

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: Monday, 7 July 2020

Report Title: Housing and Homelessness Recovery Plan

Report By: Andrew Palmer, Assistant Director Housing and Built Environment

Key Decision: Y

Classification: Open

Purpose of Report

To update members on the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak on housing and homelessness services and to set out our recovery plans for the next 12 months.

Recommendation(s)

- 1. To support the 3 priorities set out in the council's housing and homelessness recovery plan, as set out in paragraph 11**
- 2. For Hastings Borough Council to host a Housing Solutions role, within the Mental Health Specialist Accommodation Team. To allocate funding of £6,842 for the role.**
- 3. To continue to provide dispersed temporary accommodation placements for rough sleepers. The full year net cost to the council is estimated at £643,000**
- 4. To note the net cost of the council's statutory emergency accommodation is estimated to be £343,000 above the original budget projection for 2020/21**
- 5. To continue to lobby government to provide additional funding to help meet the rising costs of homelessness**
- 6. To resume the launch of Live, Work, Thrive and extend the programme end date until March 2023**

Reasons for Recommendations

The outbreak of Coronavirus has placed additional demand for on the council's homelessness services. A range of activities are underway with partners to help reduce pressure upon the service and help mitigate the additional costs associated with extended temporary accommodation usage.

Introduction

1. The coronavirus outbreak has had a significant impact on the council's housing and homelessness services, in particular our use of emergency accommodation.
2. The number of homeless households living in emergency accommodation has increased from 205 at the start of lockdown to 240 at the end of June. Of these, 51 are discretionary placements for former rough sleepers.
3. The increasing use of emergency accommodation is due to:
 - Ongoing homelessness presentations during lockdown
 - Additional placements made for rough sleepers as a result of the "everyone in" instruction from the government
 - A lack of move-on options in both the social and private rented sectors
4. On average the council has been receiving 16 new homelessness presentations each week, this has increased to around 25 per week as lockdown measures have been eased. Often this has been the result of someone being asked to leave their accommodation by a family member or friend.
5. Demand for our homelessness services is expected to rise significantly when the current restrictions on evictions are lifted at the end of August, particularly if this coincides with an economic downturn.

Partnership Working

Homelessness Cell

6. In line with the Ministerial letter from Luke Hall on 26 March 2020 a homelessness cell has been formed which brings together representatives of homelessness, health, social care, criminal justice and voluntary sector partners from across East Sussex. Hastings Borough Council are leading this work.
7. The group is responsible for managing the impact of coronavirus on homelessness services including:
 - Managing demand and supply of emergency accommodation across East Sussex
 - Co-ordinating changes to service delivery across different local authority areas
 - Ensuring vulnerable people in temporary accommodation or sleeping rough have access to necessary support services
8. The East Sussex homelessness cell is continuing to meet and provides a regular 2-way link with the Tactical Coordination Group (TCG) of Sussex Resilience Forum.
9. A copy of the homelessness cell's project plan is attached at Appendix A.

Recovery Group

10. A sub-group of the homelessness cell has been formed to develop a strategy for the recovery phase. The group includes representatives of the Ministry for Housing, Communities and

Local Government and housing, accommodation providers, health, public health, mental health, social care partners.

11. The group has three priorities for the recovery phase over the next 12 months:
 - Minimise our use of emergency accommodation
 - Minimise the spread of coronavirus amongst homeless people
 - Continue to adapt our services to meet local needs
12. A project plan for the recovery group is attached at Appendix B.
13. Both the homelessness cell and the recovery group continue to report to established partnership structures, including East Sussex Housing Officers Group.
14. The council is contributing to the development of East Sussex County Council's Economy Recovery Plan, and we will ensure that related work-packages within the housing and homelessness recovery plan are reflected in this approach.

Recovery Phase

Minimising our use of emergency accommodation

15. The high number of placements also has a significant cost to the council. People living in emergency accommodation are at higher risk of contracting coronavirus.

