

SUBJECT:	<i>Homelessness in South Bucks - Update</i>
RELEVANT MEMBER	<i>Healthy Communities Portfolio Holder Councillor Patrick Hogan</i>
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Head of Healthy Communities – Martin Holt</i>
REPORT AUTHOR	<i>Housing Manager – Michael Veryard</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>All Wards</i>

1. Purpose of Report

At Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25th February 2019, Members requested an update on homelessness in South Bucks district. The purpose of this report is to update Members on homelessness in the South Bucks district and on the delivery of the Council's statutory homelessness services including the provision of temporary accommodation.

RECOMMENDATION

That the contents of the report are noted

2. Executive Summary

The Council has implemented the legal changes to its homelessness service required by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (which came into effect from 3rd April 2018). The overall number of households in temporary accommodation reduced during 2018/19 with a particular reduction in the number in nightly booked accommodation. This has been secured via homelessness prevention measures and by developing additional types of temporary accommodation (e.g. private sector leasing).

3. Reasons for Recommendations

The report is for noting.

4. Content of Report

4.1 During 2017/18 a Homelessness Task and Finish Group undertook a full review of the Council's delivery of its statutory homelessness services including the provision of temporary accommodation. Recommendations and an Action Plan was agreed and implemented with a final report going to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30th January 2018.

4.2 Following the adoption and implementation of the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 became law from 3rd April 2018. This Act introduced significant changes to the Council's statutory homelessness duties including:

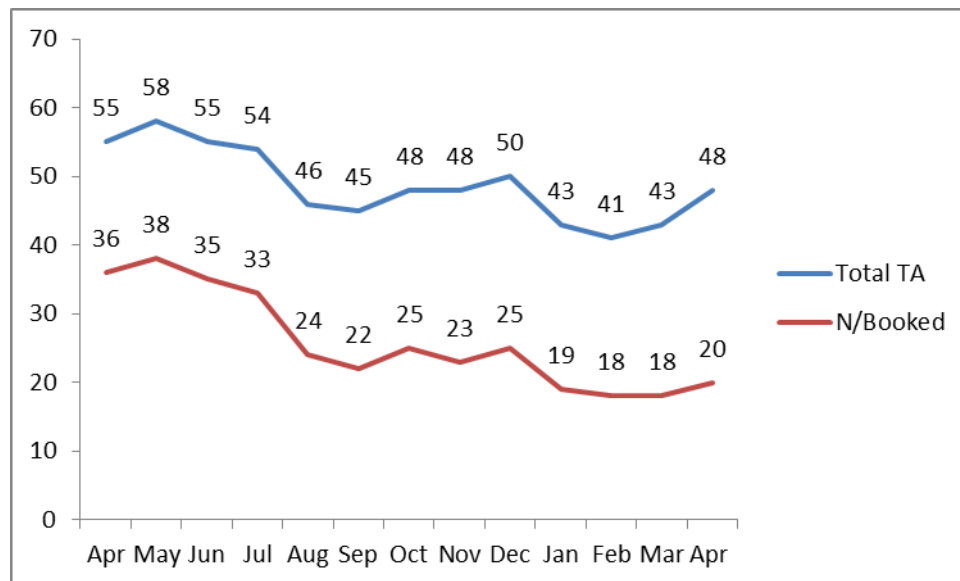
- (i) A requirement that the Council must accept a homelessness application from any persons who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days (previously 28 days),
- (ii) The introduction of a new Prevention duty to assist all households who are threatened with homelessness.
- (iii) The introduction of a new Relief duty requiring the Council to work with homeless households for a minimum of 56 days to try to resolve their homelessness (including providing temporary accommodation for priority need households during this period)
- (iv) A requirement to provide all applicants with a personalised action plan.
- (v) A formal Duty to Refer requiring other statutory agencies to refer homeless clients to the Council (including social services, Job Centres, some health services and Prison and Probation).

