

Progress to Scrutiny Review – Homelessness

Recommendation	Cabinet Decision (Accepted/ Rejected/ Deferred)	Progress as at 1 st June 2015	Officer Responsible	Action Completed Yes/ No If No the percentage completed and expected completion date
1. That the Homelessness Section should undertake work to raise public awareness of the '28 day rule'. Specific awareness raising/training should be undertaken with elected members to increase understanding of the implications of these changes.	Accepted	<p>Between April 2014 and March 2015, there were 745 households prevented from becoming homeless.</p> <p>Awareness raising/training regarding the 28 day rule has been included in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan under the Priority 3 – Providing Quality Information on all Housing Options, action points are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver training to Elected Member's and colleagues on all aspects of homelessness • Develop a Homelessness Prevention Pack for customers offering advice where to get help • Increase opportunities to self-serve and access information on the website or locally <p>Following a recent Gold Standard Inspection by a national government agency, it was noted that the officers were experienced, knowledgeable and confident and that priority need triggers were explained to the customer who confirmed that they understood. This supports Action Point 1</p>	Jill Jones	<p>No – 90% complete</p> <p>Outstanding training to Members on homelessness legislation awareness is to be included in the member development training plan 2015/16</p>

		<p>The homeless team has undertaken work to raise the awareness of the '28 day rule' with partners and wider staff members.</p> <p>A new software system has been introduced in the Housing Options team that identifies people threatened with homelessness and they are contacted by a Homelessness Officer within 1 day. This allows us to offer early intervention and housing advice to ensure rehousing is found to alleviate the threat of homelessness. A housing options pack is now produced electronically for all new customers detailing housing options and additional advice, including information on employment, money advice, and help with substance misuse as well as other additional support services that are available.</p> <p>Access to information on the website and opportunities to self-serve have also been improved.</p> <p>There is an outstanding action to deliver training to Elected Members and is to be included in this year's training plan. This was delayed due to changes in the Council</p>		
<p>2. Information and trends regarding rent arrears in relation to Welfare Reform "bedroom tax" should be monitored and reported to members at the Improving Places Select Commission meeting on a half yearly basis by the Homelessness Manager.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The information and trends regarding rent arrears are monitored by the Income team. As at 29th May 2015:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,245 tenants have a charge for "bedroom tax" • The total number of tenant with a charge for "bedroom tax" who are in arrears is 2,449, of these 1,624 have only had arrears since the introduction of "bedroom tax" 	<p>Paul Elliott</p>	<p>Complete</p>

- Current arrears attributed to bedroom tax are £416,912.-

The Rent Policy was subject to a Scrutiny Review.
(Six monthly update to be presented to Members)

In the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan Priority 5
– Reducing the risk of people becoming homeless due to financial difficulties, action points are:

- Implement changes to the Allocation policy (Sandra Tolley) complete
- Implement a new Rent Policy (Paul Elliott) complete
- Ensure early intervention and prevention is offered through advice to tenants and joint working. (See Below)

Early intervention measures have been extended now, and 2 Intervention Officers working within the income team provide early support and advice to tenants who begin to accrue rent arrears. If this is due to housing benefit size criteria (bedroom tax) then advice is offered regarding downsizing to a smaller more affordable property.

Where the situation is more serious and there is a risk of eviction, the homeless team work with the tenant and income team to offer advice and support to prevent the loss of the tenancy or to seek alternative accommodation.

<p>3.The Private Sector Housing Officer to explore the option of issuing a newsletter to private sector landlords to promote the benefits of the private rented sector and how they can contribute to reducing homelessness.</p> <p>Cabinet amended this recommendation to offer an alternative method of communication with private sector landlords</p>	<p>Amended</p>	<p>Previously a landlord newsletter was produced with private sector support funding but this is no longer available.</p> <p>Other methods of communication, including the Council's website, landlord forums and selective licencing will offer ample opportunities to promote the benefits of the private rented sector and how they can contribute towards reducing homelessness. See also 4 below</p> <p>A successful working relationship that has been established with private landlords by the Private Rented Sector Officer and the Customer Liaison and Development Co-ordinator, and their regular attendance at Landlords Forum has provided an effective link with landlords.</p>	<p>Paul Benson</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p>4. Improve communications between the Homelessness Team and private sector landlords via the Private Sector Housing Officer, holding regular meetings and being proactive in reducing the number of empty properties.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>Regular contact is made by the housing options team with private landlords and letting agents. The homeless team have developed relationships with new landlords and offer tenancy support to tenants, as well as completing health and safety checks prior to letting.</p> <p>The Private Rented Sector Officer and Customer Liaison and Development Coordinator attend Landlord Forums regularly and deal with any queries landlords may have. More landlords are approaching the Housing Options team offering their properties for rent, due to this action.</p>	<p>Paul Benson Lianne Hancock</p>	<p>Complete</p>

