

Committee: Housing Board

Agenda Item

Date: 21 September 2017

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Title: Homelessness Update

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Item for information

Summary

1. This report places before the Housing Board the latest homelessness figures and updates the Board on the latest developments regarding the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Recommendations

2. This report is for information only.

Financial Implications

3. N/A.

Impact

- 4.

Communication/Consultation	Members,
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	N/A
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	N/A
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

Situation

5. The table below details the homelessness statistics for the past 2 years, including a comparison between the first quarters of the last 2 years

Homelessness stats	2015/2016	2016/2017	2016/2017 Quarter 1	2017/2018 Quarter 1
No of people presenting as homeless	116	98	25	27
No of homeless applications accepted for the full housing duty	53	52	10	12
No in temporary accommodation (snapshot figure)	22	14	21	9
No of weeks families in an emergency were accommodated in Bed and Breakfast	2.4	1.59	2.6	0
No of cases where homelessness was prevented	48	55	14	11
No of days taken to process homelessness applications	35.5	48.7	27.1	48

6. It can be seen that the figures have been quite stable over the last two years following a period that saw a large increase in numbers. The emphasis continues to be on prevention work, although this remains challenging in an area of high housing costs.
7. The time taken to make homelessness decisions has increased and is above the guidance figure of 33 days. This is due to the complexity of the homelessness cases we have been seeing. When you are dealing with people with chaotic and complicated lives, trying to unravel the facts of their case can be very time consuming. Also there can be delays where you have to go back to other agencies or third parties to clarify information.
8. The Essex wide Trailblazer Project, details of which were provided at an earlier housing board meeting, is now in full operation. We have access to one of the project mentors who is working with the housing options team and tenancy sustainment officer to carry out homelessness prevention work, particularly with clients who need more intensive homelessness prevention work.

9. The Homelessness Reduction Act received Royal Assent earlier this year and it has recently been confirmed that the Act's implementation date will be the 1st April 2018, by which time a new statutory code guidance document will have been published by Government.

10. The key measures in the Act in brief are:-

- An extension of the period during which an authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days
- A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness. This extends the help available to people not in priority need, with local authorities supporting them to either stay in their accommodation or help them find somewhere to live. The duty requires all homeless applicants to be given a personalised plan detailing what the local authority will do and what they themselves need to do to try to prevent them becoming homeless
- A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants regardless of priority need, this help could be, for example the provision of a rent deposit or debt advice. The local authority will still only have a duty to provide temporary accommodation whilst they try to carry out this duty to those in priority need
- A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

11. The Act will increase the workload of the housing options team, as although we already offer advice and assistance to everyone who seeks it, the Act requires an individualised plan to be given to every homeless applicant. The plan must outline the steps that the council will take to prevent or relieve the client's homelessness. This has to be agreed by the client and if they are not happy with it they can ask for it to be reviewed. They also have a right to review every decision at every stage of the prevention duty. This has the potential to give rise to a large increase in the number of homelessness reviews that need to be carried out by a more senior and different officer than the one who made the original decision.

12. As we are a small team with a limited number of senior officers within it, this is an area of the workload that will need careful monitoring.

13. There will be money coming from Government to assist councils with the increased administrative burden that the new Act places on councils but we would not anticipate that Uttlesford's share of this pot will be particularly large. Our understanding is that it will be based on homelessness numbers and relatively speaking ours would be considered low.

14. The housing options team do have access to funds that we received from Government when they ended the temporary accommodation subsidy.

Something we did not use as we mainly make use of our own temporary accommodation for homeless households. This pot is being used to fund homelessness prevention work.

15. In readiness for the Act staff have been on a preliminary round of training courses and once the new guidance document is published further training opportunities will be made available.

Risk Analysis

16.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
The council fails to have sufficient resources in place to meet its duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act if it becomes law later this year	2 – Until the council can fully understand the demands that this legislation may put on services it is difficult to judge the resources that may be required	3 – The council will be open to legal challenge if it does not fulfil its duties under homelessness legislation	The housing department will work to understand the demands that may be placed upon it by this legislation and put bids forward for the required resources as they are identified. All staff will receive training on the new Act

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.