

Housing Performance Report

Adults' Health, Adult's Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 7th November 2017

Author: Head of Housing
Wards: All
Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The report sets out the key current challenges and successes in the Housing Service.
- 1.2 Members of this Committee at the last meeting requested information on accommodation for Keyworkers and Homelessness and these are detailed in 3.3 and 3.4 of this report.
- 1.3 The report assists members of the Committee to have a wider appreciation of the work undertaken by the Housing Service to enable the Committee to discuss priorities and challenges in the service area.
- 1.4 The links to the Swindon Vision in particular, Priority One: Improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing, low carbon economy and Priority Four: help people to help themselves while always protecting our most vulnerable adults and children.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Comment on the challenges and successes identified in section 3 of this report.

3. Detail

3.1 Housing and Adult Social Care joint work programme.

Housing Officers increasingly work with some of the most vulnerable individuals within our neighbourhoods. This traditionally has been seen through the work on homelessness, sheltered and supported housing as well as the growth of Homeline (Community Alarm system).

Within the last performance report to this Overview and Scrutiny Committee there were a number of joint initiatives detailed which make best use of Council resources and add to the savings already achieved in Adult Social Care, an update on these projects are detailed below:-

- Developing and refurbishing new affordable homes to meet complex needs, including 24 assisted living bungalows at the Hawthorns. This

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development has slipped from Dec 17 to Feb 18 due to ground conditions delaying supplying utilities to the site.

- The new post of Social Care Lettings Officer continues to work on individual complex housing and Adult Social care cases whilst also developing protocols to improve partnership working, for example, training and information sessions held between housing officers and Great Western Hospital discharge team.
- A recent Department of Health Grant Award of £340,000 to apply some of the most advanced technology to the new development under construction at the Hawthorns in Gorse Hill, Bembridge Close in Park North and at Linden Avenue in Pinehurst
- A new Pathway flat is now up and running within one of Swindon's sheltered housing schemes. This flat can be used by someone struggling in their current accommodation who may be awaiting an assessment or adaptation or for someone unable to return home from hospital pending assessment or longer term accommodation. (see Appendix 1 for leaflet on Pathway Flat).

The flat was ready to let in August 17 and is currently occupied by a hospital discharge client awaiting long term accommodation.

3.2. Keyworkers

- 3.2.1 The role that keyworkers contribute to the community in terms of health and wellbeing and the local economy is recognised within Swindon's Housing Allocation Policy and the housing development projects. By prioritising keyworkers for affordable housing and developing housing solely for this group then this helps to meet the wider priorities of the Swindon Vision.

There are several housing projects within Swindon that provide around 80 rented homes for keyworkers. The majority are flats and are managed by Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations) and another 15 flats are managed by Swindon Borough Council. These homes are in and around the town centre to allow easy access to public transport and employers.

- 3.2.2 The most recent keyworker development is the Swindon Council development of 15 flats at Townsend House, Old Town. This is a lifted block with 5 flats per floor over 3 floors, with 9 2-bed flats and 6 1-bed flats, it was completed in November 2016 and is tenanted by keyworkers, including teaching assistants, nurses, care workers and drug workers. They are accommodated on the same tenancy as other Council tenants and flats are let at Affordable Rents on Flexible Tenancies.

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- 3.2.3 When vacancies arise at any of these schemes then keyworkers who have applied and registered on Swindon's Housing Register will be considered as per the criteria set out in the Allocations Policy.

They must be working within the Swindon Borough area and in employment in one of the following: Education, Health, Emergency Services, Swindon Borough Council employees who are engaged with the community, Community Service workers, Armed Forces and Probation Officers.

Priority is awarded using the criteria below:-

Priority 1: In permanent employment and are in housing need in line with Swindon's Allocations policy.

Priority 2: On a fixed term contract and are in housing need in line with Swindon's Allocations policy.

Priority 3: Those in the groups above who are in permanent employment and although do not fall within the housing need criteria may be eligible based on their low household income and would benefit from affordable housing. This does not include homeowners.

Priority 4: Those in the groups above who hold a fixed term contract and although do not fall within the housing need criteria may be eligible based on their low household income and would benefit from affordable housing. This does not include homeowners.

