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<b>Subject:</b>	<b>HOMELESS PERFORMANCE MONITORING</b>
<b>Meeting and Date:</b>	<b>Scrutiny (Policy and Performance) Committee – 2 July 2019</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Louise Taylor, Strategic Housing Manager</b>
<b>Classification:</b>	<b>UNRESTRICTED</b>

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**Purpose of the report:** To brief members on the work undertaken by the Housing Options Team in response to homeless applications, the role of the Homeless Advisory Group and current performance indicators for the service.

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**Recommendation:** That the contents of the report be noted

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1) **Summary**

1.1 Local councils have a legal duty to help certain people who ask for help when they are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The help provided may take the form of giving advice and assistance to help resolve their housing problem or, under certain circumstances, providing interim housing. At the request of members of Scrutiny this report sets out, in summary the work that the Housing Options Officers do to help those at risk of becoming homeless, the role that the cross party Homelessness Advisory Group have in monitoring the service and details current performance management indicators.

2) **Introduction and Background**

2.1 Local councils have a legal duty to help certain people if they ask a council for help when they are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The help provided may take the form of providing housing or giving advice and assistance to help resolve their housing problem.

2.2 Every homelessness application has to be investigated thoroughly and the council has to provide emergency temporary accommodation if it decides that the household is likely to be homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need.

2.3 'Priority Need' includes Households with dependent children, pregnant women, young people (16/17), care leavers (18-21) and households who are vulnerable due to age, physical or mental ill-health or domestic violence.

2.4 The investigation will check whether the household has made itself intentionally homeless and that they have a local connection.

2.5 Wherever possible efforts are made to prevent homelessness from occurring eg helping the household secure housing in the private sector by providing financial assistance with rent deposits..

2.6 If, following completion of the investigation, it is determined that the council has a legal duty to provide assistance the household will normally be provided with temporary accommodation until they can be permanently rehoused.

2.7 The cost of the homelessness investigation/prevention service and provision of temporary accommodation are General Fund (GF) costs.

3) **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

3.1 On 3 April 2018 changes introduced by the Homeless Reduction Act came into effect. The key measures contained in the Act are:

- An extension of the period during which an authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days.
- A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness, **regardless of priority need**. LAs will be expected to help households to either stay in their accommodation or find somewhere to live regardless of priority need or intentionality. The duty is therefore to **assist** households to find a housing solution and does not place an automatic duty on the council to provide housing.
- A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants, regardless of priority need. This help could be, for example, the provision of a rent deposit or debt advice.
- A new duty to work with eligible applicants to develop a personalised housing plan that sets out the actions that the Local Authority will take to help the family and the actions that they need to take for themselves.
- A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless .

#### 4) **Factors Contributing to the Increase in Homelessness**

4.1 Following the Homelessness Act 2002 local authorities were encouraged to take a more proactive approach to preventing homelessness and over the following few years the number of acceptances and numbers in temporary accommodation fell.

4.2 Although Councils have maintained this preventative approach, homelessness has been steadily increasing over the past 5 years or so. Contributing factors include:

- Lack of overall housing supply resulting in increased house prices and increased affordability issues.
- Continuation of tighter lending criteria introduced following the credit crunch making it more difficult to access home ownership.
- As a consequence of the above, more households are having to access the private rented market thereby increasing demand and contributing to rent inflation as well as squeezing out lower income households especially those receiving housing benefit / Universal Credit.
- Private rented sector impacted by recent tax changes making buy to let less attractive and further adding to pressure on rents.
- Lack of tenant security in private rented sector – 6 monthly Assured Shorthold Tenancies are the standard form of tenancy – these give landlords an automatic right of possession at the end of the tenancy.
- Reduced supply of new affordable housing for rent. 1% rent reduction combined with increased risks from welfare reform means that shared ownership is the preferred affordable housing tenure type for housing associations.
- Welfare reforms:
  - Restriction of housing benefit at the shared accommodation rate for single people under 35.

- The setting of Local Housing Allowance rates that can be below local market rents and mean that tenants must top up the help they receive towards rental costs with their own money.
- Universal Credit: paid directly to claimant not landlords, increasing the risk of arrears, claimants have to wait weeks for claim to be assessed (may be longer if there are processing delays) and are then paid monthly in arrears.
- The reluctance of some landlords to accept tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

## 5) **The use of Temporary Accommodation**

- 5.1 The Council uses temporary accommodation to house households while their homelessness application is being investigated and while households wait for permanent housing once their application has been accepted.
- 5.2 The three main types of temporary accommodation used are:
- Bed & Breakfast
  - Self contained accommodation paid for on a nightly basis
  - Interim accommodation in the Council's own housing stock
- 5.3 Since April 2004, the law has said that families with children should not be housed in B&Bs except in an emergency, and then only for six weeks.
- 5.4 Regrettably there are some occasions when families need to be placed in Bed and Breakfast for very short periods of time. This is usually the result of a late or out of hours presentation as homeless.
- 5.6 Housing Options team members will try wherever possible to avoid this and move the family to self contained accommodation as quickly as possible.
- 5.4 Nightly paid accommodation generally takes the form of self- contained units that have been acquired by firms specialising in the provision of temporary accommodation.
- 5.5 Interim accommodation consists of self contained properties that Dover District Council have purchased on the open market for the specific purpose of providing good quality temporary accommodation for homeless families. These properties are primarily ex Council stock and dispersed throughout the general stock owned by the Council.

## 6) **The role of the Homeless advisory group**

- 6.1 To introduce effective and rigorous monitoring of the Homeless service a project advisory group was established in 2017. The membership of the group is cross party and their terms of reference include
- Monitoring trends in homelessness
  - Monitoring performance data
  - Looking at good practice in other local authority areas
  - Monitoring budgets for temporary accommodation
  - Making recommendations for projects that may help reduce homelessness
  - Monitoring projects that will increase access to temporary/interim or privately rented accommodation

- 6.2** The Homeless Advisory Group currently meet quarterly and their meetings are open to the public.
- 6.3 The group receive a number of detailed performance reports which provide information about the number of homeless applications per quarter, the number of families helped and the numbers placed in the different types of temporary accommodation.
- 7) Corporate performance monitoring**
- 7.1 Members currently review three performance indicators in respect of homelessness which in regard to the first two is based on data taken on the last day of the quarter. These are:
- HOU010a - The number of households living in temporary accommodation including B&B
  - HOU010b - The number of households in Bed and Breakfast
  - HOU012 - The number of children in B&B and nightly paid
- 7.2 At their last meeting Members of Scrutiny expressed their interest in the numbers of children who were living in Bed and Breakfast. Performance indicator HOU012 currently indicates the number of children belonging to families placed in both self contained temporary accommodation and Bed and Breakfast.
- 7.3 The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 has significantly increased the work that the Housing Options Officers do to help prevent homelessness and alternative indicators could potentially record the number of cases where successful intervention has prevented a homeless situation.
- 7.4 Members are aware that a review and update of the Corporate Performance Report is underway and the review will be informed of the discussions being had regarding homelessness indicators.
- 7.5 In whatever format the figures are shown they are a challenging indicator to include, especially in relation to the red, amber green (RAG) status. An increase in the numbers reflects in the report as a red status, implying a negative outcome. In terms of the budget impact the higher the figures the higher the financial impact on the GF. However, as supporting homeless households is a statutory duty the team have limited options to control the numbers requiring emergency housing and helping vulnerable households is a positive outcome for those affected. Consideration could be given to removing the RAG status from these indicators to recognise this conflict in status.

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