Social Housing Allocations

16. Turnover of social housing is low in Hastings, and this is likely to reduce over the next year due to the restrictions on evictions during the lockdown period. Through the recovery sub-group, we have been working with social landlords to improve access to accommodation for homeless households, including facilitating move on from emergency and supported accommodation.
17. Initial consideration was given to the temporary suspension of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme to maximise placements of those in temporary accommodation. However, given that the number of vacancies in the housing association stock is expected to remain low in the short term and there is a statutory requirement to consult with those on the current list who might be adversely affected by this change, it has been discounted at present.
18. However, there remains provision within the council's current allocation scheme for direct lettings to be made to "households to whom the council owes a statutory housing duty but have been unable to access suitable accommodation in the private rented sector who are currently, or would otherwise be, accommodated in temporary emergency accommodation provided by the council".
19. The council will continue to keep our emergency accommodation placements under review, to ensure available housing is prioritised for the most vulnerable groups.
20. The council has committed to providing 10 units of accommodation from social housing stock as Housing First units during 2020/21, as part of the Rough Sleeping Initiative. This commitment will continue to be met, and the units will also be allocated as direct lets.

21. The council is currently working with social landlords and other stakeholders to review its approach to allocating social housing. An updated draft allocation scheme will be considered by Cabinet in early 2021.
22. A new development, which will provide 16 new social housing units, is due for completion later this year.
23. The other local authorities in East Sussex have adopted a similar approach to allocating their social housing.

Expanding the Social Lettings Agency

24. In October 2019, Cabinet approved a new business case for the Social Lettings Agency. The business case included increasing the number of properties the council leases in the private rented sector from 20 to 56 by the end of March 2021, as an alternative to traditional emergency accommodation. Since then, the council has leased 6 new properties. The leasing scheme was put on hold during lockdown, but we will resume leasing new properties now restrictions have been eased.
25. To date, the council has acquired 22 units of its own emergency accommodation, a further 4 properties are currently under offer. A capital budget of just over £600,000 is remaining from the funding allocated by Cabinet in October 2019, and we will continue to search for suitable properties.
26. It is likely there will be some slippage in the original timescales set out in the business case, due to the slower turnover of properties.

Improving move-on from Supported Accommodation

27. We have been working with colleagues from Adult Social Care to facilitate move-on from supported accommodation. Increasing turnover of supported accommodation units will provide an alternative to traditional emergency accommodation for people with multiple and complex needs. East Sussex County Council will invest £50,000 in 2020/21 and 2021/22 to fund a Move on Co-Ordinator, which will be hosted by Hastings Borough Council. The role will work across the five housing authorities, supported accommodation providers and private landlords to improve access to the private rented sector for people leaving supported accommodation.
28. We have also been working with colleagues from East Sussex County Council's mental health team to improve links with housing and homelessness services, through a new multi-disciplinary team which was formed earlier this year.
29. It is proposed that a housing solutions role is created within the team. The role will support individuals who are ready to leave supported accommodation units provided by mental health to access housing in the private and social rented sectors. The role will also improve mental health support for homeless cases, by improving access to assessments and specialist accommodation. The total cost of the role will be £34,212 per annum (including on-costs), which will be split between the five housing authorities (Hastings Borough Council's share will be £6,842). The role will initially be piloted for 2 years. The funding for the role will be re-profiled from the landlord incentives budget.

Capacity

30. Given the high number of households in emergency accommodation, and the expected rise in demand later in the year, it is recommended that capacity in the team is increased to manage these placements. The two existing part time support officer roles will be increased to full time until the end of December. The cost of this will be £12,000 which will be met from Flexible Homelessness Support Grant allocated to landlord incentive schemes.

Landlord Incentive Schemes

31. The council has allocated a budget of £215,000 for landlord incentives. The incentives offered by the council include interest free loans for rent in advance / deposits and tenancy sustainment loans and a rent guarantor service. We are continuing to work with private landlords and colleagues from other local authorities to improve access to the private rented sector for homeless households.