Priority 3 & 4 groups are approved by a Housing Panel and assessed on affordability and will only be considered where there is a low demand for keyworker accommodation.

- 3.2.4 In addition to rented accommodation keyworkers can also access affordable home ownership including shared ownership and Help to Buy. Information is available at Help to Buy South's website: www.helptobuysouth.co.uk

- 3.2.5 In future a proportion of Swindon Borough Council new builds will be offered to key workers in line with the Allocations Policy. The 2011 Strategic Housing Market Assessment identified the issue of low demand for key worker housing, which was partially caused by the high numbers of flats offered to keyworkers. Identifying suitable properties, namely larger houses, in our new developments allows a more flexible and responsive supply of house types.

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3.3 Homelessness

Introduction

- 3.3.1 The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, Housing Act 1996, and the Homelessness Act 2002, place statutory duties on local housing authorities to ensure that advice and assistance to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness is available. This can be in the form of advice and help to prevent applicants from becoming homeless, or arranging emergency, temporary and long-term accommodation.
- 3.3.2 There is a set of criteria to determine whether a 'main homelessness duty' is owed to a person presenting as homeless, which is that they must be homeless or likely to become homeless within 28 days, or unintentionally homeless and fall within a specified priority need group. Where a 'main homelessness duty' is owed, the authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and his or her household. The duty continues until a settled housing solution becomes available for them, or another circumstance brings the duty to an end.

Performance overview

- 3.3.3. The Council's Housing Options Team is responsible for managing applicants that present to the Council as being homeless, as well as carrying out work to prevent homelessness in the borough. The Team recently had a diagnostic peer review conducted by the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS). This service is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and is used to facilitate the Gold Standard Challenge.
- 3.3.4. The Gold Standard Challenge was launched in 2013 as a way for Local Authorities to demonstrate that they are achieving the 10 challenges that were set out in the DCLG report on homelessness 'Making Every Contact Count'. In order to apply for the Gold Standard the Local Authority must have undertaken a diagnostic Peer Review and achieved a score of 60% or more.
- 3.3.5. The peer review in April 2017 gave the Council's Housing Options Team a rating of 53%. This was mainly due to a low score (22%) in the 'Strategy' section of the review.
- 3.3.6. The Council's Homelessness Strategy was developed and approved in 2008. It is a requirement under the Homelessness Act 2012 that homelessness strategies should be renewed within five years. The Council's Strategy was reviewed and a draft strategy for 2016-2021 was created in 2015. However, work to finalise the strategy was put on hold following the announcement, in June 2016, that a

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Homelessness Reduction Bill was taken to parliament for consideration. This Bill was enacted in April 2017 and includes new responsibilities for councils.

3.3.7 In addition, the Homelessness Code of Guidance is being reviewed and a new version is due to be published in spring 2018. The Council's Homelessness Strategy will be completed once a new Code of Guidance and details of the funding arrangements for the new responsibilities under the Homelessness Reduction Act have been published.

3.3.8 Other areas of the peer review were found to be very positive, achieving good ratings. These include the Council's homelessness website accessibility, navigation, information and advice, the preparation for, efficiency and engagement at customer interviews, and the timeliness, efficiency and appropriateness of outcomes from housing options reviews. A summary of the scores are as below:-

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Strategy Overview | 22% | Poor |
| Website Review | 58% | Good |
| Reception/Interview Room Facilities | 60% | Good |
| Customer Interview Observation | 65% | Good |
| Housing Options File Review | 57% | Good |
| Homelessness File Review | 60% | Good |
| Staff | 52% | Fair |
| Total Score 53% | | |

Context and Challenges

3.3.9 A summary has been included below to give context and set out the challenges for homelessness services nationally and within Swindon.

Homelessness Statistics

Whilst there was very little difference in the number of homelessness applications made in Swindon during 2016 compared to 2015, there was an increase in the number of acceptances. The change in the level of acceptances was higher than was found nationally, as demonstrated in Table 1 below.

