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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

GROWTH AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 12th August 2024

Present: Councillor Zarina Amin (Chair)
Councillor Bill Armer
Councillor Alison Munro
Councillor Harry McCarthy

In attendance: Cllr Moses Crook, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Transport
Naz Parkar, Service Director Homes and Neighbourhood
Sarah Holmes, Housing Services Strategic Manager
David Shepherd, Executive Director for Place

Apologies: Chris Friend (Co-Optee)

1 Membership of the Panel

Apologies were received from Chris Friend.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 25th March 2024 be approved as a correct record.

3 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No public questions were asked.

7 Kirklees Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 - 2029 & Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy 2024

Cllr Moses Crook, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Transport, introduced the item, informing the Panel that the information being presented is a pre-adoption review of the updated Kirklees Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which will run until 2029 and the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy. Strategic update is a periodic and statutory requirement every five years; however, it is of critical strategic importance to Kirklees.

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Housing, and having a safe secure and decent home is a pre-requisite for a healthy and productive life. Health, education and training opportunities, economic inclusion, is all supported through this basic necessity. In addition, the significant direct cost of insecure housing to those individuals needing support, the national housing crisis, which is not unique to Kirklees, imposes significant direct and indirect pressure on the council finances. By way of illustration, last year the temporary accommodation spend on hotel provision was £7.2 million, which was up from £3.1 million in 2022, which is a significant increase. The indirect costs are also significant, better health and education outcomes which are supported by better and more stable and available housing. This allows people to contribute to collective productivity, and reduce the impact on health and other service demands. Housing policy and strategy is essential for those suffering from insecure and non-existent provision, for the collective as well as those individuals future prosperity and to save on immediate and future financial cost to services.

Cllr Crook explained that to briefly illustrate the pressure currently on housing, there are 22,000 council homes plus approximately 6000 available through other registered providers, including housing associations, against a current waiting list of 18,500. Each year 1,800 homes are allocated, the total turnover of housing in council housing stock and other registered providers. Last year 1,926, homelessness assessments were conducted, even without the 18,500 already waiting for housing. The presentations of homeless households significantly exceed the total number of housing that becomes available each year.

In this context, it is clear that the new housing solutions Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy for 2024, needs to navigate a difficult task as to manage demand, and ensure that those in need are supported as well as possible within the national constraints. The policy rightly places emphasis on provision of warm, safe and decent accommodation and also on helping people to remain within Kirklees as close to their support networks as is possible. It rightly places emphasis on the impact of housing insecurity on children and also on early interventions to reduce the number of households ultimately presenting as homeless. This is a very difficult area of service delivery, and officers should be thanked for the hard work that has gone into developing this strategy and the diligence with which they support vulnerable residents in need, against a significant resource deficit.

Sarah Holmes, Housing Services Strategic Manager, directed the Panel to the summary page of the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which outlined the vision and objectives. The Panel was informed that the vision is as follows:

“Our vision is for Kirklees to be a place where we work collaboratively to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, where those most in need are able to access the right help, in the right place, at the right time.”

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In order to deliver on this vision, the four key objectives set out in the strategy are as follows:

1. Strengthen partnership working to address homelessness and secure the right accommodation
2. Rapid early help and intervention to prevent homelessness from occurring
3. Access to long term, settled homes and temporary accommodation, which is safe and decent, accessible and affordable
4. Tackle rough sleeping to ensure that it is rare, brief, and not recurring

Under each of the objective there are a summary of the key actions that will be undertaken over the five year period of the strategy. The intention is to work with partners on the Kirklees Homelessness Forum to refine the action plan. The progress against the objectives will be measured through a number of key performance indicators. The overall success of the strategy will be measurable through a positive direction of travel in these areas:

- More positive homeless prevention outcomes
- Greater use of private rented sector accommodation
- Less reliance on bed and breakfast for temporary accommodation
- Reduced length of stay in all types of temporary accommodation; and
- Reduction in rough sleeping

The Panel was informed that the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy, sets out the key principles and factors that the council will consider when making its temporary accommodation placements; and it confirms the council's commitment to offering temporary accommodation wherever possible within the Kirklees district. The policy also sets out the key principles and factors that will be considered when making temporary accommodation placements.

The Panel was directed to a section of the report which stated that the average length of time a household spends in all forms of temporary accommodation can be up to 24 months. This was highlighted as an error, and the wording will be corrected to read "that 2% of the residents that are in temporary accommodation are still awaiting a home after 24 months". The Panel was advised that it is a small number that are waiting in temporary accommodation for 24 months or more.

In response to the information presented, the Panel made comment and asked questions including some of the following:-

- The figures contained within the report does not include the numbers of rough sleepers who are ex-service personnel. In future when the figures are being compiled, can it include those who are ex-service personnel?
- Can the council liaise with forces organisations and charities to assess the broader picture with regard to ex-service personnel, particularly in relation to PTSD as it would be good to get a handle on this?
- Its seems to be aspirational only in terms of finding long term permanent accommodation, is that the top priority and has the council considered crowd funding as some authorities have set up partnerships to crowdfund?