Appendix 1 summarises the new homelessness applications process that the Council has been required to follow since 3 April 2018. The remainder of this report provides an overview of how the Council has responded to the first year of the new statutory homelessness requirements and how it has managed the delivery of temporary accommodation over this period.

SBDC Homelessness Services in 2018/19 – General Overview

4.3 During 2018/19, South Bucks District Council received a total of 107 homelessness applications which triggered either the Prevention or Relief Duty (see paragraph 4.2 above). This compares to a total of 102 homelessness applications in the preceding year, 2017/18. The change in legal duties from 3rd April 2018 means that this is not a like-for-like comparison. However, it does indicate that the overall number of homelessness applications was broadly the same in 2018/19 as it was in 2017/18.

4.4 During 2018/19, South Bucks District Council saw an overall reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation as shown in the chart below:

Chart 1 – SBDC – Number of Households in Temporary Accommodation 18/19

4.5 Overall, the number of households in temporary accommodation saw an annual drop of 12% at the end of the year 2018/19 (55 down to 48). However, within this total, the number of households in nightly booked temporary accommodation had dropped more significantly with a 44% reduction overall (36 down to 20). This had significant implications for the Council's budget as nightly booked accommodation generates significant cost for the Council.

4.6 By way of comparison, at the end of 2018/19, the LGA (Local Government Association) undertook a survey of all local housing authorities to assess the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act one year after it came into force. The survey recorded that 83% of authorities had seen an increase in homelessness applications and 61% had seen an increase in the use of temporary accommodation. Therefore, the work undertaken in South Bucks District Council in managing the homelessness service and the associated temporary accommodation has helped the authority to go against the national picture in 2018/19. Unlike the majority of other local housing authorities, the Council maintained homelessness applications at a broadly similar level to the previous year and managed to secure a reduction in temporary accommodation numbers.

4.7 The other main headlines from the first year of operating the Homelessness Reduction Act provisions in South Bucks District Council are below:

- (i) The development of alternative temporary accommodation options has helped to reduce the reliance on bed and breakfast and nightly booked accommodation (see further details below).
- (ii) Officers are spending more time on case work and paperwork with each client (including the production of a personalised action plan for each client, additional letters and case work administration).

- (iii) Officers are working with clients to try to prevent and relieve homelessness wherever possible. This includes negotiating with family and landlords to allow applicants to remain in their home and/or helping them to access other accommodation via Bucks Home Choice and private renting. However, factors such as high local rent levels and the cap on Local Housing Allowance (which limits the level of housing benefit for private rented sector tenants) are severely restricting the ability of clients to be able to move into private rented housing in South Bucks. This is a common issue in many local housing authorities as highlighted by the LGA survey.
- (iv) Officers have implemented and applied the new duties effectively and in accordance with the new legal requirements. There has not been any upturn in review requests or challenges. However, we may see an increase in the future as more legal challenges start to happen across the country.
- (v) The impact of the Duty to Refer from other statutory agencies has been limited so far. However, we are starting to see an increase in referrals as other agencies start to get more familiar with the process.

SBDC Homelessness Services in 2018/19 – Temporary Accommodation

4.8 Under the provisions introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act, the Council has a duty to secure temporary accommodation when it accepts a Homelessness Relief Duty and it has reason to believe that the applicant is in priority need (e.g. household with or expecting children, applicant with significant medical issues etc.). The Relief Duty lasts for a minimum of 56 days. Therefore, the Council will normally have to provide temporary accommodation for at least 56 days before it can make a final decision on whether or not it has a duty to secure longer term accommodation for the household. If the Council accepts this longer term duty then it has to continue to provide temporary accommodation until the applicant can secure a permanent move elsewhere.

4.9 Appendix 2 includes a table showing a month by month breakdown of temporary accommodation provision during 2018/19. Further background information on each type of temporary accommodation is given below:

4.10 Bed and Breakfast/Nightly Booked Accommodation – The Council places applicants directly into this accommodation and pays a nightly rate directly to the landlord. The Council then re-charges the applicants £25.00 per night towards the cost of the accommodation (the Housing Act 1996 allows the Council to make a reasonable charge to applicants in relation to the costs that it is paying).

