

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

UPDATE ON THE DEMAND FOR ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR SINGLE HOMELESS PEOPLE

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE STRATEGIC HOUSING MANAGER (ACTING UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY IN THE ABSENCE OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF REGULATORY SERVICES)

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR SEAN PRENDERGAST, THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet Members with an update on the local demand for accommodation and support services for single homeless people, which has risen significantly since the start of the pandemic.

2. STEPS TO DATE

- 2.1 This update has been requested by Cllr Sean Prendergast, the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

Covid-19 impact

- 3.1 The Council, as a local housing authority, has duties contained within homelessness legislation to provide advice and support to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and to provide accommodation for specific groups of homeless households. Although the Council no longer owns any housing stock, under the 'interim accommodation duty', the Council must provide emergency accommodation for households approaching as homeless and who may be in 'priority need' – primarily families and vulnerable individuals.
- 3.2 The Covid-19 pandemic dramatically changed this prevailing landscape, with the government issuing its 'Everyone In' directive in March 2020. This required local authorities to provide emergency accommodation with immediate effect, for all those sleeping rough in their areas including those at risk of sleeping rough. This effectively extended the existing interim accommodation duty to include a whole new cohort of single homeless people (and some couples too).
- 3.3 The Council has provided emergency accommodation in line with 'Everyone In' for almost 200 people since the start of the pandemic, many of whom had multiple placements over this period (this was in addition to priority need households accommodated in line with usual duties). The vast majority of these have been single people, and most were at risk of rough sleeping rather than physically living on the street. Large numbers were placed in local hotels initially due to a lack of capacity in purpose built temporary accommodation, which is also largely family housing and not

suitable for single people. Shared hostel accommodation was deemed to be unsuitable in this public health emergency.

Demand for temporary accommodation

- 3.4 The additional demand from Covid-19, on top of the Council’s usual duties towards homeless families and other households in priority need, has placed exceptional pressure on temporary accommodation (TA) over the past two years. The table below illustrates the impact of the pandemic at the end of 2019/20, when numbers in TA started to rise, fuelled by a significant increase in single people being accommodated through ‘Everyone In’. Hotel usage also rose substantially as a result, with a corresponding financial impact as these placements are Council funded. Over the last two financial years, hotel bookings have cost the Council in excess of £400k.

Households in temporary accommodation (snapshots at year end)

	31/3/19	31/3/20	31/3/21	31/3/22	08/06/22
Total households in TA at year end	85	93	136	104	106
<i>Of which:</i>					
single households	15	33	72	46	47
hotel placements	4	19	58	15	16

- 3.5 Although remaining Covid-19 restrictions have now been removed in England, numbers of single people in TA and hotel usage remain exceptionally high compared to pre-pandemic levels. This is likely a result of single homeless people engaging more fully with Council and other services now as a result of the ‘Everyone In’ directive whereas previously they may not have done, given the limited duties owed to single people. Future demand is likely to remain high with additional pressures arising from the current cost of living crisis and the ongoing and increasing challenge of sourcing affordable accommodation in the private rented sector locally.

Single homeless households

- 3.6 The pandemic revealed a large, previously hidden cohort of single people in the district who are living unstable, often chaotic lives. Many are moving in and out of informal accommodation arrangements including enduring spells of ‘sofa surfing’ with friends or relatives or periods of rough sleeping. The Council placed over 150 single households into temporary accommodation over 2021/22, the majority approaching from unsettled accommodation arrangements. Almost one-third were of no fixed abode, whilst 13% were sleeping rough and a further 8% were homeless on departure from prison or hospital. 10% had been living in temporary or supported accommodation, highlighting a core of clients who have repeatedly lost placements made for them by the Council due to challenging behaviours and unmet support needs.
- 3.7 Support needs amongst this cohort are extremely high. Of the single households placed in TA over the past year, 80% had at least one identified support need with over 60% having two or more. Poor mental health was by far the most common, with over half of households reporting this. Almost one-third had poor physical health, with a similar proportion being at risk of or having experienced some form of abuse, including domestic abuse. Alcohol and/or drug dependency was also prevalent (23% of households) whilst 18% had an offending history. Over one-third of households had a history of repeat homelessness or rough sleeping, again reflecting the instability of individuals’ lives and entrenched, unmet support needs.

The single homeless pathway

- 3.8 The Council and its partners has begun to develop an integrated and sustainable pathway of accommodation and support services for single homeless people, including those with the most complex needs. New support-based accommodation services have been brought online in conjunction with local partners due to the demand levels outlined earlier and also as the Sanctuary hostel in Hitchin (which is male only) had to scale down its occupancy overnight due to its dormitory nature and the public health risks posed by the pandemic. All clients on the pathway are supported on-site and assisted to access specialist external support, ensuring that housing, health and social care, criminal justice departments and other local services are brought together in a targeted way. The Council has additionally worked with Hertfordshire CC; as part of their approach to supporting people with complex needs, they have funded a new outreach support service for clients with mental health and substance dependency issues in each of the 10 district/boroughs.
- 3.9 The government is seeking to end rough sleeping by 2024 and much of this additional accommodation capacity has been funded following successful Council bids to government homelessness schemes; a further bid was submitted to the Rough Sleeping Initiative 5 round, with the outcome of this currently embargoed until further notice.
- 3.10 The pathway however remains significantly oversubscribed as evidenced by continuing high hotel use and there are gaps in provision for some groups including women and those with the most complex support needs. There is also uncertainty around the development of the planned new 40-unit hostel at Protea Way in Letchworth. This gained planning approval in February 2021, however a significant increase in construction costs has forced the housing provider, Haven First, to consider alternative delivery routes. Haven First have made it clear however that the development at Protea Way remains the key objective of their Board of Trustees.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 A report will be produced for the next Cabinet meeting on 13 September 2022, with proposals for the allocation of government grants for homelessness services to secure support and accommodation options for single homeless people for 2022/23 and beyond.

5. APPENDICES

- 5.1 None.

6. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 6.1 Martin Lawrence, Strategic Housing Manager, martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk, 01462 474250

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Letter to local authorities from Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing: [Annual rough sleeping snapshot statistics 2021 and our vision to end rough sleeping - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)