

COMMUNITY & SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

24th JANUARY 2017

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOODS

HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of some of the key issues and trends within the borough in relation to homelessness, and outlines the service developments that have been or are being made to prevent and alleviate homelessness.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:-

- 2.1 Members note and understand the current homelessness position within Melton Borough.**
- 2.2 Members note and approve the Next Steps highlighted in sections 3.9-5.0.**
- 2.2 Members note the comparable figures with Leicestershire Councils presented in Appendix A**

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Like all Local Authorities in England Melton Borough Council have a duty to secure accommodation for unintentionally homeless households who fall into a 'priority need' category. There is no duty to secure accommodation for all homeless people. For example, there is no statutory duty to secure housing for homeless single people and couples without children who are not deemed to be vulnerable for some reason. It was recently highlighted that nationally Melton has a high number of "Homeless" per head of population, however in reality whilst we have a large number of people presenting themselves as "homeless" the number of those where we have an actual duty to find them accommodation remains relatively low. 82 people in 2014 & 67 people in 2015. The early indications for 2016 continue to see a reduction.
- 3.2 The purpose of Melton Borough Council's Housing Options service is to provide housing in emergency situations. It should be viewed as a safety net and not, as some may see it, as a way of speeding up the process of obtaining council or housing association accommodation.
- 3.3 All homelessness customers receive a formal interview, explaining a broad range of options and suggested solutions to each customer which always includes ways the customer can be helped to remain in their current home, delaying their move out of their current home so alternative accommodation can be arranged, or helping them to find alternative accommodation. More specifically this can include family mediation and help accessing accommodation in the private rented sector.
- 3.4 Homelessness arising from parents/friends/relatives being no longer willing or able to provide accommodation remains significant, as does homelessness arising from the breakdown of a relationship. However, the most frequently cited reason for loss of the last settled home is now the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector. See table 2 in Appendix A

- 3.5 The Localism Act 2011, provided powers that local authorities may discharge their homelessness duties by housing applicants in private rented sector accommodation, however whilst we fully support this approach, there is a declining availability of private rented accommodation willing to take those in receipt of Housing Benefit.
- 3.6 The overall supply of affordable housing is a key factor. In Melton demand is pushing prices up beyond the reach of a larger proportion of the population, thereby increasing pressure on the rented sectors. In turn, this pressure pushes private rents up, causing more people to apply for Council housing.
- 3.7 With households presenting as homeless there has been an increase in those presenting with complex and multiple needs. A lot of these clients are already linked with other services or have dropped out of engagement. We all know that just having extra support needs is more likely to impact negatively on one's ability to find or sustain accommodation. The Housing Options team are becoming more involved in unravelling these issues before any proactive work can commence. This is where our abilities to work alongside other agencies have proven invaluable. Partnership working has grown and the engagement of partners such as the voluntary sector, health colleagues and CAB has become more relevant to not only assist the clients with housing but also with health and tenancy sustainment for the future.
- 3.8 The new welfare reforms announced over the last 18 months have particularly marked consequences for families with more than two children, and for out-of-work young single people aged 18-21 who, subject to specific exemptions, may be entirely excluded from support with their housing costs or otherwise subject to the very low Shared Accommodation Rate of Housing Benefit in the social as well as the private rented sector. Universal Credit also has an adverse impact on supporting the homeless. The average waiting time for Universal Credit to be paid to claimants is currently 7-8 weeks which is another reason private rented landlords

Next Steps

- 3.9 The new proposed Homelessness Reduction Bill currently going through Parliament makes changes to the current homelessness legislation. It places duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. It requires local authorities to provide new homelessness services to all those affected, not just those who are protected under existing legislation.
- 3.10 Currently the threat of homelessness is defined as beginning 28 days before a person is likely to become homeless. The bill would extend that period to 56 days, giving people longer to seek help from their local authority. The Bill requires local housing authorities to carry out an assessment of the applicant's needs, and that the steps agreed between the local housing authority and the applicant are set out in writing – in the form of a personalised plan. We await further clarification and how the proposals will be funded.

