

Item for Executive Team – 9th April 2020

Housing Services - Accommodation Update (Covid 19)

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To update Executive Team: -
- On the approach being taken to maintain the delivery of statutory homelessness services, especially the requirements to provide temporary accommodation for a wider group of homeless people. (E.g. Rough Sleepers and those with no recourse to public funds).
 - On the work being done to increase temporary accommodation capacity, including how this links to the suspension of the letting of empty council housing.
 - On the services joint work with Adult Social Care and Health services on supporting the discharge of people from hospital and moving people through the care system.
- 1.2 To request decisions on postponing the full implementation of the Enhanced Lettable Standards and Home Starter Fund pilot when letting empty council housing and on the approach to be taken to allocating and letting properties that are both within and outside current policy.

2. Decisions required

- 2.1 Confirmation that it is considered appropriate where feasible to move people on from temporary accommodation into empty council or private rented accommodation where such moves are within existing policy and where households can as necessary be supported with essential furniture and cooking facilities. This will free up additional capacity to accommodate more homeless households.
- 2.2 Having agreed to honour the 'offer' of council homes to applicants made prior to the suspension of Choose n Move lettings to decide whether or not new tenants should be asked to sign up on an introductory tenancy and or given the option of signing a temporary agreement. (Not every applicant has physically viewed the property they have been allocated). If signed up on a temporary basis this will be reviewed later and either converted to an introductory tenancy or alternative accommodation options discussed and agreed.
- 2.3 In relation to the 'not allocated' category of empty council properties two possible approaches could be taken to using them to help house homeless households.
- i) Agree a direct let to a household who has been accepted as statutorily homeless and to whom we have a duty to provide accommodation. Could be seen to be jumping the queue as other such homeless households on the Register are on hold.
 - ii) Take the properties into the Temporary Accommodation portfolio to house homeless households. Once the crisis has passed a decision could then be taken as to whether or not to leave some of the properties in the Temporary Accommodation portfolio to help address the temporary accommodation sufficiency gap.

A decision on whether either of the above options should be implemented is requested.

- 2.4 Confirmation that full implementation of the Enhanced Lettable Standards and Home Starter Fund Pilot can be suspended due to material and furniture availability issues. All properties will meet the agreed Lettable Standards and eligible households will be advised that the enhanced elements will be made available at a later date.
- 2.5 Clarification whether or not at this point in time additional Home from Home properties should be identified and furnished.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17) placed increased duties on Local Authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness for eligible households regardless of whether or not they are in a priority need group by offering information and support but not a requirement to secure accommodation. The main homelessness statutory duty to eligible homeless households in defined priority need groups remains as does the Local Authorities duty to secure for such priority households suitable accommodation. In addition, the duty to provide interim or temporary accommodation remains.
- 3.2 The Council's Accessible Homes Team are responsible for providing cross tenure medical rehousing and home adaptations services. This includes joint working with social care and health colleagues to both prevent admission to but also discharge people from hospitals and care settings. The staff team work jointly with Adult Social Care colleagues and others on the Home from Home Scheme and the Extra Care Housing Allocations Panel.
- 3.3 Government's response to Covid 19 and rough sleeping is to bring in those on the streets to protect their health and stop wider transmission. Local Authorities were asked to support rough sleepers and other vulnerable homeless people into appropriate accommodation by the end of the week commencing 23rd March 2020 and to continue to support people to stay in that accommodation until such time as restrictions ease and step down arrangements can be put in place.
- 3.4 Government guidance is that home buyers and renters should, where possible, delay moving to a new house while measures are in place to fight coronavirus. If moving is unavoidable for contractual reasons and the parties are unable to reach an agreement to delay, people must follow advice on staying away from others to minimise the spread of the virus.

4. Key issues

- 4.1 In response to government and MHCLG guidance on Covid 19 homelessness services are being delivered as follows: -
- Most staff working from home providing information, advice and assessment by telephone. Out of hours services are provided by the Council's Emergency Duty Team.
 - Customer Service Centres are closed but if people present as roofless with no telephone, they can be seen by a staff working in Dewsbury and Huddersfield. (Skeleton staff in the office on a rota carrying out essential work)
 - The Rough Sleeper team continue to do outreach work to verify rough sleepers and in accordance with MHCLG guidance support rough sleepers to accept and maintain temporary accommodation.
 - Temporary Accommodation is being provided to eligible households.
- 4.2 In response to the anticipated increase in demand for temporary accommodation for homeless households and for people needing to be discharged from hospital or moved

through the care system as a result of the worsening Covid 19 crisis, a joint Council and Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) Project Team has been established to: -

- Confirm the process for receiving and responding to requests for temporary accommodation for homeless households.
- Establish the existing range, capacity and availability of temporary accommodation and how to increase the number and range of temporary accommodation options.
- Determine how the Council's 183 empty council homes should be allocated and let.
- Determine the property standards that should be worked to during this period.
- Agree how logistically households can be supported to move on from temporary accommodation into council homes to free up temporary accommodation capacity. Including the provision of furniture / white goods and removals.
- Confirm the process for letting properties and signing up new tenants.
- Confirm the type of tenancy to be granted to households moving on from temporary accommodation into empty council homes who had not previously been allocated, matched and offered that property prior to the suspension the Choose n Move choice-based lettings system.
- Confirm the process for receiving and responding to requests for temporary accommodation in the Home from Home properties and accommodation in the Council's Extra Care Housing Schemes.
- Confirm the process for and agree how logistically households can be supported to move on from Home from Home properties.
- Confirm with Adult Social Care colleagues if there is a need to expand the number of Home form Home properties and if so, agree how many and a plan for setting up additional properties.

