

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Health and Housing Policy Development Review Panel

Date **14 November 2013**

Report of: **Director of Community**

Subject: **REVIEW OF HOMELESSNES AND ROUGH SLEEPING IN THE
BOROUGH**

SUMMARY

This report provides a review of homelessness since September 2012 and the changes that have been implemented in response. It also outlines the approach to preparing the next Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy for the period 2014 – 2017.

Members received a presentation on Rough Sleeping in March 2013, since then work has continued as part of the South Hampshire Regional Rough Sleeper Group, this report provides an update as to the progress made.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Panel note the contents of this report.

INTRODUCTION

1. There have been significant changes in legislation affecting homeless households and those in receipt of welfare benefits in the last two years, both of which have affected the outcomes the Housing Options Team have been able to achieve to prevent homelessness and the accommodation options available to those where homelessness cannot be prevented. The Homelessness & Housing Options Strategy 2010 – 2013 is currently under review with the aim of producing a new strategy early in 2014 to cover the period 2014 to 2017.

REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS SEPTEMBER 2012 – SEPTEMBER 2013

2. In the period September 2012 to September 2013, 1,181 households approached the Housing Options Team for housing advice, of these, 766 were considered to be threatened with homelessness.

For 76 of these cases, homelessness was successfully prevented by the Housing Options Team, this may have been through negotiating with the evictor to allow the household to remain in occupation, using schemes such as Tenancy Rescue, Mortgage Rescue, or in a large proportion of cases matching households with alternative accommodation in the private rented sector with the assistance of the deposit guarantee scheme.

A further 6 households were prevented from becoming homeless through the actions of organisations other than the Council.

122 of these households went on to make a homelessness application.

The remaining 562 households may have been able to resolve their situation following the advice they had been given, or been able to secure alternative accommodation on their own behalf. In the majority of these cases a Housing Options Plan would have been sent following their interview, detailing the reason for their approach, the options and advice given during the interview, actions recommended, and any other information the applicant may find beneficial in resolving their housing issue.

3. The changes introduced so far under Welfare Reform has not resulted in the expected increase in the number of people approaching for housing assistance, however, some of the solutions used to prevent homelessness are becoming increasingly difficult to access.
4. One of the main homelessness prevention tools is the Deposit Guarantee Scheme known as AFFORD, where one month's rent is offered in the form of a bond and the first six month's rent are guaranteed by the Council to assist households to secure accommodation in the private rented sector. During this 12 month period only 23 households were assisted in this way, in previous years the average has been 40 households. This highlights that accessing the private rented sector is becoming increasingly difficult.
5. The decline in the number of households being able to access accommodation in the private rented sector has meant increasing pressure has been placed on our temporary accommodation, highlighting the need for this to be managed more effectively to achieve greater throughput.

6. Whilst Bed and Breakfast accommodation is always used as a last resort, the number of households resident in this type of accommodation has remained consistent at an average of 4 households over the past twelve months. However during the last month this number has more than doubled, with 10 households being resident in B&B at the time of writing this report. The cause of this sudden increase is concerning, as there could be links with the changes introduced by the new Allocations Policy, where the priority on the Housing Waiting List for certain groups has been lowered, resulting in a very lengthy wait before they are successful. It is possible therefore that those affected are of the view that approaching the Council as homeless is now the only way of being able to access social housing. This issue will be investigated further to determine what action needs to be taken.

PERSONNEL CHANGES INTRODUCED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

7. The Housing Options Team was restructured in January 2013, following personnel changes within the wider Strategic Housing Division. The new structure has been designed to cope with the increasing demand for temporary accommodation, the need to manage this accommodation more effectively, to create move on opportunities and to address the difficulties in accessing accommodation in the private rented sector. In addition it was hoped that the restructure would improve the level of service provided to our customers by reducing the number of specialist officers a customer with a housing issue would need to deal with, before solutions could be identified.
8. The new structure has created six Housing Options Officers (HOO) posts; these roles undertake the tasks of the previous posts of Homelessness Prevention Officer, Homelessness Officer, Homelessness Visiting Officer, and the Housing Waiting List Officer. Each HOO is able to assess and determine an applicant's Housing Waiting List application, give housing options advice and where possible, prevent the household becoming homeless. This is achieved through undertaking home visits to mediate between families, trying to resolve conflicts between landlords and tenants, or to make the appropriate use of homelessness prevention tools such as the Mortgage Rescue Scheme, Tenancy Rescue Scheme, and Local Welfare Assistance etc. Where homelessness cannot be prevented the HOO can proceed to take and determine a homelessness application. From the customer's perspective the new team means they now have one point of contact right up until their housing issue is resolved, in the past they would have been faced with dealing with up to four different officers.
9. The other significant change in structure is the creation of a new Initiatives Team. Two new posts were established to join the existing posts of Allocations Officer and Accommodation Officer. The new post of Senior Housing Officer (Initiatives) (SHO(I)) heads up the team, with support being given by a new fixed term post of Temporary Accommodation Co-ordinator. The focus of this team is to ensure that the best use is made of all temporary and permanent accommodation so that time spent in bed and breakfast is kept to a minimum and move on into the private rented sector is achieved wherever possible. To increase access to the private rented sector, the SHO(I) has been tasked with introducing a new lettings scheme to encourage landlords to come forward with their properties and work with the Council.

POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGES INTRODUCED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

10. The Allocations Policy was revised following the introduction of the Localism Act. The new policy was implemented on 1 May 2013, changing the priority given to certain groups, and this has already had a positive effect for those households in temporary accommodation, reducing the average wait for an offer of permanent accommodation from 2.6 years to 1.6 years. However, as mentioned above, there could possibly be a negative aspect to the change in priority for certain groups, which has led to an increase in the number of households approaching as homeless.
11. On the 12 September 2013 the Health and Housing Policy Development Review Panel agreed the policy to enable the Council to discharge its homelessness duty by accessing accommodation in the private rented sector. Introduced through the Localism Act 2011, this power will mean that households, to whom the Council has accepted a homelessness duty, will no longer be able to remain in temporary accommodation and will be encouraged to take up an offer of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT - GOLD STANDARD

12. The National Practitioner Support Service was set up by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in April 2013. The service has been set up specifically to develop and administer the framework for providing continuous improvement in front line housing services through the development and delivery of the Gold Standard Challenge. The Challenge is a local authority sector led peer review scheme designed to help deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services.
13. The Gold Standard Challenge comprises of ten criteria, and culminates in being approved by a board of peer authorities. Fareham currently achieves six of the criteria and as attaining the Gold Standard does not attract any additional funding or benefits, but does involve a lot of officer time to undertake peer reviews and attend meetings, it is not proposed to pursue gaining accreditation under the Gold Standard but to strive to meet the other criteria for the benefit of our customers. The Gold Standard criteria are attached to this Report as Appendix A.

ROUGH SLEEPING

14. In March 2013, Members received a presentation on Rough Sleeping in Fareham. Since then, Fareham has continued to be part of the South Hampshire Regional Rough Sleeper Group. This group of 7 authorities has been allocated £377,000 to bolster front line provision in dealing with rough sleepers and to address and try and prevent single homelessness.
15. The Project Worker for the Regional Group organised an event in the summer, to which all agencies with involvement with rough sleepers were invited to discuss and generate ideas as to how the £377,000 could be used to help tackle and reduce the incidence of rough sleeping. Following this event, agencies were invited to submit proposals for small grants for specific schemes and projects. In Fareham, both Two Saints and the YOU Trust have been invited to bid. Fareham

and Gosport Borough Councils have advocated the need for a Rough Sleepers Outreach Worker to be based at 101 Gosport Road, this has been accepted and it is hoped that the position will be filled towards the end of this year.

16. The long spell of dry, warm, weather this year resulted in a number of people choosing to sleep rough in the Borough. The increase in the number of visible encampments and the associated problems, led to complaints and concerns being raised by members of the public and Members. Officers worked closely with 101 Gosport Road and the Police to ensure that all identified individuals were given advice, encouraged to engage with 101 Gosport Road or where appropriate be "moved on". The appointment of an Outreach Worker would greatly enhance the success of working with this group, as they would be able to engage with the rough sleepers swiftly as this is often the key to avoid problems escalating. The Support Worker will also be able to offer assistance to address other issues such as alcohol or substance misuse and help them to identify more sustainable housing options in the private rented sector.

HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING OPTIONS STRATEGY 2014 - 2017

17. In preparation of the new Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy, a workshop will be held with all officers within Strategic Housing, to identify the pressures, trends, blockages and ideas in the prevention of homelessness and to reflect on the work undertaken so far with landlords to increase access to the private rented sector.
18. A Homelessness Event will also be held on Monday 9 December 2013 to which all organisations involved in housing and homelessness in Fareham will be invited. The event will focus on the main challenges being faced and seek to generate ideas as to how these can be addressed and agree what the Council's priorities should be for the next 3 years.
19. The Housing Options Service including some areas of work undertaken by the Initiatives Team has been involved in the Systems Thinking Review being carried out by the consultancy firm Vanguard in recent weeks. The Vanguard team have been actively following up some of our customer's journeys and it is hoped that their findings will help improve the service we can offer and determine the priorities for our customers.
20. Key issues to be considered as part of the review will be how to fill the gap when the Mortgage Rescue Scheme is withdrawn in April 2014, preparing for the impact of Universal Credit, establishing a viable "lettings agency" approach to access more accommodation in the private rented sector and continuing to take a proactive approach to move on from all types of temporary accommodation, and to reduce the use of bed and breakfast. Whilst not pursuing the Gold Standard Challenge, the 10 criteria that form part of the assessment process will form part of the Action Plan for 2014 -2017.

RISK ASSESSMENT

21. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report. However, there could be financial implications if additional temporary accommodation is not secured and if it's not possible to access the private rented sector. This could

lead to increasing bed and breakfast costs and the possibility of the Council facing legal challenges and increased complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman.

CONCLUSION

22. The current economic environment continues to place challenging demands upon the service. The changes that have been introduced in the past twelve months are in response to these challenges and it is hoped that over the life of the next Strategy, these changes will continue to have a positive impact.

[Appendix A - Gold Standard.docx](#)

Background Papers:

Reference Papers:

Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2010-2013

Report to Housing Policy Development and Review Panel – September 2012
“Review of the Homelessness Strategy”

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Sara Head. (Ext 4369)