at Crown House (24 units) and Grovelands Park (22 units) bringing the use of more temporary accommodation within the Council's control.
- Significant reduction in temporary accommodation expenditure has decreased the Council's financial reliance on Bed and Breakfast accommodation resulting in a saving of £97,924 from Q2 2021 to Q2 2022.
- Engagement with the private rental sector via a newly established landlord forum will hopefully improve standards and stability for private sector residents
- Working collaboratively across the Council to ensure that opportunities to secure more temporary accommodation (and affordable accommodation) are maximised, via use of Council land and assets, planning policy as well as open market purchasing.

ONGOING ACTIONS

- The continued assessment of opportunities within the Council's own land and assets against the demands of the Housing Register (as well as the priority of needs from other Council services) to ensure the homes provided target the most pressing need.
- Maximising the delivery of affordable housing delivery on developer led sites, ensuring that affordable housing delivery meets need and those residents waiting on the Council's Housing Register are prioritised.
- Continue to upstream efforts to reduce homelessness with early prevention strategies and consider the various needs of our residents with the increased provision of specialist and accessible housing units.
- Strategically assess the impact to residents and the Council from national policy changes and ensure that WBC has an input into national consultations.

PLANNED ACTIONS

- Develop a Young Peoples Housing Strategy with clear housing pathways for vulnerable young people, helping to avoid housing crises. Reviewing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy and accompanying action plan in light of social and economic changes.
- A new preferred Registered Provider partnership will be in place from April 2023. A revised agreement will help to try and secure more temporary accommodation through the partnership, as well as working together to address the key causes of housing crises.
- Maximising funding opportunities via the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy and Homes England grant programmes
- Further development of the Rent Guarantee Scheme for Private landlords and Letting Agents supported by a regular Landlord Forum.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other Financial Information

Spend for B&B accommodation is currently forecasted at £680k in 22/23, which is on budget. The budget is the same for 2023/24. The Council is looking to move some of those residents currently in B&Bs into Temporary Accommodation which will reduce B&B usage. Ultimately our aim is to reduce our reliance on B&B with other cheaper accommodation.

Developing more early prevention measures will help to reduce homelessness presentations and ultimately will reduce the demand for temporary accommodation and reduce the pressure on Council end-point support provision.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

This report has been compiled by both strategic and operational housing, based on the latest information and evidence available.

Further stakeholder engagement will be undertaken when the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan is reviewed. This will include consultation with key internal and external partners, as well as input from all relevant Council service areas.

Public Sector Equality Duty

A full equalities assessment accompanied the Council's Housing strategy which showed there was no adverse impact against protected groups. All actions being undertaken to address the homelessness situation fall under the priorities and actions of the strategy.

Climate Emergency - This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

Any building related actions developed as part of the Council’s strategic response to homelessness will help address achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 by factoring in carbon neutral solutions where feasible. One of the key priorities of the Council’s Housing Strategy (under which the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sits) is around improving the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough’s housing stock, ensuring that the Council helps to improve carbon efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty.

List of Background Papers

Overview and Scrutiny – Homelessness Update Presentation

Contact Zulfiqar Mulak	Service Place and Growth
Telephone 07902 402006	Email zulfiqar.mulak@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank