
To: The Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)

Date: 7th March 2024

Subject: Housing & Homelessness Service Update

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To update the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) on the progress of the Housing & Homelessness Service and the key initiatives that have been implemented.
- 1.2 To discuss the key homelessness issues and trends over the previous 12 months.
- 1.3 To note actions that will be progressed during the next 12 months to achieve the key objectives of the Homeless Service.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board is recommended to:
 1. Note the information contained within this report; and
 2. Identify any further recommendations for the Cabinet Member

3 Background and Information

- 3.1 The Council approved its Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2019-2024) in March 2019 and is the core strategy that drives the service forward. The Strategy and action plan was refreshed during 2022 to ensure that the actions were still relevant and those that had been completed were removed. The strategy has four key areas of focus:
 - Preventing homelessness & supporting homeless households
 - Support for people and communities
 - Improving existing homes
 - Housing development
- 3.2 The Housing and Homelessness Service has undergone significant change over the previous 5 years with a number of initiatives/projects being worked on with the intention of:
 - Reducing the financial burden on the Authority whilst providing better quality temporary accommodation options.
 - Increasing the number of households where homelessness is prevented or relieved and therefore decreasing the number of households in temporary accommodation.

- Increasing the number of properties available to households in exceptional housing need that are either at social/affordable rents or at the Local Housing Allowance rates if in the private rented sector.

- 3.3 The demand for homelessness services in the city has grown significantly over the last 12-18 months. These increases have been reflected nationally with the highest number of households ever recorded currently living in temporary accommodation in England.
- 3.4 The homeless service is currently being approached by an average of 200 individual households each week in housing need. A number of these will receive initial advice and guidance with over 50% progressing to a homeless application.
- 3.5 As at the 26th February 2024 there are a total of 1145 households in TA provided by Coventry City Council. Of these 791 are households with dependent children with the remaining 354 households being single people or childless couples. The number of families in TA has increased at a greater rate than single people with large family accommodation being particularly high demand.
- 3.6 The Councils rough sleepers team undertakes outreach walks across the city 5 days a week to engage and work with people currently sleeping rough in the city. The frequency of these walks means that the service are fully aware of who is sleeping rough in the city. The team find some people only once whereas we also have people sleeping rough who have done so for a number of years. In January 2024, even though additional accommodation was available due to SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) for 18 nights we found a total of 51 people with approximately 15 individuals sleeping rough on any one night.

4 Homeless Service project and progress

- 4.1 The table below sets out a number of projects/improvements that have been implemented over the previous 2 years and the outcomes these have achieved.

Project	Progress	Next steps
Homeless Prevention	Undertook a pilot funded through WMCA to utilise social media to target families with financial issues to seek advice as early as possible	To continue to seek different ways of engaging with people facing potential homelessness to keep them in their current accommodation wherever possible.
Homeless prevention and reliefs	A challenging target of 1350 households prevented or relieved from homelessness for 2023/24. This is a significant increase from 1077 achieved in 22/23.	To seek to increase the number of successful interventions during 2024/25
Rough Sleeping team	The team are continuing to work with rough sleepers to secure accommodation and additional funding has been secured to provide a range of different accommodation options.	To deliver against the ending rough sleeping plan and continue to maximise new funding opportunities to prevent people rough sleeping and support this who are currently rough sleeping.

Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy	The Housing & Homelessness Strategy was approved in March 2019 & The city's rough sleeping strategy was approved in December 2019. We have commenced work on undertaking a review of homelessness in the city.	To carry out a review of homelessness in the city and develop a new combined (homelessness and rough sleeping) strategy and action plan during 2024. This will include consulting with partners and homeless households.
Reduce cost of expensive Temporary Accommodation	The service has undertaken a number of actions to procure alternative TA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 92 units of Supported Temporary Accommodation for single people with an additional 54 beds being progressed. • Approval to purchase 50 family homes – 42 been purchased to date. • Procured TA on lease agreements from the private rented sector (PRS) 	The Accommodation team will continue to review costs and ensure best value for money. We will be seeking to undertake further procurement to deliver additional TA properties. We will also continue to consider alternative TA options which deliver good quality accommodation alongside financial savings.
Eliminate use of B&Bs for families	The service didn't place any families in B&B for circa 2.5 years. However, the increase in demand has meant that some families have been in B&B. There are currently 16 families in B&B Although no family spent Christmas in a B&B.	Continue to prioritise moving any families placed into B&B in an emergency into self-contained TA asap and source additional self-contained TA
Eliminate use of B&Bs for single people	The service has worked hard to reduce significantly the number of single people in B&B accommodation, and it is only used in emergencies or if there is no other option on the day they approach as homeless. There are currently 20 singles in B&B	Maintain this achievement and continue to pursue alternative TA
Alternative TA for families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frank Walsh House • Caradoc • Refurbished properties through Citizen – Project completed. • Procured contracts 	Monitor take-up and ensure 90% plus occupancy across the schemes
Discharge Homeless Duty into the PRS policy and Let's Rent Coventry.	Access to the PRS has proved more difficult due to the sector being buoyant. Let's Rent Coventry continue to bring on additional landlords but lower numbers than historically	Ensure that we maximise the opportunity of increased LHA (Local Housing Allowance) rates from April 2024

Increasing supported accommodation options for single people in the city	Secured funding to provide. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional emergency beds for rough sleepers • New project with 18 rooms just received planning permission. 	To continue to work with trusted partners to deliver additional accommodation for single people who require support
Enhance the rough sleeping service	The team have been successful in securing additional resources to increase the capacity in the team.	Continue to seek additional funding to improve services including the DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) Test & Learn funding that has been announced.
Health & Well-being	In partnership with PH secured health inequalities funding to create a homelessness pathway lead role at UHCW (University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire)	To carry put the Nice self-assessment and include health inequalities in the new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy
Social Housing Improvement Programme	Secured funding to set up a multi-disciplinary team to improve standards within the supported accommodation sector. Launched a standards document and continue to visit providers	Continue current programme and progress support and where appropriate action to providers of supported exempt accommodation.
Additional Accommodation	Secured funding through DLUHCs (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) Local Housing Fund. A total of 24 properties purchased by Stonewater as permanent accommodation and 20 purchased by CCC (Coventry City Council) as temporary accommodation.	To deliver the 44 properties by the 31 st March 2024
Homeless prevention	Implemented a pre- eviction panel for any one being evicted from supported accommodation in the city to minimise evictions wherever possible.	To continue the panel and include additional landlords onto the panel.
Enhancing use of data to drive service improvement	Recruited to a new Housing & Homelessness Performance officer role to assist the service in meeting data related objectives.	To continue to use data to review performance, make improvements to the service and inform the homelessness review and strategy. Benchmark against comparable councils.
Social housing allocations	The Coventry Homefinder Policy has been fully implemented and embedded, including an annual renewals module requiring residents to update their details to ensure housing need within the city is reflected accurately. The wait for housing register applications to be assessed has reduced from 12 to 7 weeks.	To continue to manage the scheme in line with the policy and onboard new registered providers onto the system to allocate new builds within the city when available through new developments.

4.2 Future pressures

The service is likely to see an increase in demand from both families and single people as we move through 2024/25. These increases are likely due to the following.

- Although LHA rates will be increasing from the 1st April 2024 the private sector is buoyant and therefore it is likely that some landlords will continue to demand rental payments in excess of the benefit level
- Continued pressure due to demand for social housing with fewer properties becoming available for letting.
- There is still a cost-of-living crisis in the UK which continues to impact on low-income families.
- During previous financial downturns there has been an adverse impact on young people living at home who are evicted by their parents/guardians due to pressures on the family. Additionally, historically households with mortgages experience financial stress 2 years after interest rates are increased.
- It is likely we will see a continued increase in homelessness across all groups and therefore an increase of people living in temporary accommodation and an increase in rough sleepers.

Name of Author Jim Crawshaw

Job Title Head of Housing & Homelessness

Organisation Coventry City Council

Contact details jim.crawshaw@coventry.gov.uk