

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2019-2022

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To present to Members progress on the Action Plan since the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2019-2022 was adopted in 2019. The Action Plan is attached as Appendix 1 of this report.

2 Recommendations/for decision

- | | |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2.1 | That Members review and endorse the Housing and Homelessness Strategy action plan updates which includes progress and achievements up to the end of June 2019. |
| 2.2 | That Members are happy for the action plan updates to be uploaded onto the AVDC website for the public to view. |

3 Executive summary (if longer than 2 pages)

- 3.1 The Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2019-2022 (the Strategy) was produced following a review of the housing and homelessness needs of residents within the Vale and outlines the Council's plan on addressing these needs for the next three years.

3.2 Preparations for Unitary

The Housing Team is part of the countywide housing work stream and work is currently taking place on mapping of all contracts and processes. Information is being collated on existing stakeholder contracts to ensure that relationships will be maintained post Vesting Day.

Transitional provisions allow up to 24 months for a new countywide strategy to be produced. As the AVDC Housing and Homelessness Strategy is valid until 2022, the immediate focus is on maintaining business as usual for all clients referring into the service with an emphasis on providing a consistent approach regardless of which "front door" the client enters. Beyond this, a new county-wide strategy will start to be developed that will continue to uphold the positive contribution that AVDC and the other districts have made to homelessness in the Vale.

- 3.3 Four strategic aims were identified and below are highlighted notable achievements within each of the aims during the period of January to June 2019.

Strategic Aim No 1 – the Prevention of Rough Sleeping

- 3.4 In February 2019 the number of rough sleepers fell below 10. However on the most recent count in May 2019 there were 17 identified rough sleepers. The annual statutory counts are made publicly available. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2018>). Numbers continue to present a challenge, particularly new flow (new rough sleepers), which has far exceeded expectation. Although a significant increase locally, an increase is reflected in all other authorities. However, data on rough sleepers is complex and fluid and cannot be viewed in isolation of the work conducted to support those at risk from homelessness.
- 3.5 Rough Sleeper Initiative counts are conducted bi-monthly and are closely scrutinised against the detailed Rough Sleeper action plan, which is a living document and regularly reviewed. A significant challenge remains with a lack of high needs supported accommodation within the county.

- 3.6 Implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act continues to place demands on the Housing Team as more complex recording of data is required.
- 3.7 During our Winter Emergency Provision, we partnered with Riverside Housing who manage our temporary accommodation at Bearbrook, to provide local emergency accommodation during the coldest periods and this proved to be a successful partnership.
- 3.8 In February 2019, the first properties were supplied and released by Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust as part of a housing first type model for medium risk clients.
- 3.9 Arising from lessons learnt from the Building Resilience Pilot, the Districts have funded a county-wide short-term Prison/Probation and Housing Liaison Officer contract provided by Connection Support, to ensure prisons meet their statutory Duty to Refer, which came into effect in October 2019.

The Housing Team are closely monitoring referrals from the prison service to ensure they are complying with the Duty to Refer requirement.

- 3.10 The Tenancy Sustainment Contract managed by Bucks County Council has been extended to include support for new tenants.