<p>5. The Homelessness Section continue to explore potential partnership options to address the lack of bed space provision, particularly for women and young people who need additional support.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The Homelessness Service are working closely with the Strategic Investment team to identify potential options for bringing properties back in to use, and working with partners to provide the right accommodation for those in housing need. This includes private landlords, supported accommodation providers and local authority colleagues.</p> <p>The Homelessness Service have recently worked with Action Housing and supported their bid for funding to provide supported accommodation for young people 16-24yrs, including those with a mild to moderate learning difficulty, which is an identified need in Rotherham.</p> <p>There is also an identified need for supported accommodation for people with complex needs and are currently pursuing an initiative called MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter.)</p>	<p>Jill Jones</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p>6. Explore the above and other potential opportunities for joint service provision for temporary accommodation sub regionally via the South Yorkshire Leader's meeting.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>To take forward this suggestion of working sub-regionally it was proposed that the issue of lack of bed spaces is raised at the South Yorkshire Leader's meeting to consider how this aim can be achieved.</p> <p>Discussion has taken place with sub regional partners. Sheffield was the only area that may have been able to assist in this suggestion, but due to procedural changes and demand in that area this is not a viable option, and therefore the South Yorkshire Leader's group was not approached.</p> <p>The other issue is that homeless households should be placed in suitable accommodation in the local</p>	<p>Jill Jones</p>	<p>Initial action is no longer viable.</p>

		<p>area. A recent Supreme Court has handed down judgment in the case of <i>Nzolameso v City of Westminster</i> [2015] UKSC 22. A local authority may only discharge its homelessness duties by securing that "suitable" accommodation is available for the applicant. Accommodation must be provided within the district of the authority "so far as reasonably practicable".</p>		
<p>7. Develop a coherent, cross service approach to tackling empty properties within the Rotherham Borough utilising existing resources</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>This is embedded in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan – Priority 6, <i>Helping more people to access and sustain private rented accommodation</i> encourages landlords to offer up available empty properties to the Housing Options team.</p> <p>The Council has worked with partners to identify suitable properties for renovation or redevelopment to address identified needs and reduces homelessness.</p> <p>The Homelessness Service has considered a number of funding opportunities, and has recently worked with the Strategic Investment team to produce funding bids and also worked with Homeless Link and the National Practitioners Support Service where we gain early awareness of funding opportunities.</p> <p>There is commitment from the Strategic Housing and Investment team to consider the implications of property acquisition and rehousing needs when undergoing regeneration schemes.</p> <p>A recent accommodation project in Kilnhurst has been completed by the HOPE project.</p>	<p>Tom Bell</p>	<p>Complete</p>

		<p>The project provides housing for people with drug and alcohol problems and provides apprenticeships so those in recovery can gain the skills they need for employment. The HOPE Project tackles homelessness and unemployment by providing housing, creating employment and training opportunities. The HOPE project will provide employment if the recent bid for additional supported accommodation is successful.</p>		
<p>8. Consider ways to provide tenancy support to private sector tenants within the Rotherham Borough.</p>	Accepted	<p>There is already provision for tenancy support within all housing sectors which is provided by Supporting People floating support services.</p> <p>In addition, to prevent failed tenancies in the private rented sector, the Tenancy Intervention Officers who are part of the Homelessness team will provide intensive support at the start of the tenancy as required, and will intervene if tenants or landlords have issues which may put the accommodation at risk at any time.</p>	Jill Jones	Complete
<p>9. The Homelessness Manager to arrange implementing the suggested improvements to the crash pad provision, which included provision of local information on arrival to the property. E.g. location of amenities.</p>	Accepted	<p>If a household is believed to be statutory homelessness, then temporary accommodation in a 'crash pad' accommodation can be offered. There are 22 'crash pads' situated in various locations within Rotherham. The provision has recently been recognised by a national government agency as good practice and will be shared with other local authorities.</p> <p>Local information is now available in all crash pads. Reality checks are undertaken every month to ensure all information is available for tenants who access temporary accommodation, and 6 monthly</p>	Jill Jones	Complete

		<p>reviews have been completed.</p> <p>The team consider feedback from customers and respond to suggestions to improve our services.</p> <p>Regular inspections of the properties and the provision of support for occupants are embedded in the service.</p>		
<p>10. The Neighbourhood Investment Team to look at building provision to both prevent and tackle homelessness in future regeneration schemes at the planning stages and consider ways that this could incorporate an extension to the HOPE project or other similar projects.</p>	Accepted	<p>There is commitment from the Strategic Housing and Investment team to consider the implications of property acquisition and rehousing needs when undergoing regeneration schemes.</p> <p>A recent accommodation project in Kilnhurst has been completed by the HOPE project.</p> <p>The project provides housing for people with drug and alcohol problems and provides apprenticeships so those in recovery can gain the skills they need for employment. The HOPE Project tackles homelessness and unemployment by providing housing, creating employment and training opportunities. The HOPE project will provide employment if the recent bid for additional supported accommodation is successful.</p> <p>Action Housing is preparing a bid proposal for the Platform for Life initiative launched by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). Action proposes to redevelop the vacant Parkgate Library/ex-Neighbourhood Office site (being sold by RMBC to Action) into shared accommodation let at an affordable rent. The 36 units will be designed to address the housing needs of young people (18-24)</p>	Tom Bell	Complete

		at risk of homelessness. It is proposed that the existing and new-build buildings will be adapted, extended and designed to provide a range of housing and care support facilities that will help young people acquire the necessary skills to live independently. This project builds on the successful HOPE methodology and also contributes to Action Point 7		
11. For the Council to explore how it invests in property and assets with the aim of reducing homelessness and out of authority placements.	Accepted	<p>The Strategic Housing and Investment Service have supported Key Choices to apply for external funding to invest in property and assets with the aim of reducing homelessness and out of authority placements.</p> <p>Partnership bids have recently been worked on by the Strategic Investment team in conjunction with colleagues and partners for a project for young people and those with a mild to moderate learning difficulty at a former Council owned site.</p> <p>Discussion is also taking place with the Big Lottery Fund to consider specific housing need – this is in the early stages and will be progressed throughout the year.</p>	Tom Bell Jill Jones	March 2016 50% complete