

REPORT TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY PANEL 6th July 2016

HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

Background

The Homelessness Strategy 2015 – 2019 was approved in January 2015 and identified that there should be an annual review in June each year starting in June 2016.

The Homelessness Review has been undertaken in 3 parts – each of which forms an appendix to this report

1. A review of current issues related to homelessness in BCKLWN, future threats and potential solutions
2. A review of homelessness trends
3. A review of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

Developments and trends since January 2015

There was a significant rise in homelessness applications and decisions in 2013-14 and this has continued. In addition to formal investigations, there is much work undertaken in providing advice and preventing homelessness. Approximately 2,000 households are assisted with advice in any given year. Signs are that pressure on homelessness and housing advice services is rising and not falling.

There have been a number of positive developments since the adoption of the Homelessness Strategy including newly commissioned services to meet changing needs. These include an extension of advice and support services to people suffering from domestic abuse, support for vulnerable homeless people with multiple needs and a newly commissioned housing debt and advice service. A number of shared house projects have been developed with housing associations partners and the Purfleet Trust to meet the needs of single homeless people. The housing needs of care leavers have been the subject of joint working with Children's Services.

However, there are negative pressures most notably access to rented accommodation, fewer new social rented homes for those in need, income and debt issues for households together with an increase in issues related to younger single people and those with mental health issues. There has been a recent rise in the number of people rough sleeping in tents.

The high demand and lack of available settled accommodation has led to an increase in the use of temporary accommodation including bed and breakfast outside the Borough when all other avenues have been explored.

Future issues

Demand exceeds supply for rented accommodation and it is predicted this will continue. Rents in the private sector continue to rise and are increasingly unaffordable for households likely to approach the Council for advice and assistance.

The welfare reform agenda will bring forward challenges for household budgeting which is likely to impact on the ability for those that are in receipt of benefits being able to meet housing costs – including those in work.

There has been discussion of changes to the duties of local housing authorities such as BCKLWN. These appear to be additional duties so the scope of homelessness legislation could cover a wider range of people at an earlier stage of their potential homelessness. There are no firm proposals in place but any additional duties would put further pressure on the Council's resources and will be kept under review

To meet potential future issues, it is proposed to review the Council's role in increasing housing supply – including affordable and temporary accommodation – whether directly or indirectly. A new housing debt and advice service is to be launched and the impacts of welfare reform will continue to be closely monitored. Demand for shared accommodation for those under 35 is likely to increase and the Council will review its role in supporting new provision with partner housing providers. The need for housing and support will be kept under review with partners with the ideal of commissioning services to meet those needs albeit difficult in a time of budgetary constraint.

Detailed information can be found in the appendices to this report

Conclusion

Members note the Homelessness Review. Officers will be available at the meeting to provide more information and answer questions