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Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

03 March 2015

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Children and Young People – Councillor Ruane

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Executive Director of People

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

**Title:**

Managing Emergency Accommodation

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

The City Council commissions a number of support services for people in housing crisis. These include homelessness services for Adults, support to families with children in need including those with No Recourse to Public Funds and Supported Accommodation for people aged 16-24. In addition to these support services the City Council works with the private rented market and Registered Social Landlords to ensure that housing options are available for people who would otherwise be homeless.

There are also homeless charities in the City that provide independent support and sometimes accommodation to people who are homeless outside of the provisions of a City Council funding arrangement.

Despite these arrangements being in place there is not always capacity in the available services, where this is the case, and on an emergency basis Bed and Breakfast accommodation is used in order to meet the City Councils statutory responsibilities for homelessness.

Recognising that Bed and Breakfast is not ideal accommodation the City Council is committed to reducing its use, and should Bed and Breakfast be required it is only used in exceptional emergency situations where clear action plans are in place to limit the duration of stay.

To monitor and ensure exit plans are managed and progressed an emergency accommodation panel will be established to be chaired by the Head of Housing and consisting of representatives

from the Placements Team, Route 21, and Childrens Social Work. The panel will meet monthly and provide strategic and operational oversight of the City Council's use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and monitor the exit plans for all vulnerable people, families and young people placed in emergency accommodation including Bed and Breakfast.

In order to emphasise the City Councils commitment to reducing its use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation the City Council should sign-up Barnados 'Beyond Care' pledge 'I support Barnardo's 'Beyond Care' campaign. I will work to make sure that our local authority takes the necessary steps so that care leavers in our area have better accommodation and support'. By signing up to this pledge the City Council is demonstrating its commitment to providing appropriate support to care leavers.

Further to this and in order to reduce reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation the City Council embarks on a tender process for emergency accommodation so that there are improved quality standards in place for when emergency accommodation is required

**Recommendations:**

Cabinet Member is recommended to:

- (1) Sign up to the Barnados 'Beyond Care' campaign to demonstrate its commitment to providing appropriate support to care leavers.
- (2) Approve the establishment of an emergency accommodation panel to provide oversight of Young People, families or vulnerable people placed in emergency accommodation.
- (3) Require that all young people aged under 18 and covered by the provisions of the Children Act accommodated in Bed and Breakfast accommodation for a period in excess of 2 days are reported to Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on a quarterly basis.
- (4) Approve the commencement of a tender process for emergency accommodation so that there is more capacity to support homeless people or those at risk of homelessness and reduce reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation.

**List of Appendices included:**

None

**Other useful background papers:**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title: Managing Emergency Accommodation**

**1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1 The City Council commissions a number of support services to support people in housing crisis. These include homelessness services for Adults, support to families with Children in Need including those that have No Recourse to Public Funds and Supported Accommodation for people aged 16-24. Additionally, the City Council works with the private rented market and Registered Social Landlords to ensure that housing options are available for people who would otherwise be homeless and to ensure that where support services are provided this is for as short a period as possible.
- 1.2 Significant progress has been made over the last year to improve support to homeless people. A new homeless service has been implemented for homeless adults aged 24 years and over and ex-offenders with the Salvation Army, and new Supported Accommodation contracts for those aged 16 – 24 were implemented in 2013 for care leavers and homeless young people. As well as the provision of accommodation these contracts provide a range of support such as assistance with housing applications, financial management and settling in new accommodation once this has been secured. In addition to this the City Council operates principles of Staying Put to enable care leavers to remain with Foster Carers beyond their eighteenth birthday.
- 1.3 These arrangements were commissioned following extensive consultation processes but have nevertheless presented a series of challenges around capacity and levels of need. Where demand for support is in excess of available supply the City Council may use bed and breakfast and self-contained accommodation in order to ensure it can continue to deliver its statutory duties.
- 1.4 Both bed and breakfast accommodation and self-contained accommodation has a specific definition in Housing terms and a number of hotel establishments provide both self-contained accommodation and Bed and Breakfast. The main differences between the two accommodation types are that in self-contained accommodation occupants are required to make their own arrangements for all of their meals and are supplied with basic equipment, which may be as simple as a fridge and a microwave oven with which to do so.
- 1.5 There are also homeless charities in the City that provide independent support and sometimes accommodation to people who are homeless outside of the provisions of a City Council funding arrangement.
- 1.6 City Council Responsibilities
- 1.7 The City Council has a range of responsibilities to accommodate people. These include responsibilities under the Housing Act 1996, Children Act 1989 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. These responsibilities are primarily discharged through Homelessness and Supported Accommodation contracts however, where capacity in these contracts is insufficient bed and breakfast accommodation is occasionally used in emergency situations until more appropriate contract capacity is required.
- 1.8 Under the Children Act 1989 the City Council has a statutory duty to provide accommodation for people who are 1) under the age of 18 who are subject to a care order and 2) have reached 16 and whose welfare is likely to be 'seriously prejudiced' should accommodation not be provided. Additionally there is a duty to accommodate any 16 or 17 year old in the area who is assessed as requiring accommodation and agrees to be accommodated. Statutory guidance issued in January 2015 clarifies that Bed and

Breakfast accommodation is not considered to be suitable other than for very exceptional emergency circumstances. The guidance states that such placements should be limited to a duration of no more than two working days and that when local authorities place young people in such settings they should ensure that they receive appropriate supervision and contact from the authority.

