

Environment and Community Panel 4 July 2017

HOMELESSNESS REVIEW Appendix 1

Positive issues and changes – what has worked well

Provision of accommodation

- Good working relationship around accessing Emergency Direct Action Beds with Merchants Terrace (Genesis Housing).
- Development of training houses that accommodate and support vulnerable single homeless people. These are a partnership between The Purfleet Trust, Freebridge Community Housing and the Borough Council. There is also a shared house provided and managed by Broadland Housing.
- Preparatory work and planning for provision of temporary and rented accommodation via the Council, Local Housing Company and partners

Our approach

- Use of Homelessness Prevention Fund to prevent homelessness by e.g. assisting with rent deposits / rent in advance, reducing rent arrears, travel to an area of safety or reconnection to an area where accommodation is available.
- IAA (Insecure Accommodation Award) to help people access housing through the housing register before they lose their home and become homeless.
- Introduction of new software system to i) support advice, self help ii) direct officer time to preventing homelessness and assessment of cases, iii) case management iv) reducing information input and double entry v) monitoring temporary accommodation vi) enhanced reporting tools including automatic production of P1E Government statistical return
- Revising working arrangements to prioritise responses and focus officer time on advice by developing early, more detailed information from clients, phone interviews
- Managing expectations - Providing earlier, clearer reality about demand for social housing
- Interventions and discussions with those that wish to exclude household members e.g. sons and daughters
- Targeted visits to vulnerable people and to prevent exclusions
- Improved monitoring of temporary accommodation – software system, hostels meetings

Working in partnership

- Tenancy sustainment work - Preventing eviction from housing association properties through partnership working with Stonham Homestay (tenancy support service), Freebridge Community Housing and the Borough Council.

- Continued and developing emphasis on multi-agency working
- Commissioning of housing, debt and generalist advice services
- Work with domestic abuse agencies such as Leeway Domestic Abuse Service including a drop in service with the Borough Council Offices and a telephone service covering West Norfolk.
- Joint work with Police and Immigration Service to respond to rough sleeping and any associated criminal activity to people with no recourse to public funds
- Working in partnership with the Purfleet Trust which delivers training, washing, meals via their Pathways Centre and a commissioned intensive support service.
- Early intervention and planned discharge from Fermoy
- Work with Norfolk County Council Children's Services relating to young people and care leavers e.g. Jointly commissioned Housing Officer Post (Norfolk housing authorities and Norfolk County Council) to reduce the number of young people in care and to develop / facilitate appropriate housing pathways, Care Leavers Transition Panel a partnership to facilitate appropriate housing pathways.
- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Panels – working in partnership to plan for high risk people suffering domestic abuse – daily meetings
- Early Help Hub - A partnership led by Children's Services making sure that vulnerable families receive that the right support is available as soon as someone needs it – weekly meetings
- 180 scheme – A partnership led by the Police to manage priority and prolific offenders – fortnightly meetings

What hasn't worked so well

- Local housing allowance used for housing benefit increasingly below the actual cost of private renting which has been increasing – causing affordability issues and difficulty for people accessing or retaining private rented homes.
- Former tenant debt including rent arrears, court costs, damage exclude many households accessing the private rented sector (primarily) but also social housing.
- Increasing income limits for private rented homes mean even working families have issues in accessing them.
- Lettings agent fees and set up costs very high – up to £1850 for a 3 bedroomed house to be paid before a key can be turned in the door.
- Pressure of increasing rents and set up costs restricts the ability of homeless people in accessing the private rented sector.
- Issues in relation to clients with mental health issues i) changing provision/ no specialist residential accommodation ii) securing suitable accommodation including on a temporary basis for those with mental health issues

- Unprecedented increase in rough sleeping, an increase from 5 to 42 reported to DCLG in the last financial year.
- Reductions in new social housing for rent due to funding changes – capital grants and rent control in housing associations
- Increasing demand on housing options/homelessness service including larger families
- Increased use of temporary accommodation including bed and breakfast accommodation outside the West Norfolk area although reduced by year end
- Landlords personal circumstances change leading to loss of tenancy
- Short term impact of Hillington Square redevelopment as properties not available for rent – although long term investment is beneficial
- Stretched staffing resources – Homechoice and Options – especially in times of change and peaks in demand
- Unrealistic expectations of clients in relation to availability of social housing offer

Who are the excluded people with limited access to housing and associated services?