4.11 The nightly rate payable by the Council will vary depending on the type of accommodation and size of household. A review of applicants who were in nightly booked accommodation in March 2019 (including those who moved out during that month):

- The nightly rate being paid for a B&B (with shared facilities) ranged from £30.00 per night to £65.00 per night
- The nightly rate for self-contained nightly booked accommodation (typically used for larger families) ranged from £65.00 to £85.00 per night. Payments of £85.00 per night tend only to be made in exceptional cases with a larger family. In these cases, the focus will be to move these families on to other temporary accommodation (e.g. private sector leasing) as soon as possible.
- Overall, the average nightly rate being paid by the Council for a placement during March 2019 was £55.00 per night.
- These are gross nightly costs and do not include the £25.00 per night charge that the Council makes in turn to the applicant.
- Comparisons with the rates paid by other authorities are difficult to make as this information is not generally shared. Many authorities are looking to generally reduce their use of nightly booked accommodation in the same way as South Bucks District Council is doing. Informal discussions with other authorities over the last 12 months indicate that the rates paid by South Bucks District Council are comparable with other authorities and are lower in some cases.

The highest nightly costs are for larger self-contained family units. In reducing the number of nightly booked units overall, the Housing Options service has particularly focussed on reducing the number of households in self-contained units. This number dropped from 19 down to 8 during 2018/19 (a reduction of nearly 58%).

4.12 Gerrards Cross Former Police Houses – During the first 8 months of 2018/19, the Council continued to utilise 8 former Police Houses as temporary accommodation. Originally, the houses were leased by Bucks Housing Association from Thames Valley Police and the Council nominated homeless households to occupy the properties. When the Council acquired the site from Thames Valley Police, it continued to lease the houses to Bucks Housing Association for this purpose. The Council required vacant possession of the site at the beginning of December 2018 in order to allow redevelopment to commence. In the months leading up to this, the Council's Senior Housing Options Officer worked with the 8 existing occupiers, Bucks Housing Association, L&Q and other partners to ensure that all occupiers were moved on by the December 2018 deadline. As result of this work, 6 of the occupiers were moved directly into L&Q tenancies and 1 occupier moved directly into a PSL (Private Sector Leasing Scheme) property with Paradigm. The remaining occupier had to be moved into temporary nightly booked accommodation for a short time before being moved on to a L&Q tenancy in February 2019. All of the former police houses were vacated by the December 2018 deadline and the site to be handed over to the contractor as planned.

4.13 Private Sector Leasing Scheme (PSL Scheme) – The PSL scheme operated in partnership with Paradigm grew considerably during 2018/19 to meet a significant proportion of the Council's temporary accommodation requirements. Under the scheme, Paradigm lease properties from individual owners and then let

them to homeless applicants who are nominated by the Council. Paradigm enters into a tenancy agreement with the applicant (including rent payments). The Council is not liable for any rent payments or arrears. It pays a flat rate management fee to Paradigm. During 2018/19, the PSL scheme expanded from 1 property to 20 properties and by the end of the year was meeting 42% of the Council's overall temporary accommodation requirements.