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Table 1

| | Swindon | | | England | | |
|---------------------|---------|---------|----------|---------|---------|----------|
| | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | Increase | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | Increase |
| Applications | 534 | 529 | -1% | 81,690 | 85,300 | 4% |
| Acceptances | 154 | 185 | 20% | 37,870 | 40,320 | 6% |

3.3.10. Causes of homelessness

- The top reason for all homelessness acceptances in 2015/16 and 2016/17 was the termination of assured shorthold tenancies (mainly used in the private sector). This accounted for 38% of all homelessness acceptances in Swindon and 29% in England.
- The second highest was parents, other family or friends are no longer willing to accommodate. This was the reason for 15% of all homelessness acceptances in Swindon and 26% in England during 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- The third highest reason was the breakdown of a relationship either non-violent or violent. Violent relationship breakdowns were more frequent than non-violent breakdowns. Relationship breakdowns accounted for 6% of all homelessness acceptances in Swindon and 18% in England during 2015/16 and 2016/17.

3.3.11. Households

- Single female parents made up the highest proportion of homeless acceptances in Swindon (53%) and nationally (47%) in both 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- 24% of all homelessness acceptances in Swindon and 22% in England were couples with children.
- Single females were the third highest homeless acceptances accounting for 16% of all homelessness acceptances in Swindon. However nationally single males made up the third highest proportion (13%) of homelessness acceptances.
- 84% of homelessness acceptances in Swindon during 2015/16 and 2016/17 were a priority need due to them having dependent children, 10% were pregnant women and 6% were due to a vulnerability. This differed from the national statistics where 67% had dependent children, 22% had vulnerabilities and 7% were pregnant women.

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- The majority of all homelessness acceptances in Swindon in the last two years were aged 25 to 44 (58%), 30% were aged 16 to 24 and 12% were over 45. This pattern was found to be the same for the whole of England.

3.3.12 These findings are to be expected as the priority need for a homelessness duty applies to those that have children who live with them or are pregnant. Single people are only found to have a priority need if they are either 16 to 17 years old and not eligible for social care housing or 18 to 21 years old and homeless due to fire, flood or other emergency or have a vulnerability.

Housing Market

3.3.13. Nationally, home ownership levels in March 2017 were at their lowest since 1985. As a result the number of households renting in the private sector has increased. The demand for private sector rental properties has increased rent levels making them unaffordable for many households. The top reason for homelessness acceptances for the last two years in Swindon and also nationally was the termination of assured shorthold tenancy agreements which are mainly used in the private sector.

3.3.14. There is a shortage in the availability of affordable housing in Swindon. The number of applicants on the housing register waiting and transfer list in June 2017 was 2,928. The highest demand was for one bedroom properties (36%) followed by one or two bedroom accommodation for people over 60 (25%) and two bedroom properties (24%).

Availability of suitable and affordable temporary accommodation

3.3.15. As at June 2017 (latest published data by DCLG) there were 354 homeless households in temporary accommodation in Swindon, of which:

- 98 were in local authority or housing association properties.
- 249 were in private leased properties.
- 6 were in bed and breakfasts.

3.3.16 The Council spent over £2.5 million on rent for private leased properties during 2016/17 and leases approximately 400 properties in Swindon that can be used to temporarily house the homeless. Historically the Council has always received enough funding to cover the cost of managing the properties and the gap between local housing allowance rates (used to determine the housing benefit payable) and the rent charged. This is because funding from the Department for Work and Pension (DWP) included a £60 temporary accommodation management fee per week for each private leased property in addition to housing benefit received to cover the rent.

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3.3.17 However, from April 2017 a new Flexible Homeless Support Grant has replaced the temporary accommodation management fee. As a result the Council received £400,000 less funding for 2016/17. In order to alleviate homelessness budget pressures, in April 2017, Cabinet approved an allocation of £17 million from the housing revenue account which is to be used to purchase 80-100 properties during 2017/18 that can house homeless families and reduce the number of private sector lease properties in use by 150 units.

Since April 2017 24 homes have been purchased from this fund, generally family sized accommodation with another 6 properties currently under offer. Properties are purchased predominantly on council estates as these provide an affordable option from the housing market.