1.9 Aside from those covered by the Children Act 1989 there is no statutory guidance on the duration that people should be accommodated in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

#### 1.10 Use of Bed and Breakfast and Self-Contained Accommodation

1.11 For the period 1 July 2014 to 30 Sept 2014 the City Council used Bed and Breakfast and self-contained emergency/temporary accommodation on 231 occasions.

1.12 For single young people – Over the three month period, young people were accommodated in Bed and Breakfast on 101 occasions. The maximum accommodated on any one night was 39, with an average of 28 each night. The average length of stay was 39 nights. For households accommodated under homelessness duties or social care duties, a total of 93 households were accommodated. 46 were placed in B&B accommodation with shared facilities (average length of stay – 13 nights) and 47 were placed in self-contained accommodation within hotel establishments (average length of stay – 18 nights). As at 30 January 2015 14 single young people were accommodated in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

1.13 The City Council also supports families with No Recourse to Public Funds. Over the same period, a total of 37 families were accommodated (maximum 30 families at any one time). 13 were placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation (average length of stay – 142 nights). The other families were placed in rented accommodation (average length of stay – 507 nights). As at 30 January 2015 9 households with No Recourse to Public Funds were accommodated in Bed and Breakfast with a further 15 in rented accommodation.

1.14 For households accommodated under homelessness duties or social care duties – Over the three month period, a total of 93 households were accommodated. 46 were placed in B&B accommodation with shared facilities (average length of stay – 13 nights) and 47 were placed in self-contained accommodation within hotel establishments (average length of stay – 18 nights) As at 30 January 2015 11 households were accommodated, 3 in Bed and Breakfast and 8 in self-contained accommodation in hotel/Bed and Breakfast establishments.

1.15 Under the Salvation Army contract when they take over responsibilities for homeless families (after the 14 nights that they are accommodated by the Council), they may also use Bed and Breakfast and self-contained accommodation in hotel establishments. The average length of stay is 46 nights, with all families being moved to self-contained accommodation within 35 nights. The Salvation Army is actively working towards obtaining alternatives to this type of provision.

1.16 There are also a number of reasons why the use of B&B temporary accommodation continues, the main factors being:

- The Council retains responsibility for emergency/temporary accommodation for homeless families (who are owed the interim housing duty) for 14 nights before responsibility for temporary accommodation is taken over by the Salvation Army. There is currently no alternative to B&B and self-contained hotel accommodation.

- There is no commissioned service for temporary accommodation for homeless families who are accommodated under Section 17 (rather than the Housing Act duties) or who have no recourse to public funds.
  - There are occasions where an immediate placement is necessary until more suitable accommodation can be found – for example, if a family contacts the Emergency Duty Team during the night.
  - The capacity available through the commissioned services is not always sufficient to accommodate the volume of people presenting to the City Council for which there is a duty, and sometimes an assessment is required by a contracted provider before they are able to offer a placement. This means that a short term bed and breakfast accommodation placement is required until such an assessment is completed and a more appropriate placement made.
  - The number of homeless people (both single, couples and families) in Coventry is growing. During the calendar year 2013, 528 households were assessed by the Council as being statutorily homeless. In the calendar year 2014, this increased to 630 households.
  - The pressure on availability of housing in the social rented and private rented sectors mean that there may be barriers to finding long-term accommodation to move on to after a household is placed in temporary accommodation. Almost 14,000 households are registered for social housing on Coventry Homefinder, with between 2000 and 2500 properties becoming available each year.
  - The private rented sector can play a role in meeting housing needs, however, the Coventry and Warwickshire Joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2013 highlighted that landlords are becoming increasingly cautious about accepting tenants who are benefit claimants due to welfare reforms. Anecdotal evidence indicates that as the private rental market is buoyant in the city, private landlords effectively have the flexibility to choose who they accommodate, and much of the larger family housing is advertised for sharers (both students and professionals). The SHMA also highlights affordability issues with private renting, particularly in relation to family housing, where entry-level (lower quartile) rents were found to be higher than the Local Housing Allowance rate for properties with more than 2 bedrooms.
- 1.17 All of those accommodated in either bed and breakfast or self-contained accommodation have floating support from an external support provider. Where the City Council has responsibilities to the child in the case of a homeless family the City Council recognises that it is generally preferable to ensure the family remain together, even if this means emergency accommodation as opposed to taking the children into care and leaving the parents homeless.
- 1.18 It is accepted that the use of these types of accommodation is far from ideal, particularly for families with young children, or unaccompanied young adults, it is however in some emergency situations the only option available. There is the possibility that should people be placed in this form of emergency accommodation they can 'drift' unless active management takes place to move to a more sustainable setting, and preferably one that is independent of City Council support. In order to ensure all people in emergency accommodation have a clear plan for move on that is being delivered against it is proposed to establish an emergency accommodation panel. The panel will assist in monitoring and ensuring these cases are moved on quickly with clear exit plans to move those vulnerable people and families into more appropriate accommodation where required.