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- What is the percentage of young single people needing housing units compared to families seeking council housing units?
- There seems to be an issue where people are evicted through no fault evictions from private accommodation, and are seeking council accommodation and are advised to make a counterclaim against their landlord. The council policy does not seem to be favourable in terms of people issuing legal claims against their former landlords. Is there dialogue between the council and housing charities?
- How are the figures with regard to rough sleepers calculated?
- Support to asylum seekers once they have received leave to remain, what support do they receive?

RESOLVED:

- That Cllr Moses Crook and Sarah Holmes be thanked for providing an update on the Kirklees Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024- 2029 and the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy.
- That a breakdown of the number of young single people on the housing register be provided to the Panel.

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Approval of Damp, Mould & Condensation (DMC) Policy

Cllr Moses Crook introduced the item, advising the Panel that the issue around damp, mould and condensation is a well-publicised national issue. The report being presented, outlines the new Damp, Mould and Condensation (DMP) Policy which will further improve the councils approach to service needs and resolve issues within housing stock, in addition to responding to the Regulatory Notice to Improve, which was issued by the Regulator of Social Housing on the 6th March 2024.

The policy prioritises resident safety and demonstrates the new strategy to address damp, mould and condensation within the housing stock. This is by properly reacting to, and resolving root causes by proactively addressing repairs to prevent future instances of damp, mould and condensation from emerging. Ensuring a consistent timely and a well managed approach including positive and clear communication with residents. This policy has been developed in consultation with tenant voice. This policy outlines how the improvement journey will be accelerated in compliance with the regulator's consumer standards.

Naz Parkar, Service Director Homes and Neighbourhood, informed the Panel that this policy has at its heart, the tenant and their safety and wellbeing. It is also a policy that enables residents to become clearer about what they can expect from the council as their landlord in response to damp, mould and condensation. It has been informed and heavily influenced by the tenants voice, using the complaints handling information, feedback from responding to certain cases, taking learning from others in terms of some of the Housing Ombudsman reports, all these have influenced how this policy has been shaped and designed to ensure that the tenants voice is heard loud on it.

It is a policy that takes a fragmented approach because currently, damp, mould and condensation responses are held within the repairs policy which covers a multitude of repair responses and responsibilities. The aim was to have a standalone policy to

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ensure there is a more co-ordinated approach to the way things are done and this enables the design of a much more defined approach in two key areas.

- 1) In terms of reactive, all cases are prioritised by the household circumstances, but also resolves existing open cases, whilst dealing with new ones that are coming through.
- 2) In terms of the proactive approach, it enables the identification of cases that might not be known about, referred to by the Housing Ombudsman as 'finding your silence.' There may be tenants who for one reason or another do not want the council to enter their property, they may have vulnerabilities such as hoarding for instance.

Currently, the response has been on a responsive repair basis, responding to the situation by asking a contractor to go out and carry out a damp and mould treatment and it has not always addressed the real issue. The approach now being adopted is that it is surveyed first, identify the root causes, the response still might end up being a DMC treatment, however it may point to something more fundamental such as a roof repair because there is a leak or there is rising damp or a structural issue.

This approach enables the issue to be addressed at its root cause and it also enables a response to Awaab's Law, which will be enacted through secondary parliamentary legislation at the appropriate time. It also enables a response to the regulatory notice and the consumer standards that the regulator has introduced.

The policy then also shapes the process that is designed around the response and the way work is undertaken. It allows a three month phone call to be built in, once the work has been undertaken, to ensure that the resident has had no further issues. Following that, there will be a six month post work inspection through a surveyor to ensure that the case has been resolved finally and that it is not returning in any way before the job is closed down on the system.

Once the process is designed it also allows thinking around the type of data that will need to be captured, therefore the next steps are to complete the redesign of that process. Rolling out and embedding training to enable staff to see what their role in this looks like and also at the same time as upgrading the systems to ensure that data is captured in a co-ordinated way. Reporting consistently and understanding future trends to be able to respond to them.

It is important to note that when the council reported itself to the regulator and the notice was received on the 6th March 2024, there were 1,800 open cases. Work has started in this new way and that has enabled a reduction to the number of cases, down to 1,280 with a target to get to 800 cases before the winter season, before Christmas. Through better monitoring and trend analysis, it will help shape how that is undertaken.

Whilst in the longer term, it is important to note that there are no quick fixes to this, there does need to be a long term approach, to ensure that the asset strategy priorities, invests into properties where there are these sorts of cases. It is important how data is collected in the future to get a better understanding of the

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council's housing stock, by doing stock condition surveys and then collecting more data, as this will help identify where to prioritise asset investment in the longer term. In response to the information presented, the Panel made comment and asked questions including some of the following:-

- Cllr Armer stated that in his case work experience he had noticed a marked difference this year, where there has been a much better response, it is moving in the right direction, and it is impressive. There is still a large backlog, however housing are aware and are working on it
- With regard to incorrectly identifying problems that are causing DMC, does this happen quite frequently, because it then takes a long time to resolve the problem?
- With regard to access issues and some of the difficulties accessing some properties, what improvement has there been in terms of resolving those problems?
- There has been an improvement in terms of how housing officers contact residents, and it is key to building good relationships and communication with residents

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Moses Crook and Naz Parkar be thanked for providing an update on the Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy.