

Exempt Supported Accommodation

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Wednesday 8th February 2023

Context

- There are a number of exempt supported providers in Coventry – many of who are long established
- The 3 main types of provider are;
 - RP's who provide supported housing e.g. Citizen FWH, St Basils
 - Non RP's which are well established organisations e.g. Salvation Army, Cyrenians, Mind
 - CIC's with limited expertise/experience of accommodating vulnerable groups or/and new to Coventry
- Coventry has seen an increase in provision over the last few years;
 - 2019/20 2939 units
 - 2020/21 3201 units
 - 2021/22 3601 units
 - 2022/23 January 2023 - 3570 units
- Exempt accommodation not commissioned by CCC City Council has no specific regulatory framework
- Concerns regarding the quality of support provided as is only required to be above minimum
- Issues raised regarding specific properties/providers increasing]
- An issue of national interest:
 - Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) private members Bill is currently going through the House of Commons,
 - Cross-party Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (LUHC) Committee in a report published on 27 October 2022 '*exempt housing and support services are a complete mess*'

Key Challenges

The increase in exempt providers of accommodation for homeless complex singles has created numerous challenges for the police and community safety teams but also for regulation and enforcement, housing benefit, and housing services

- As a housing function we maintain an overview of providers in terms of who is offering a quality service. The ability to do this in a robust planned way is limited due to resourcing as well as the absence of an agreed minimum standard and framework for dealing with issues, assessing quality, and ensuring value for money.
- HMO licencing process – where providers have not or do not believe they need an HMO license to operate thus operating without one meaning that enforcing licence conditions is more difficult, the growth in HMO style accommodation puts additional pressures on the enforcement function.
- VFM / quality of support - The Housing Benefit team currently ask new providers to complete a questionnaire that details the service provision, cost, location etc. A copy of the support plan is requested to assess the need for support for the individual who enhanced housing benefit is being paid for.
- Referrals - the local authority has little control over who is referred into exempt supported accommodation and a limited understanding of referral routes, assessment processes and risk. This can result in groups of incompatible, complex people being housed in a single location. There are significant impacts on local residents in the area as a result of this clustering of provision resulting in community cohesion issues.
- Where tenancies are ended or fail additional pressure is placed on our commissioned services, front line housing service as well as our rough sleeping outreach team.
- The subsidy loss for CCC is significant. Having the ability to reduce costs and drive out poor providers (who are predominantly non-RP's), we will be able to demonstrate the impact on both service users and subsidy loss, therefore providing an evidence base to maintain a permanent team long term.

Current Approach: Housing and Community Safety

- Discourage any further provision, with clear messages delivered regarding over supply and low demand particularly from organisations who are new or unknown.
- Respond reactively to issues when identified through joint inspections , intelligence sharing etc.
- Work with Neighbourhood policing teams to identify issues and concerns
- Informal on-going meetings with providers to maintain relationships
- Planned meetings and interventions with providers to address issues that arise
- Informal scrutiny of policies, processes and assessment of risk (including safeguarding practise)
- Provision of advice and guidance when issues/ problems arise

Current Approach: Housing Benefit

- Scrutiny to ensure accommodation can be classed as SEA under HB Legislation (Landlord Test, Care Support and Supervision (CSS) test)
- HB cannot cover charges for CSS but can cover **reasonable** charges for core rent, eligible service charges, housing management costs
- Application questionnaires completed for each new provider – includes details of the operational model and whether the scheme is supported by CCC
- Copies of support plans requested to verify the need for support
- Detailed review of rent and service charges undertaken to ensure financial loss to the council through government subsidy is minimised
- Information sharing with Housing services where concerns arise

Current Approach: Regulation and enforcement

RP's	Non RP's	CIC's
HHSRS (Duty to CAT 1)	HHSRS	HHSRS
Exempt from Licensing (Sch.14)	Not exempt (no fee) i.e. Cyrenians/ Salvation Army Policy decision	Not exempt (no fee) Policy decision
Management Regs exempt	Management reg's apply	Management reg's apply

- Reactive complaints HMO licensing / HHSRS
- Non HMO's – only HHSRS – reactive
- Non HMO or exempt – no current resource as HMO scheme is self financing

Enforcement Options – Based on current reactive approach

- Residents responsible for their behaviours and landlords for failure to control.
- Environmental enforcement – domestic noise team
- Criminal enforcement, work with Police colleagues
- Community Protection Warnings/Notices – can be issued against residents and landlords – landlords can be summonsed to courts and fined up to £2500.
- Closure powers can be used but unproven in a HMO setting, we would likely have to find alternative accommodation for any “innocent” residents affected.

Opportunities for improvement

Supported Housing improvement Programme bid

Bid was successful to create a virtual team by increasing resources in both Regulatory Services and our Housing Benefit team and creating a dedicated quality officer post that will sit within Housing & Homelessness :

- Monitor the quality of provision and service
- Support, advice, and guidance for providers
- Co-ordinate and oversee a structured programme of inspections in relation to support provided as well as compliance.
- Review support arrangements, including safeguarding, through person-centred assessments of the support being provided to individuals
- Work with Community safety, the fire service, and the police to co-ordinate multi agency responses to issues or concerns that arise
- Develop a program of multi-disciplinary inspections
- Provide more scrutiny of HB claims in terms of VFM and quality of support plans
- Ensure quality and compliance of the assets in regard to minimum standards and regulatory compliance
- Responding to reactive complaints, proactive management and compliance inspections and spot checks

Outcome of bid

- Applied for £409k over three years. Awarded £319k
- Essential elements:
 - Quality Officer within Housing Services
 - Environmental Health Officer within enforcement
 - Housing Benefit Officer – 50% FTE
 - Crisis - £15k over three years
- Confident can deliver the programme with reduced funding
- Recruitment currently on-going – Aim to go live April 2023 and runs until March 2025
- Real opportunity to drive up standards across the city to ensure that Exempt accommodation is of a high standard

Recommendations

1. Scrutiny to note current position and funding
2. To support the co-ordinated response to managing Exempt Accommodation in the city
3. To include as a future agenda item to receive an update on progress and outcomes achieved through the SHIP funding