

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Delegated Officer Decision – 06 March 2024

**Report Title**

Temporary Accommodation Utilities Payment Responsibility

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

**Report Author(s)**

Holly Smith – Business Development Unit – Project Development Officer

**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough Wide

**Report Summary**

The purpose of this report is to give approval for homeless occupants staying in RMBC temporary accommodation to begin to cover the costs of their own utility usage from April 2024.

The proposal is for the service to adopt a new management process when an occupant moves into Temporary Accommodation, where they are supported to manage their own utility payments via a pre-payment utility meter throughout the duration of their placement.

**Recommendation**

Agreement for new occupants residing in temporary accommodation to be made responsible for the payment of their personal gas and electricity utility use, via a Smart Pre-payment Meter, for the duration of their placement, from April 2024.

Agreement for all District Heating properties within the portfolio (except the 4 within Shaftesbury House) to be gradually terminated at the point when the current occupant vacates and replaced with alternative units which have standard gas and electricity supply.

**List of Appendices Included**

None

**Background Papers**

None

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

No

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

<b>1.</b>	<b>Background</b>
1.1	Currently homeless occupants staying in Rotherham Council's temporary accommodation properties do not pay for their utilities, the Council covers all utilities costs. The Council's temporary accommodation portfolio was initially introduced in 2004; homeless occupants have never been asked to cover the costs of their usage.
1.2	When a new occupant signs the Occupancy Agreement for their temporary accommodation placement, they are notified that the Council is responsible for all utilities, and they are encouraged to use utilities appropriately.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	Under the current utility management process, occupants residing within temporary accommodation are not being treated equitably compared to general let tenants or indeed the general public. As the Council is managing all elements of utilities, occupants are not being given an opportunity to gain essential tenancy sustainment skills through managing their personal utility costs. Exposure to finance management skills would support them to sustain long term accommodation at the point that they move on from temporary accommodation.
2.2	Gas and electricity utility costs are currently met through the General Fund which is facing a significant financial pressure from homelessness costs. The Council continues to experience an increase in homelessness and the complexity of the needs of individuals. A revised utilities management process will ensure appropriate levels of support are given to vulnerable homeless occupants, while effectively managing the pressure on the General Fund to sustain service provision.
2.3	This decision is also an opportunity for the Council's current utility management approach to be brought in line with regional good practice recognised at neighbouring Local Authorities.
<b>3.</b>	<b>Options Considered and Recommendation</b>
3.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Option 1 - Do nothing - Business as Usual (BAU)</b> – The Council continues to manage and pay for temporary accommodation occupants' gas and electricity utilities.</li> <li>• <b>Option 2 - Occupant Responsibility (Recommendation)</b> – The temporary accommodation occupant manages their own gas and electricity utility payments via a prepayment smart meter. The Council is named as account holders with British Gas. Support is provided from the Council throughout the duration of the placement. A budget will be required to top-up prepayment meters at the start of each new occupancy and during void periods.</li> <li>• <b>Option 3 - Service Charge</b> – The Council manages the utility accounts and pays the bills but charges the occupant a specific rate for their usage.</li> </ul>

3.2	A weighted options analysis, directly comparing different elements of the 3 options using a defined criterion was conducted. The benefits, risks and resources required for each option have been assessed to support the recommended decision – Option 2.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Consultation on proposal</b>
4.1	The decision has been consulted on with service managers and their teams, to ensure scrutiny from an operational perspective.
<b>5.</b>	<b>Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision</b>
5.1	It is intended that the decision will begin implementation from April 2024 at the point of each new occupancy.
5.2	The Head of Service within Housing will be responsible for instructing the implementation of this decision across the Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation teams.
<b>6.</b>	<b>Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications</b>
6.1	<p>The 2024/25 temporary accommodation budget has been set with the assumption that occupants will be paying for their own energy costs.</p> <p>Currently the General Fund does not make any payment to the HRA for rents lost because of accommodation being taken out of general let and used for temporary accommodation. The result of this is a loss of income to the HRA.</p> <p>The reduction in energy costs charged to the General Fund has enabled us to set a budget for rents that will be paid to the HRA.</p>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)</b>
7.1	<p>Revised wording to the Temporary Accommodation Occupancy Agreement has been agreed by the Council’s legal department and will take effect following agreement of the decision from April 2024.</p> <p>Other than the above, there are no substantive legal implications arising from the contents of this report.</p>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Human Resources Advice and Implications</b>
8.1	There are no HR implications arising from the report.
<b>9.</b>	<b>Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults</b>
9.1	The recommended change is likely to produce benefits for other teams and directorates, particularly in contributing to local targets on homelessness prevention and sustainable tenancies.
<b>10.</b>	<b>Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications</b>
10.1	An initial (Part 1) Equality Impact Assessment Screening (EIA) for this decision has been completed to ensure that the impact of this change has been considered.

10.2	The decision will bring a positive impact in helping to sustain a permanent tenancy. Occupants will gain an understanding of financial responsibilities in readiness for when they move onto permanent accommodation.
10.3	The decision will only affect homeless service users who require temporary accommodation. In line with Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996, the Council must offer emergency accommodation if it has reason to believe a person might be homeless, eligible based on their immigration status and have a priority need. Individuals within this group of service users may have one or more of the protected characteristics, however the service does not specifically target any individuals or groups who fall into one of these categories.
<b>11.</b>	<b>Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change</b>
11.1	This proposal has no additional impact on emissions.
<b>12.</b>	<b>Implications for Partners</b>
12.1	The Council's temporary accommodation provision and support offer is assisted heavily by partner agencies. All partnership working affected by the decision has been considered.
<b>13.</b>	<b>Risks and Mitigation</b>
13.1	A detailed analysis of the risks and mitigations of the 3 initial options have been considered via an Options Analysis. – Option 1 Business as usual (BAU), Option 2 Occupant Responsibility, and Option 3 Service Charge.
13.2	All risks, mitigations and benefits of the Occupant Responsibility model, along with resources required have been reviewed.
<b>14.</b>	<b>Accountable Officers</b>
14.1	Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing Sandra Tolley, Head of Housing Options

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