Minimising the spread of Coronavirus amongst homeless people

Rough Sleepers

32. The number of people rough sleeping in Hastings remained low throughout the lockdown period. Outreach services have continued, in partnership with the Seaview Project, and rough sleepers are being supported to access homelessness advice through the council.
33. The council is currently providing 51 temporary accommodation placements for former rough sleepers. Most of these placements are discretionary and were funded by the Rough Sleeping Initiative grant. A budget of £85,000 had been allocated from the grant for temporary accommodation. However, given the increased number of placements that were made as a result of the government's everyone in instruction, and the lack of move on options during lockdown, this budget has now been fully spent.
34. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government has indicated that the additional costs of temporary accommodation should be met from the funding announced for local authorities in April. However, given the additional cost pressures faced by the council, this will not be enough to cover the cost of providing temporary accommodation. The council has been lobbying government for additional funding to provide accommodation for rough sleepers.
35. It is recommended, that the council continue to fund these placements in order to minimise the number of former rough sleepers returning to the streets. This is in line with the priorities set out in the national rough sleeping strategy. The budget shortfall for continuing these placements is estimated at £643,000 by year end.
36. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government recently announced that additional capital funding would be available for local authorities to provide move-on accommodation for former rough sleepers. Additional revenue funding has also been announced, which could be used to offset the cost of temporary accommodation. The council has been leading work across East Sussex to proactively identify opportunities to increase the supply of Housing First and supported accommodation units. A full grant prospectus is expected to be published in the coming weeks.
37. In partnership with East Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group we have launched a 6-month care and protect pilot, which provides enhanced access to primary healthcare services for

former rough sleepers. We are continuing to work closely with East Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group to see if this approach could be applied to other homeless groups.

Welfare checks

38. The council will continue to provide regular welfare checks for homeless households, particularly those living in emergency accommodation as lockdown measures are eased. The purpose of the welfare checks is to reinforce the latest public health guidance and ensure vulnerable people have access to essential services, including the community hub.

Access to Homelessness Advice

39. The council replaced face to face housing options appointments with telephone appointments during the lockdown period. People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness can book appointments over the telephone or using the online triage process. Clients are then contacted directly by their housing options officer, so no costs are incurred during the call. A limited face to face service is available in the Tourist Information Centre, for people at immediate risk of homelessness.
40. It is recommended that the council continue to offer telephone appointments at least until the end of August, when the restrictions on evictions are due to be lifted. We will co-ordinate any changes to service delivery based on demand and in line with the other local authorities in East Sussex, in order to ensure a consistent approach.
41. We are continuing to monitor homelessness presentations as a result of domestic abuse. Presentations are currently at a similar level to the pre-lockdown period. The council is working closely with refuge services across East Sussex.

Adapt our services to meet people's needs

Employability

42. A lack of affordable accommodation for welfare dependent households has been a longstanding issue underpinning rising homelessness. Given the likely impacts of an economic downturn in the months to come, it is essential that the council continues to improve access to employment for vulnerable people.
43. Prior to lockdown, the council secured funding through the Connecting Hastings and Rother Together (CHART) programme for Live, Work, Thrive, a project to improve access to employment and training for homeless households, particularly those living in emergency accommodation. Live, Work, Thrive has been developed in partnership with Rother District Council, Education Futures Trust, Fellowship of St Nicholas and Sussex Community Development Association. The project will comprise a team leader and 3 work coaches, co-located between the housing team and voluntary sector partners. The start of the project has been delayed as a result of lockdown, but recruitment of the team is now underway. It is recommended that the end date of the project is extended from March 2022 until March 2023.
44. Employability support has been highlighted as a priority by several support services after the lockdown, and we will ensure our approach through Live, Work, Thrive complements this work.