- Vulnerable groups including those with complex needs, undiagnosed mental health, domestic abuse as well as those recognised mental health needs.
- Single people under 35 with restricted housing benefit.
- Young/single individuals and those with intense support needs.
- People with high rent arrears, debts with previous landlords and general debt.
- People who are ineligible for housing assistance
- Those who are unaware of their entitlements..
- People with substance misuse issues.
- Offenders including sex offenders.

What are the barriers to finding and retaining accommodation?

- Demand for rented accommodation exceeds supply – with increasing issues in securing larger accommodation
- Lack of affordable accommodation, increasingly with housing benefit restrictions or those on a low income.
- Landlords not willing to accept tenants on benefits – this could increase with introduction of Universal Credit
- Need for housing solutions (accommodation and support) in the transition from temporary or supported accommodation to a settled home.
- High up front costs in accessing private rented homes - obtaining deposits, rent in advance, agent's fees.
- Household income and debts.

- Lifestyle – chaotic, drug use, domestic abuse, not having the skills to maintain property such as paying bills, managing money.
- Taking personal responsibility - including understanding ramifications of not adhering to tenancy rules and agreements.
- Gaps in provision of floating support e.g. no specialist young person service.

Future threats:

- Implementation of Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and changes to our duties – anticipated April 2018
- Reduction in funding opportunities for charitable/supporting/advice organisations.
- Reductions in Supporting People (Norfolk County Council) commissioned services and public sector financial constraints.
- Reduction in new rented social housing development
- Local housing allowance rates frozen until 2020 but private rents increasing.
- Housing Association allocation policy reviews for under 35 year olds who may have their housing benefit level reduced.
- Changes to supported accommodation for homeless households.
- Potential impact of Universal Credit e.g. processing delays, direct payments to claimants, budgeting, arrears, private landlords choosing not to let to let to those in receipt
- Pressure on staffing resources to help all those that require assistance if demand continues to rise and as our statutory duties expand.
- New duties on private landlords being introduced – could impact on ability to let property and lead to reduction in availability of private rented homes
- Increased costs of temporary accommodation as potentially no reclaim of costs when Universal Credit implemented

Potential Opportunities and Solutions:

Increasing supply of accommodation

- Development of more shared houses with housing associations including potential HCA funding
- Direct or indirect action to increase new suitable housing supply – including affordable such as starter homes, custom build, private rented accommodation.
- Expand the temporary accommodation offer including directly provided accommodation (7 purpose built and a further 14 flexible units) with future consideration of residential caravans and analysis potential of new accommodation models
- Review of Long Term Empty Homes Strategy including consideration of funding a scheme to bring low cost long term empty homes into use to meet housing needs where acquisition and/or remediation costs are not prohibitive

- Work with housing and housing support providers on new models of delivery.
- Investigate the business case for provision of private sector leasing schemes and/or social lettings agency – improve access and quality of accommodation and improve option of private rented sector discharge of duty

Our approach and working in partnership

- Further development of housing advice and options online – including promotion of lower cost home ownership.
- Managing expectations through communications strategy – publicity, website and through day to day discussions and correspondence
- Continue with a multi-agency approach to share information and work in partnership.
- Work within the Council and with partners to monitor the impact and promote initiatives to mitigate welfare benefit changes where possible especially Universal Credit
- More engagement with private rented sector and consideration of financial incentives or guarantees
- Review Social Housing Allocations Policy and processes in light of Homelessness Reduction Bill
- Greater involvement in Court Action User Group
- Developing a new jointly commissioned and funded Tenancy Sustainment Protocol to replace de-commissioned SP (NCC) service that reflects local priorities
- Identifying and developing an outreach service for rough sleepers in conjunction with NCC, CCG including consideration of a treatment room

Implementation of Government agenda

- Potential abolition of lettings agents costs to tenants
- Flexible Homelessness Support Grant replacing Temporary Accommodation Management Fee to be administered by council (separate report will be circulated to members in due course)
- Personal Housing Plans through homelessness reduction bill, duty to co-operate
- New Burdens Funding