

COVID-19 RECOVERY – COUNCIL SERVICES – HOMELESSNESS

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That Cabinet consider the following recommendations from the COVID-19 RECOVERY - Council Services Task and Finish Group (CS T&FG):
- (a) To continue to accommodate those vulnerable people already placed into emergency accommodation during Covid-19;
 - (b) To explore and support move on options for all of these vulnerable people to resolve their homelessness once and for all; and
 - (c) To bring on board at the earliest opportunity existing projects to create further council owned temporary accommodation and to seek new opportunities for further units.

2. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to report back to Cabinet following a meeting of the COVID-19 Recovery – Council Services Task and Finish Group held on 14 July where Members considered the impact that COVID-19 has had on homelessness and the implications of this on the Council's budget.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide a homelessness service and to intervene in the early stages to prevent homelessness. Through the good work that has been done in adopting a sound Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2019, the Council was well placed to cope with the challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.2 The changes that the Council has implemented under the Strategy including increased partnership working with the voluntary sector and other statutory agencies, as well as creating its own temporary accommodation facilities placed the Council in a good position to deal with significant numbers of new homeless households, particularly single people, presenting to the Council at the height of the pandemic.
- 3.3 Officers have been working in accordance with the government guidance released during the pandemic in order to offer vulnerable homeless people a safe place to stay.

4. COUNCIL SERVICES TASK AND FINISH GROUP OVERVIEW

- 4.1 The Task and Finish Group received a presentation from the Executive Head of Governance and Housing and the Housing Options Service Manager at the last meeting. The Group is asking the Cabinet to support the recommendations in paragraph 1.1 of this report.

- 4.2 The Council had to react quickly at the start of the pandemic to spread out those in existing shared council accommodation and relocate residents to more self contained accommodation in order to protect the most vulnerable. Hotels closed with little notice leaving people homeless and caravan parks and campsites also closed their gates which led to a significant number of enquiries. However, the Council has maintained frontline homelessness services at all times.
- 4.3 The pandemic has seen an increase in rough sleepers being accommodated by the Council. There has also been a significant increase in single people, particularly males, presenting to the Council as homeless. Additional temporary accommodation had been required and the Council worked in partnership with local hotels to provide more bed spaces. At the height of the pandemic, over 85 households were in external emergency temporary accommodation and many of these households had complex needs.
- 4.4 Whilst the success in placing people in emergency temporary accommodation is acknowledged, there has been a significant increase in accommodation costs to the Council. Over £257,000 has been spent over and above the budget position for the period March – July 2020 and these pressures will continue for some time as there is likely to be an increased demand in the medium term future. National Grant funding from MHCLG has been announced to cover some emergency accommodation and long term housing options but there will be a considerable shortfall falling on the Council. Further details of funding bids are awaited.
- 4.5 The Government guidance to accommodate vulnerable people remains in place. More move on and temporary accommodation types and options for vulnerable people is needed. Support work is vital to assist people to sustain accommodation in the long term. The Task and Finish Group would like a variety of move on options to be explored for the vulnerable to resolve their homelessness. More Council owned temporary accommodation is also required and new opportunities should be investigated.

5. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None.

6. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 6.1 I fully support the Task and Finish Group's recommendations.

Further Information

Grainne O'Rourke
Executive Head of Governance and Housing
Tel: 023 8028 5588
Email: grainne.orourke@nfdc.gov.uk