Probation

45. During lockdown, the Ministry for Justice announced plans to release low risk offenders, who were nearing the end of their custodial sentence early from prison. The number of cases in East Sussex is likely to be low. However, we are taking the opportunity to review arrangements for criminal justice partners to refer people leaving prison who are at risk of homelessness to local councils for advice. Probation are developing a revised protocol, and this will be considered for adoption across the 5 local housing authority areas.

Substance Dependency

46. Substance dependency issues are prevalent amongst homeless groups. Through the Rough Sleeping Initiative team, we have been working with Public Health, Change, Grow, Live and the county council to expand services for this group. This approach is likely to include additional support to manage substance dependency issues for people living in temporary accommodation and support them to access long-term housing. This work will be linked to plans to introduce a trauma informed working practices across homelessness services.
47. Outreach services are continuing to link rough sleepers and the street community to substance dependency support.

Floating Support and Supported Accommodation

48. East Sussex County Council are in the process of re-commissioning their floating support and supported accommodation services.
49. The original timescale to recommission the floating support service has been delayed by approximately 6 months. Through the East Sussex Homelessness Cell, we are providing feedback on service delivery during the lockdown period, to help inform the specification for the new service.
50. A new framework for supported accommodation is due to be launched in autumn 2020. This will provide the flexibility to increase the supply of supported accommodation units over time.

Key Risks

51. The most significant risk is rise in demand for the council's homelessness services, once existing lockdown restrictions on evictions are lifted at the end of August, particularly as Hastings has a large private rented sector. We are working with the National Landlords Association and the local court service to better understand the scale of this issue.
52. Turnover of long-term accommodation in both the social and private rented sector is also likely to be lower. This will particularly affect homeless households, who often struggle to access affordable accommodation.

Financial Implications

53. The outbreak of Coronavirus has created additional financial pressures, particularly in respect of the council's use of temporary accommodation.
54. A budget of £85,000 had been allocated from the Rough Sleeping Initiative grant to provide temporary accommodation for former rough sleepers in 2020/21, this has now been fully spent. The other interventions delivered by the project have been fully mobilised, so there is no scope to re-profile funds. Based on the current costs, there will be a budget shortfall of

£643,000 by year-end. It is recommended that the council continue to meet these costs, in order to avoid rough sleepers returning to the street.

55. The council has also seen the cost of its statutory emergency accommodation placements increase. The net cost of statutory emergency accommodation placements was budgeted at £827,000 at the start of the financial year. Based on current spend, it is projected we will be £343,000 over budget at the end of 2020/21.
56. We expect the cost of temporary accommodation to remain high and possibly escalate further in the months to come, due to the current lack of affordable accommodation options locally and new homelessness cases. The government has previously indicated that these costs must be met from the grants awarded to local authorities. However, we will continue to lobby for additional funding to meet the rising costs of homelessness and reducing rough sleeping.

Timetable of Next Steps

57. Please include a list of key actions and the scheduled dates for these:

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Expand Social Lettings Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Second phase of capital investment in emergency accommodation completed Private sector leasing scheme expanded by a further 30 units 	March 2021	Strategic Housing and Projects Manager
Improve move-on from supported accommodation units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move On Co-Ordinator and Housing Solutions Officer recruited 	September 2020	Strategic Housing and Projects Manager
Long term accommodation for rough sleepers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital bid submitted to Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government 	Timescale to be confirmed	Strategic Housing and Projects Manager
Improve employability support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Live, Work, Thrive launched 	August 2020	Strategic Housing and Projects Manager

Improve links with Probation Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated protocol agreed 	July 2020	Housing Options Manager
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Wards Affected

(All Wards);

Policy Implications

Reading Ease Score: 31.6

Have you used relevant project tools? Y

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Y
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	N
Risk Management	Y
Environmental Issues & Climate Change	N
Economic/Financial Implications	Y
Human Rights Act	Y
Organisational Consequences	Y
Local People's Views	N
Anti-Poverty	Y
Legal	N

Additional Information

N/A

Officer to Contact

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