4.0 Good Practice and area of Focus

These are just a few examples of measures that have been put in place to help in the reduction of homelessness.

- Hospital Discharge team working with the Boroughs and Districts at an early stage to enable a smooth transition for clients with medical and health issues to move planned and timely manner into suitable accommodation.
- Partnership working has evolved and enabled some Boroughs to secure accommodation jointly, in particular for the use of temporary supported accommodation. i.e. 16-17 year old protocol.

- The No Second Night Out (NSNO) service for the County that has helped to provide temporary accommodation for Rough Sleepers for the last 2 years.
- Regular training of the Customer Service Team to provide help and information to aid customers facing homelessness.
- Made a Leicestershire wide bid to the £10 million rough sleeping prevention fund to help individuals who might be struggling to get by from ending up on the street.
- Contributed to the Leicestershire wide bid to the £20 million for local authorities to trial new initiatives, responding to the specific needs in their communities and focusing on prevention at an earlier stage; these areas will work with a wider group of at risk people to help families and individuals before they reach crisis point.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The decline of availability in the Private Rented Sector to customers that approach for assistance has already seen some impact. This raises concerns for Melton with the impact of recent Government legislation, Tax implications, changes to the Buy to Let mortgages, the impact of the Local Housing Allowance being in line with current private rental charges and Welfare Reform cuts making this sector even more affordable and less accessible.
- 5.2 Melton Borough Council is part of the Leicestershire Homeless Delivery Group (HDG) and can conclude that despite changing legislation, funding cuts and service closures, homelessness has for the periods discussed been maintained at below the national trends.

Members are asked to consider and approve the next steps and key areas of focus to manage the on-going demand to enable ore proactive, prevention and intervention mitigation.

An exempt [Housing Foyer] is being presented elsewhere on the agenda which identifies potential resources to support these next steps.

6.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Although there are no direct policy and corporate implications arising from this report. Effective use of existing resources coupled with the support form external agencies aim to mitigate the overall impact of homelessness.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Over the last 2 years there has been considerable financial pressure on the homelessness budget. The use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation, whilst always the last resort, is expensive. However there continues to be is a need to use this form of temporary accommodation due to the lack of available alternative properties. During 2016/17 the number of homeless cases and subsequent use of B&B accommodation has reduced slightly, however there is a predicted forecast of an overspend of £21k on homelessness. Monthly monitoring of this budget continues.
- 5.2 Further pressure will be put on the Housing Options service once the full implications of the new Homelessness Reduction legislation are announced. It is expected that funding will be limited and may not cover any additional resources or support required to deliver this new policy.

5.3 The changes in funding for supported accommodation such as the Melton Foyer will may make it challenging financially for these schemes. This in turn will put further pressure on an already dwindling stock of suitable accommodation. There will need to be a greater focus on early intervention and support for those young people facing homelessness or requiring suitable accommodation.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

6.1 There are currently no legal implications directly arising from this report. We will consider any implications of the new homelessness reduction legislation in the future.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

7.1 There are no community safety issues with regard to the recommendations in this report.


8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 No initial equalities issues have been identified

9.0 RISKS

9.1 The risks are considered in the table below

Very High A				
High B				
Significa nt C			2	
Low D		1		
Very Low E				
Almost Impossi ble F				
	IV Neglig ible	III Margi nal	II Critica l	I Catast - rophic



Impact

Risk No.	Description
1	Prospective tenants cannot access affordable housing.
2.	Unable to meet the implications of the Homelessness Prevention Bill

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no climate change issues directly arising from this report.

11.0 CONSULTATIONS

11.1 Consultation has taken place with internal staff, Leicestershire District Council and the Leicestershire Citizen Advice Bureau.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 All wards which contain Council properties are affected.

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Date: 6th January 2017

Appendices: A- Countywide Homeless Figures

Background Papers None

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