

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Health and Housing Policy Development Review Panel

Date **13 November 2014**

Report of: **Director of Community**

Subject: **REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS**

SUMMARY

This report provides a review of homelessness in the past 12 months, and updates Panel members as to the progress made with the new initiatives launched to reduce rough sleeping and increase access to accommodation in the private rented sector.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Panel notes the contents of this report.

INTRODUCTION

1. Since the Review of Homelessness Report to Panel in November 2013, the Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy was agreed by Executive in April 2014. The Strategy focuses on the issues and barriers the Council faces in meeting the needs of homeless households. It sets out new initiatives and projects designed to reduce these and includes key actions the Housing Options team aims to achieve over the next 3 years. Following the introduction of the new Allocations Policy in May 2013, a review was undertaken 6 months later, to establish the impact the changes had had, and as a result minor amendments were agreed by the Executive in March 2014. The Policy, which determines how all Council and Housing Association stock (excluding temporary accommodation) is allocated to households on the Housing Waiting List, is fundamental in managing movement through temporary accommodation and identifying those in the greatest housing need.

REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS SEPTEMBER 2013 – SEPTEMBER 2014

2. In the period September 2013 to September 2014, 1007 households approached the Housing Options Team for housing advice compared to 1,181 in the previous year. Of these, 674 were considered to be threatened with homelessness compared to 766.
3. For 55 of these cases, homelessness was successfully prevented by the Housing Options Team. A further 10 households were prevented from becoming homeless through the actions of organisations other than the Council. 202 of these households went on to make a homelessness application, compared to 122 in the previous year. The reason for the increase in the number of homelessness applications is due to the introduction of legislation enabling the homelessness duty to be discharged through an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector. Previously households were able to refuse offers of accommodation in the private rented sector, however, since September 2013, if an accepted homeless household refuses an offer of suitable private rented accommodation; they have to make their own housing arrangements.
4. A concern at the time of writing last year's report was the sudden increase in the number of households requiring emergency Bed and Breakfast placements (B&B). Having remained consistent at an average of 4 households per month for well over twelve months, the number suddenly increased in September 2013 to 6 households, 11 in October, 8 in November and December 2013. However, from the start of 2014 the number reduced to 4 households per month again. Weekly meetings were held during the last quarter of 2013 to determine the possible causes for the increase, identify how B&B placements could be avoided and what alternative accommodation options could be accessed.

As a result of this analysis it was established that the increase was due mainly to young adults (16-21) being evicted from their family home. The Housing Options Officers therefore took a firmer, proactive role in negotiating with parents/extended family to agree a planned move for the young person, rather than an immediate eviction into B&B. Steps were also taken to improve the void turnaround period for the 3 units of accommodation at 24 Wickham Road, which is temporary accommodation used as an alternative to B&B.

5. The number of households approaching the Council threatened with homelessness during the period reduced from 766 to 674. However, from the lower number of households threatened with homelessness, a greater number have required assistance

to secure alternative accommodation. The average number of households accommodated in temporary accommodation at any one time during the period September 2013 to September 2014 was 99 compared with 93 households for the same period in 2012/2013. This increase is on top of an unprecedented number of moves of households out of temporary accommodation into permanent social housing stock or private rented accommodation due to the change in Allocations Policy and the creation of the Initiatives Team, whose role it is to manage moves into and out of temporary accommodation.

6. From the period 1st October 2013 to 30 September 2014, 60 offers of permanent accommodation were made to households in temporary accommodation. Moves out of temporary accommodation into permanent accommodation prior to this were not monitored, however, it is estimated that no more than 10 moves would have been achieved in any 12 month period. 60 moves in 11 months is therefore evidence of the increase in demand on the service.
7. The reason for the increase in the number of households requiring assistance to secure accommodation, is due to the continuing difficulties households face in raising deposits, rent in advance, finding landlords willing to accept households in receipt of welfare benefits and the general lack of affordable accommodation (rents within Local Housing Allowance levels) in the Borough.

PERSONNEL, POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGES INTRODUCED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

8. Whilst the Housing Options Team was restructured in January 2013, to create a team of 6 generic Housing Options Officers, the last member of the new Initiatives Team only started in July 2014. This temporary 12 month post of Tenancy Support Officer was created to support and manage households into and out of temporary accommodation (TA). The new Initiatives Team which is responsible for improving the management of TA, making the best use of it and identifying what is required to gain access to more accommodation in the private rented sector, has achieved a great deal in the short time it has been fully staffed.
9. FareLets launched on 1 July 2014, is an initiative aimed at increasing access to accommodation in the private rented sector, 3 schemes have been promoted to private landlords, ranging from a basic tenant find to a fully managed service. The strategy behind these schemes is to build on the Council's reputation, promoting our ability to help resolve housing benefit issues, provide 12 month rent guarantees, tenant referencing, and easy access to other Council services such as Building Services, Community Safety, and Environmental Health.
10. Since the launch, 12 properties have been taken on under the fully managed lease scheme and 8 under tenant find. To date promotion has been through our existing landlord contacts, an article in the spring edition of Fareham today, flyers on all Council noticeboards, a press release and a dedicated webpage with an email address. Further publicity is currently being arranged which will include adverts on the plasma screens in the Council's reception area and on the Council's Connect stand in the shopping centre. Due to the increase in demand for TA, a radio advert campaign is also being developed.