- 1.19 In order to emphasise the City Councils commitment to reducing its use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation the City Council should sign-up Barnardo's 'Beyond Care' pledge 'I support Barnardo's Beyond Care campaign. I will work to make sure that our local authority takes the necessary steps so that care leavers in our area have better accommodation and support'. By signing up to this pledge the City Council is demonstrating its commitment to providing appropriate support to care leavers with Bed and Breakfast accommodation 'only being used in emergency situations if there are no better alternatives'.
- 1.20 Under the Children Act 1989 the City Council has a statutory duty to provide accommodation for people who are 1) under the age of 18 who are subject to a care order and 2) have reached 16 and whose welfare is likely to be 'seriously prejudiced' should accommodation not be provided. Additionally there is a duty to accommodate any 16 or 17 year old in the area who is assessed as requiring accommodation and agrees to be accommodated. Statutory guidance issued in January 2015 clarifies that Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not considered to be suitable other than for very exceptional emergency circumstances. The guidance states that such placements should be limited to a duration of no more than two working days and that when local authorities place young people in such settings they should ensure that they receive appropriate supervision and contact from the authority.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 2.1 In order to ensure that bed and breakfast and self-contained accommodation is only used in exceptional emergency situations that an emergency accommodation panel is set up chaired by the Head of Housing and including representatives from Placements, Route 21 and Children Social Care who will provide strategic and operational oversight to ensure the speedy exiting of vulnerable people, families and young people from unsuitable Bed and Breakfast Accommodation.
- 2.2 In addition, and in order to ensure that where emergency accommodation is used this meets certain quality standard it is recommended that the City Council embarks on a tender process for emergency accommodation so that there are improved quality standards in place for when emergency accommodation is required. This tender will prioritise having sufficient, specific emergency accommodation that is appropriate for care leavers, families and other young people in a housing crisis. This might include crash-pads, short-term supported lodgings, Nightstops, or emergency beds in youth-only hostels or foyers.
- 2.3 Signing up to Barnardo's Beyond Care campaign will emphasise the City Councils commitment to improve this area of support so that this accommodation should only be used in emergency situations if there are no better alternatives.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1 No consultation was undertaken as the proposals are not to change an existing policy or way in which a service is delivered but to put in place a policy for the City Council on the use of emergency accommodation in line with statutory guidance.

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1 The panel process described will be established from April 2015. The tender process for Emergency Accommodation has commenced and is in the early stages of scoping the Specification and agreeing the timescales.

## **5. Comments from Executive Director of Resources**

### **5.1 Financial implications**

Forecast spend on Bed and Breakfast and Emergency Accommodation for 2014/15 is in the region of £1m across Adults Services (£0.2m) and Children's Services which includes support to families with children (£0.3m) and supported accommodation for 16-24 year olds (£0.5m). The proposals contained within this report aim to reduce this expenditure through reducing usage of this type of accommodation. Any alternative accommodation arising as a result of tender activity, or any other alternative, needs to be funded within the existing financial envelope.

Expenditure on Bed and Breakfast and Emergency Accommodation is met from budgets within the People and Place directorate.

### **5.2 Legal implications**

There are a number of duties upon the City Council to meet the assessed need of individuals and families including duties around accommodation. This includes Section 23B of the Children Act 1989 requiring the local authority to provide relevant children with, or maintain them in, suitable accommodation. Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not considered to be suitable other than for very exceptional emergency circumstances. Guidance states that such placements should be limited to a duration of no more than two working days. Local authorities should ensure that when placing young people in such placements they receive appropriate supervision and contact from the authority.

## **6. Other implications**

### **6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?**

The recommendations contained within this report support a number of City Council objectives including people having independent lives; ensuring that children and young people are safe and providing a good choice of housing.

### **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

The proposal to implement an emergency accommodation panel will ensure that risks associated with the use of Bed and Breakfast and self-contained accommodation in terms of people being placed in accommodation that is not appropriate are managed in a coherent manner.

### **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

None

### **6.4 Equalities / EIA**

An Equality Impact Analysis was not undertaken as the proposals are not to change an existing policy or way in which a service is delivered but to put in place a policy for the City Council on the use of emergency accommodation in line with statutory guidance.

### **6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

None

#### **6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

The proposals to tender for emergency accommodation will create opportunities for Registered Social Landlords. In signing up to the Barnado's 'Beyond Care' pledge will increase positive relationships between the City Council and the Voluntary Sector.



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