Welfare Reform Act 2012

3.3.18 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced the removal of the 'spare room subsidy'. This affected working age benefits whose benefits were cut if they had a spare room in their house. The intention was to reduce the housing benefit bill and to free up larger properties by under-occupying households moving to smaller properties.

3.3.19 From April 2013 the Welfare Reform Act introduced a cap on the amount of benefit payments that a person in receipt of housing benefit can receive. From November 2016 this was reduced further from £26,000 a year to £20,000 for couples or single parents and from £15,600 to £13,400 for single people.

3.3.20 Under the Act the Government also abolished Council Tax Benefits where a person with low income could receive benefit payment to cover their full Council Tax bill. This was replaced by Council Tax Reduction Schemes that were determined by individual local authorities. In Swindon all households with the exception of pensioners, households in receipt of disability living allowance or premium, war widowers or those in receipt of war disablement pension will have to pay at least 20% of their council tax bill.

3.3.21 Universal Credit went live in Swindon from the 30th November 2016. Universal Credit claimants receive all their individual benefit payments as one lump sum and this is paid monthly in arrears. Therefore claimants who have not previously had to budget their expenditure will have to manage their finances to ensure that they can pay their rent. It is anticipated that the change from housing benefit to universal credit will increase the rate of rent arrears and therefore the resulting evictions. In addition, it is expected that the number of private sector landlords that will accept tenants who are on benefits will reduce, further limiting the availability of suitable housing for those facing homelessness.

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Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

3.3.22 The Homelessness Reduction Bill Received royal assent in May 2017 and will be enacted in April 2018. This Act introduces a new duty on local authorities to carry out an assessment in all cases where an eligible applicant is homeless, or threatened with homelessness regardless of whether there is any priority need or possible intentional homelessness. During 2016/17 there was 115 homelessness applications that were found to be either intentionally homeless or not in priority need, which this new duty would apply to.

3.3.23 In addition, the Act has extended the period for when the local authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days. This is intended to ensure that interventions take place earlier to avoid homelessness applicants from reaching crisis point. Of the 545 homelessness decisions made in 2016/17, 234 (43%) were found not to be homeless. This is likely due to them being outside of the 28 day criteria. The change in legislation could therefore result in a significant increase in the number of homeless acceptances.

3.3.24 Additional funding of £61 million to help local English councils finance the new burdens was announced March 2017. This has been followed up by an announcement on 16th October 2017 with an additional £11.7 million being made available which takes the total amount to £72.7.million.

Additionally, Government will be providing local authorities with an equally distributed share of £3 million to support the upgrade of data systems to monitor the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Swindon's Homelessness Reduction Act - allocation of new burdens funding:

2017/18 - £69,940

2018/19 - £64,065

2019/20 - £71,565

Total - £205,570

It is anticipated that Swindon's homelessness team will use this new burdens funding for additional staff posts and improved IT systems to better manage caseload and the statutory timescales.

The consultation on the draft Homelessness Code of Guidance was also launched on 16th October and will run for 8 weeks before it is finalised for publication in spring 2018. Details

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

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3.3.25 Overall, the Council continues to manage its homelessness services well.

During 2017/18 based on recent challenging trends it is expected that an estimated 60 households will be accepted each quarter. However due to a high number of successful prevention cases only 31 were accepted as homeless in the first quarter.

The households whose homelessness was prevented in the first quarter numbered 77. With the assistance and proactive support of the housing options officers the majority of these households secured accommodation in the private rented sector using incentives such as rent in advance or deposit guarantees. Other households were helped into supported housing schemes.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Committee can choose the information to review on performance from the Housing Service. Feedback on this report is welcomed.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Section 21 of the Local Government Act requires every local authority to establish an overview and scrutiny function to hold the Executive to account, undertake policy development and review, monitor, and improve performance.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other direct implications arising from this report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendations made by it.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 No Diversity Impact Assessment is required at this stage. Any DIA that is required during review of topics included within the work programme will be identified at the appropriate stage.

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Risk Management

- 5.5 No risk management issues have been identified at this stage. Any risk management issues will be identified at the appropriate time when a topic is under review by the Overview Scrutiny Committee and if it makes any recommendations.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Leaflet on Pathway Flat at Les Gowing House, Penhill