Strategic Aim No 2 - To facilitate and maximise the supply of affordable housing

- 3.11 The number of new affordable homes, for the period January to June 2019 was 155 new units. There is no statutory obligation to provide a target of new affordable homes but local authorities can set their own internal estimates. Due to a number of factors such as delays in development and processing of legal documentation there is often slippage. However our aim is to provide the maximum number of new affordable homes as possible. According to the Government's Affordable Housing Supply statistics 2017-18 Aylesbury consistently achieves more new affordable homes than the other districts in the county. We are also exploring shared equity loans in Haddenham.
- 3.12 We are looking to bring forward a number of social rented houses. The current figure is 34 but is subject to change as we cannot predict the exact number of completions of approved units by end March 2020.
- 3.13 A proportion of the new homes bonus has been ring-fenced for the delivery of new affordable housing.
- 3.14 The Accommodation Officer post, which was funded through the Rough Sleeper Initiative is working well to manage and maximise the provision of our temporary accommodation at Griffin Place. Client support is provided at Griffin Place by the charity Barnados.
- 3.15 Bucks Home Choice, the social housing allocation policy for Bucks, has been reviewed and the new policy will go live on 1st October 2019.
- 3.16 The Environmental Health Team successfully prosecuted landlords in breach of HMO Licensing rules. The team continues to work closely with the police and other agencies to act on intelligence and public concerns about either licensed or unlicensed properties.
- 3.17 A draft masterplan for Aylesbury Garden Town is currently being developed. Reference will be made to housing and homelessness challenges experienced by Aylesbury residents to support future local plan policies as part of the new unitary authority.

Strategic Aim No 3 - Responding to the ongoing challenges of welfare reform

- 3.18 The Revenue and Benefits team continue to support Universal Credit (UC) Claimants and have forged closer working with the housing team to mitigate its effects and have helped prevent instances of homelessness.
- 3.19 The Housing Debt Advice team have seen increased referrals from those in financial difficulty including those in receipt of direct payments. The team work closely with the Housing Benefits Team to enable access to the Discretionary Housing Payment fund and improvements have been made to the fund to help streamline the decision making process.

The fund is used to help supplement housing benefit or UC where there is a shortfall between the housing benefit and the cost of rent. A Supreme Court ruling in April this year, upheld that tenants who are unable to make up this shortfall should not be forced to spend subsistence benefits (i.e. money intended for their and their children's most basic daily living needs such as food and heating) on rent to avoid homelessness. To this end, there has been an increase use of this fund.

Since April 2019, Citizens Advice deliver a service called "Help to Claim" for customers who require extra support when making a new UC claim or moving onto UC. The service offers tailored, practical support throughout a customer's claim until they receive their first full correct payment. This means AVDC are no longer helping clients with budgeting support or assisted digital support with new claims.

Strategic Aim no 4 - Contribute to the improvement of health and wellbeing services for people at risk of homelessness

- 3.20 The Mental Health Nurse post within the Housing Team is working well to identify homeless people who have mental health needs and liaises with mental health services to ensure they receive appropriate and timely referrals.
- 3.21 The Housing Team have met with the Clinical Commissioning Group, who do not have a Duty to Refer, to explain the need for GP's to identify to the Housing team, patients at risk of homelessness, at the earlier opportunity and how to refer those at risk to the Housing Service.

New legislation and consultations

The following new pieces of legislation were introduced this year:

- 3.22 The Homes Act (Fitness for Habitation) came into force on 20th March 2019, which gives additional rights to tenants who live in social or privately rented houses and flats.
- 3.23 A draft Domestic Abuse Bill was published on 21st January 2019 together with a consultation document.
- 3.24 In addition, AVDC Officers have responded to the following Government Consultations:
- Tackling Homelessness, which sought the views of homelessness partners on the effectiveness of existing non-statutory and statutory local accountability and partnership structures and how these might be improved.

- A call for evidence on the statutory principles of the Mental Capacity Act Code of Practice and how it can be best refined and improved to reflect current needs.
- A call for evidence on considering the case for a Housing Court.
- MHCLG Allocations Evidence Collection Exercise (linked to recommendations within the Social Housing Green Paper)
- Improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces, Veterans and their families.

Conclusion

Much has been achieved in the period since the new Housing and Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan was approved. Officers continue to balance business as usual against their involvement on unitary work streams as well as keeping a watching brief on any impact arising from Brexit and the effect that a “no deal” scenario may have on housing and homelessness such as a change in the eligibility criteria for immigration status of some EU Nationals. Housing and Homelessness continues to be a priority for many services within the Council and considerable efforts have been made to improve and identify opportunities, for closer working between them.

4 Supporting information

4.1 The Housing and Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2022.

5 Resource implications

5.1 None