

Central Bedfordshire Council

Report to: Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP)
Date: May 2018
Report Title Homelessness
Contact Officers: Charlotte Gurney - Locality Manager, Housing Solutions

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of the TSP report is to examine what ways and to what effect CBC improving is the Customer Pathway for homeless people? The TSP enquiry is a collaboration between the Housing Solutions service and TSP with the recommendations coming from the TSP, these being within the scope of the TSP's remit to examine how customers experience and outcomes.

The following was included within the scope of this enquiry:

1. Homelessness Strategy Action Plan
2. Housing Solutions Service Plan

The Housing Service in parallel undertaken a review of the homelessness process to compliment the TSP's evaluation of customer experience, in the context of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

2. Scope

The TSP looked to understand the Housing Options approach (which is well established in statutory guidance) in relation to both the customer experience of homelessness; and the Improvement Plan being implemented to achieve better outcomes and a more positive customer pathway for people who experience homelessness. This is happening in the context of a comprehensive demand management approach across the Housing Service.

The main reason for the review was to understand the current homelessness pressures and the improvement journey (action plan etc.,) that being progressed, from a customer perspective.

During initial conversations with the TSP it was agreed that scrutiny of existing processes would be out of scope, with their focus being on the customer and how the service offer could be improved, during the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The TSP was therefore introduced to and asked to scrutinise the;

1. Transitional accommodation (TA)
2. Permanent accommodation

3. Appropriate and accessible accommodation (different from general needs – to fit individual needs)
4. Homelessness Strategy
5. Housing Solutions – latest review of their Action Plan
6. Presentation on Homelessness Reduction Act
7. Report on Modern Day Slavery with guidance for homelessness/councils
8. Homeless Forum minutes
9. Determination of homelessness (Legal process)
10. Interviewing of customers who are housed in Transitional Accommodation

During the TSP enquiry, regular communication was maintained and further information was provided to assist their enquiries;

Contact with the Night Owl Night Shelter Bus service run by Amicus Trust and funded by CBC.

3. Complementary Service Review and improvements

Review of the existing process noted the following actions have been put onto our work plan;

- I. A leaflet stand within homelessness/options meeting room
- II. Flat screen TV within homelessness/options meeting room showing you tube videos on homelessness/allocations/lets rent on loop
- III. Better information pointing to how to contact Out of Hours if homeless (like the idea of outdoor signage). This information is on the CBC Website.

The TSP noted we should understand where in CBC homelessness was occurring. We have learnt homelessness comes from everywhere in CBC and occurs to all types of tenures and social standing. It isn't limited to certain areas or types of people. It is just the more affluent you are, the easier it is to find something without needing council assistance. More important is the information on where people want to live to remain close to schools, doctor's surgeries etc., so we can plan for where to build and where more affordable homes are required.

With regards to Transitional Accommodation, the service agree that a local pack is a great idea and would be extremely useful for the Intensive Property Management Team to develop, for people staying in our various locations e.g. Bedford Court, Franklin House and new Transitional Accommodation coming on stream. Where information, maps of local area, shop location, Doctors can support the team who already have individual meetings with customers to assist them when they arrive.

We work with many partners and service providers. The new homelessness act is developing a prescribed list of those who will have a statutory duty to work with us, it will be released in October 2018. Until then we are continuing to build relationships with everyone we work with. Once there is a prescribed list we can add to our website and self-assessment toolkits (available on line) with contact details.

Benchmarking is carried out by government including every local authority data on every element of homelessness is released every month and you can compare to other. Link to this information is as follows; <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	HOUSING RESPONSE
1	<p>a) The overall, underlying problem is there is not enough housing for the central Bedfordshire area and in particular, not enough adequate housing (disabled accommodation, large properties, 4 beds plus, and older accommodation to support the rightsizing approach.</p> <p>b) There is not enough housing being built to house the growing population of central Bedfordshire.</p> <p>c) Need in Dunstable is substantial and is least provided for in the Local Plan. The gap is substantial.</p>	<p>Agree more Housing is needed, there is a lot of work going on in this area. Whilst we also undertake demand management work to ensure best use of existing stock</p> <p>We will continue to work with Council colleagues in future planning numbers of houses needed and best locations</p> <p>In the last budget we requested money to buy more stock to use as TA and then maybe in the future convert to permanent accommodation. This was approved (£13m). (SEE NOTES BELOW) More affordable housing is required in Dunstable, more than anywhere else.</p>
2	<p>More accommodation needs to be available now and in the future for the ratios of the Housing temporary on licence clients or permanent clients</p>	<p>Franklin House is being refurbished, it will be available in the summer of 2018 and provide another 46 odd units of TA.</p>
3	<p>CBC should be considering the help that Housing Associations (HA) could give them with the homeless situation, this should include all Housing Associations.</p>	<p>Discussions continue with HA. Howard Cottage offered to buy properties for CBC to use as TA.</p> <p>Aragon have provided 20 homes for use as TA.</p> <p>All providers allow us to nominate Homeless clients to their voids and a percentage of advertised properties, through the Bedfordshire Homefinder Website.</p>