11. From January 2014 monthly meetings have been held to review the progress being made to move households on from TA, minimise the use of B&B and ensure the best use is being made of all forms of TA available to the Council. These meetings have proved very successful, achieving a significant reduction in the average length of time households now stay in TA. Households moving into TA are advised by the Tenancy Support Officer of the plan to move them on within specified target times. The plan identifies how this will be achieved, which is either through an offer from the Housing Waiting List or a move into the private rented sector.

Several households had been in TA for numerous years due in part to a lack of officer time to effectively manage the situation and also because some households were happy to remain in TA (often due to a leased house on a private estate being more desirable than a council flat on a large estate) and therefore deliberately failed to bid on properties advertised on LetSelect. Through the monthly meetings, those identified as being well placed for an offer of accommodation via the Housing Waiting List are actively encouraged to start bidding on all suitable vacancies. Failure to do so, results in bids being automatically submitted on their behalf and offers of accommodation made.

As mentioned above, this active management has resulted in 60 offers of permanent accommodation and 21 moves into private rented accommodation in the last 11 months. The number of units available as TA during this period has not increased overall, despite the success of FareLets, due to the loss of 15 units of accommodation at Meon House, Fareham. Whilst First Wessex the owners of Meon House have indicated that they will work with the Council to replace these units, it is likely that we will have an overall reduction in the number of TA units available for use, for a substantial period of time to come.

ROUGH SLEEPING

12. Last year's report introduced the work of the Regional Rough Sleeper Group and the imminent appointment of an Outreach Worker. Marcus Chapman took up this post on 8th January 2014; working out of 101 Gosport Road, Fareham (direct access hostel) he covers the boroughs of Fareham, Gosport and Havant. Since January he has engaged with 64 clients in Fareham. Of these 64 clients, 18 were taken into 101 Gosport Road, 2 were found private rented accommodation in Fareham. 7 were helped to resolve their original housing issues or assisted to move back with family, 13 were relocated to an area where they had an established connection and 3 were linked in with ARC (young people's service) and provided with a positive outcome. Of the remaining 21, 6 disengaged and 7 went on to serve a custodial sentence. Marcus continues to work with the remaining 8 clients.
13. The Panel agreed at the meeting on 17 July 2014 to set up a Member Officer Working Group to look at the issue of rough sleeping in the Borough. The group held their first meeting on 30 September 2014, to which Marcus gave a presentation on the work he had achieved. Since being in post Marcus advised that he had already established a multi-agency working group, involving the Police, Community Safety, Probation, Housing Options and Avalon, to look at ways in which the various agencies and the community could help rough sleepers and deal with some of the issues they presented, such as Anti-Social Behaviour. The Member Officer Working Group felt it would be beneficial to observe the work of this group and from there determine how best they could help influence and support their activities.

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

14. The Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2013 – 2017 will be formally reviewed and progress towards the action plan reported to the Panel meeting being held in March 2015.
15. A Systems Thinking intervention is due to start in Housing Options in November 2014, which will inform the review of the Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy and the Allocations Policy. An intensive piece of work, the journey of customers approaching the Council for housing assistance will be followed to determine how we can improve their experience and meet their needs. As temporary accommodation is often the solution for many customers, it is envisaged that the intervention will also look at how this is accessed and managed, which will also aid the review of the FareLets schemes.
16. Hampshire County Council announced substantial cuts to the Supporting People budget at the end of last year, some schemes and services have already been reduced or withdrawn, with other cuts due to take effect from April 2015. Homelessness services funded by Supporting People were due to be reduced from April 2015, however, due to the unknown impact such cuts would have, the 11 districts challenged the proposed timescale and as a result the County are now working with the districts to assess need and determine the outcomes required of the services to be commissioned from April 2016.
17. The potential impact for Fareham of the cuts being proposed by the County are a reduction in the number of support hours at 101 Gosport Road and the requirement for the hostel to become a County wide resource, enabling those districts without a direct access hostel/ night shelter access to an emergency facility. This reduction and opening up of access could lead to an increase in the number of rough sleepers in the borough, as hostel staff will no longer have time to support the work of the Outreach Worker and competition for bed spaces will increase.

RISK ASSESSMENT

18. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report. However, there could be financial implications if further temporary accommodation is not secured to replace the units lost through the sale of Meon House and FareLets fails to attract sufficient landlords in the private rented sector. This could lead to increasing B&B costs and the possibility of the Council facing legal challenges and increased complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman.

CONCLUSION

19. The number of households requiring assistance to secure accommodation has increased in the last 12 months, placing increasing pressure on the Initiatives Team to proactively manage all forms of temporary accommodation as well as successfully marketing the FareLets Schemes. The Systems Thinking intervention in Housing Options will hopefully identify where improvements and efficiencies can be made, so that resources and staffing can be targeted to achieve maximum effect for the service.

Background Papers:**Reference Papers:**

Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy 2013-2017

Report to the Housing Policy Development and Review Panel – November 2013
Review of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in the Borough.

Enquiries:

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