- 4.14 Bucks Housing Association Acquisitions** – The Council provided capital funding of £360,000 to support Bucks Housing Association to acquire three properties in South Bucks to be utilised as temporary accommodation for Council homelessness applicants. The acquisitions were completed during the latter part of 2018/19 and are all now being utilised as temporary accommodation. Bucks Housing Association enters into a tenancy agreement directly with the applicant (including rent payments). The Council is not liable for any rent payments or arrears and does not make any ongoing payments to Bucks Housing Association for the properties.
- 4.15 Other Registered Provider Accommodation** – A small number of units within the general needs housing stock owned by L&Q and Paradigm continue to be utilised as temporary accommodation. These are mainly historical cases as the registered providers have advised that they do not normally wish to let general needs stock as temporary accommodation. However, they will still consider this on a case by case basis if there are exceptional circumstances (e.g. a large family where suitable temporary accommodation may not be available from other sources).
- 4.16 Bath Road (Walters Court and 801 Bath Road)** – These units are not shown in the Table as they were still in development during 2018/19. The scheme is providing a total of 14 units (12 at Walter Court and 2 at 801 Bath Road) that will provide a significant additional supply of temporary accommodation (to further reduce the reliance on B&B or other nightly booked accommodation). The units will be leased to Bucks Housing Association and, in turn, Bucks Housing Association will enter into tenancy agreements (including rent payments) directly with homeless applicants nominated by the Council. The Council will not be liable for any rent payments or arrears or any other ongoing payments to Bucks Housing Association in connection with the properties.
- 4.17** As shown in the above paragraphs, the Council's Housing Options service has worked throughout 2018/19 to maximise homelessness prevention and develop additional strands of temporary accommodation in order to manage demand and provide alternatives to the use of B&B and nightly booked temporary accommodation. The new units at Bath Road form one strand of this work and were originally scheduled to be completed in the latter part of 2018/19. However, the Housing Options service has not been working on the basis that these units will become available on any specific date. The service has been working to deliver a wide range of homelessness prevention and temporary accommodation options

and the Bath Road units will provide a valuable additional resource as and when they are ready to occupy.

SBDC Homelessness Services in 2018/19 – Expenditure

4.18 The reduction in the use of B&B and nightly booked temporary accommodation has helped to reduce the costs incurred by the Council on its homelessness service. The budget outturn figures for 2018/19 shows that the total net expenditure on the Council's overall homelessness budget was £237,887 against a budget of £269,970.

SBDC Homelessness Services in 2019/20 – Issues going forward

4.19 The early weeks of 2019/20 has seen a continued upturn in the number of households in temporary accommodation although the number still remains below where it was at the beginning of 2018/19. As at 14 May, the total number in temporary accommodation was as follows:

Type of Temporary Accommodation	Number (at 14/5/19)
B&B	12
Other nightly booked	6
Private Sector Leasing Scheme	25
Bucks Housing Association acquisitions	3
Other Registered Providers	5
Total in Temporary Accommodation	51

4.20 The above table shows that which there continues to be a slight increase in the overall demand for temporary accommodation, the Council is continuing to minimise the number of households in B&B or nightly booked accommodation (18 in total). At the time of writing, it is anticipated that both the Bath Road scheme and lettings in the forthcoming Denham development will allow some of these households to move on. Overall, the trends nationally and locally indicate that the demand for temporary accommodation is unlikely to drop significantly during 2019/20. The increased range of temporary accommodation options that were brought forward during 2018/19 and the Bath Road scheme will both help the Council in managing this demand.

4.21 As reported above, other authorities have seen an upturn in homelessness applications following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. It is possible that we will start to see this in South Bucks as well during 2019/20 as clients and other agencies become more familiar with the new legal requirements that are now in place. The Duty to Refer may see more homeless clients being referred to the Council from other statutory agencies. We are also starting the see

the first legal challenges in other Councils relating to how the Act is being implemented and this may have a knock on effect in generating more applications depending on the legal rulings. Officers will continue to monitor this.

5. Consultation

Not applicable

6. Options (*if any*)

Not applicable.

7. Corporate Implications

Reports must include specific comments addressing the following implications;

7.1 Financial

The main report contains details of the budget out-turn for 2018/19.

7.2 Legal

This report deals with the delivery of the Council's statutory homelessness duties under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017)

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

This report links to the following Policy Objectives

- Delivering cost- effective, customer- focused services
- Working towards safe and healthier local communities

9. Next Steps

Officers will continue to update Members on key issues relating to the Homelessness service and the provision of temporary accommodation

Background Papers:	None, other than those referred to in this report.
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