4	CBC to work with private landlords in the prevention of their tenants becoming homeless, through dialogue/mediation.	<p>Yes, this is work we already do via Options, Lets Rent and Private Sector Housing.</p> <p>The Housing Service is also creating a 'Making Moves Team' to improve the flow rate through Transitional Accommodation.</p>
5	We feel CBC needs to look at a way of Managing properties in the private sector to give them an added arm with housing the homeless.	Lettings Service has been approved as a pilot and have agreed 17 properties in Caddington for the CASE Trust to manage.
6	CBC should acquire properties in the Central Beds area for the Housing of the Homeless and people on a temporary basis which would help keep Homeless clients in their own communities.	As mentioned the HRA budget has allocated funding to buy more stock to use as TA and then maybe in the future permanent accommodation. Good progress is being made. Supported by the Executive.
7	Leaflets should be made available for potentially Homeless People Via Doctors Surgeries, Supermarkets, Libraries, Hospitals: in the community.	Agree factsheets to be updated and made more readily available. There are also YouTube videos being produced to improve the quality of housing advice.
8	We feel the Night Bus Service that operates a pick-up service for homeless clients, feeding them and supplying a bed, for example in Bedford and Bull Pond Lane, Dunstable, should be supported by CBC. We feel CBC are missing some clients, and a pick-up system traveling round the Central Beds area would capture a wider cliental.	This is not in control of CBC as it is a charitable organisation (not funded by us). We do appreciate the work they do.
9	<p>a) We would like posters advertising that CBC can help prevent people from becoming homeless.</p> <p>b) Out of hours details on Council building doors. This would help point them in the right direction when Council Offices are closed.</p>	We have produced information and made it available to help clients get in touch at the threat of homelessness as well as in emergency and are using different and new ways such as YouTube to communicate with customers as and when they need access to information. The TSP have been happy with progress to date.

10	We would like more information made available to clients when in a new area i.e. local services, a pack.	We meet with customers on arrival at the TA and can look to create packs based on customer feedback.
11	More Communication should be available from CBC to Homeless clients. Maybe a package containing details of Schooling, Job Centres, Libraries, Foodbanks, shops, bus Services.	As per Finding 10 above. This is in response to customers indicating how this initial support is something they value.
12	A survey of the CBC area should be undertaken to ascertain if there are certain places that Homelessness occurs, which would help in the way CBC can house clients, be it temporary or on Licence or Permanent.	Demand Management work already underway and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment completed each year which gives details on accommodation required. The Housing Service Plan includes actions to identifying at a more granular lever. The demand/requirement in each of the main settlements in Central Bedfordshire.
13	There is a Rough Sleeping Partnership (RSP). We support CBC being involved in. It is only a two-year project and we would urge that it can continue after the two years to benefit and be accessible to future clients.	The RSP is now up and running and is already proving to be very successful. This partnership is only a 2 year project but it is hoped that it continues whilst it is successful. There are actions in the Housing Service Plan to identify and deliver Nigh Shelter provision linked to the provision of Transitional Accommodation.
14	Bench Marking: could give CBC feedback as to how they are performing in dealing with the Homelessness Situation : this needs to be shared.	Data is collected monthly and available at; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness

3. Conclusion

The Service thank the TSP for their enquiry and the work they undertook and looks forward to completing the actions resulting from the recommendations of the Tenants Scrutiny Panel's investigation. Our experience to date is that our advice is welcomed and that Action Plans have been implemented. We are confident this will continue to be the case.

Overall, the challenge is for more accommodation to be provided (in terms of the Council's Local Plan) and for a high proportion of accommodation to be affordable, in particular to provide more rented accommodation and specifically, more larger properties, more accessible housing for disabled people and more older persons accommodation to enable people to rightsize and make family sized accommodation available.

The affordable housing delivered in 2017/18 is welcomed but as a proportion of the total number of homes provided, it falls some way short of the Council's own policy requirement (30%). The figures for 2017/18 are, we understand, as follows:-

- 191 rented homes (affordable)
- 17 intermediate rented homes
- 129 shared ownership homes
- 6 shared equity
- 343 homes in total

NOTES:

13M referred to above, clarifying the figure quoted for Transitional accommodation with this note from Finance colleagues. This £13M (or £12.963M to be exact) is correct, split £1.15M for the Birches and £11.813M for other acquisitions. This is from the Medium Term Financial Plan.