Links have been established between this project and the Additional Community Bed Base Task and Finish group led by the Health CCGs (Toni Smith) and Adult Social Care (David MacDonald). The work of each to increase capacity does not compete for the same accommodation but does where possible compliment and support.

4.3 People – Anticipated increase in requests for temporary accommodation

Due to new restrictions put in place by government to prevent evictions for a 3-month period we should see a decrease in the number of people threatened with homelessness as a result of rent arrears or other breaches of tenancy.

However, we anticipate that we could see an increase in presentations from the following: -

- Domestic abuse victims
- Younger people asked to leave friends and family – sofa surfers
- Hospital discharge
- Prison release
- New rough sleepers.

It is difficult to accurately predict what the demand for temporary accommodation will be. Information on the recent numbers and reasons for homeless presentations will be provided at the Executive Team Meeting.

The existing process for receiving homelessness referrals from individual households, other services and partners is considered fit for purpose during the current Covid 19 ways of working. A process map will be shared at Executive Team meeting.

4.4 Places - Temporary Accommodation – Capacity (as at 5.4.20)

An analysis of the current homeless temporary accommodation capacity in B&B/hotels, hostels and temporary accommodation properties is shown in the table below.

Name of provision	Client Type	Unit nos.	No of vacancies @ 5/4/20	Any other notes (e.g. if not taking new referrals)
Clare House	Men and women 21+	22	0	Will accept new referrals but don't see any spaces in the near future as no move on plans in place
Hollinbank	Young people 16 – 25	10	0	2 voids – 1 possibly becoming available 6.4.20
Swan Lane	Young people 16 - 25	8	1	Needs bedding
Batley Foyer	Young people 16 - 25	10	0	2 voids on hold due to disrepair
Spring Street	Men age 18+	8	0	Still accepting referrals
Domestic Abuse refuges	Domestic abuse	33	1	1 void in N Kirklees, ready to let w/c 14/4/20
B&B / hotels	Singles, couples, families	164	27	Spread across 4 B&Bs currently used. NB total no. of available rooms does not equate to no. of placements made by Housing Solutions Service.
Temporary Accommodation properties managed by Housing Solutions Service	Singles, couples, families	130	3 + 1 crashpad	24 Temporary Accommodation voids currently, 3 ready to occupy.
TOTALS		385	32 + 1 crashpad	

As the existing temporary accommodation options are in effect 'silting up' due to the lack of move-on accommodation, in part due to the suspension of the letting of council accommodation, work to identify additional temporary accommodation capacity is underway and includes: -

- Contacting B&B and Hotels in the Kirklees and surrounding area to establish if they would be willing to work with us to accommodate homeless households
- Exploring the possibility of using student accommodation, although the cluster and shared facility model along with the fact that some students are still living in the properties does not easily lend itself to meeting this need.
- Exploring the potential to use service, furnished 2/3/4 bed apartments, possibly for families who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse.
- Contacting private landlords to establish if they will offer 12-month tenancies to homeless households or allow us to use their accommodation as temporary units.
- Considering the advantages and disadvantages of furnishing empty council housing which is ready to let and using it as temporary accommodation.

4.5 Places – Empty Council Homes Allocation and Letting

When the letting of council housing was suspended on 25th March 2020 there were 183 empty properties. These properties were at different stages some were

- Allocated and ready to let (35)
- Allocated to prospective tenants but not yet ready to let (111)
- Ready to let not allocated but advertised and bid on (4)
- Not yet ready to let or advertised or allocated (41 includes the 4 above)

It was decided to honour the offers to those applicants who had been allocated properties (146) although in practice and bearing mind initial government guidelines around postponing or stopping house moves and the logistics of actually arranging a house move, supporting tenants with securing furniture / white goods etc, the new tenants have so far been prevented from moving in.

In order to release capacity in temporary accommodation, initially those in B&B and hostel/refuge accommodation, work has now started on developing a process and the associated logistical measures so that those with a confirmed offer whose property is ready to let, can be moved on and into their new home. The process map will be shared at the Executive Team meeting.

As some applicants will not have had chance to view the property allocated to them in advance of us arranging for them to sign up and move in it has been suggested that anyone uncertain about the offer be signed up on a temporary agreement. This can then be reviewed later and either confirmed as the final offer and the new tenancy started or a further offer of accommodation made. Often people who live in our temporary properties and get used to living there and settled in the community say that they would prefer to stay rather than move on again so it is anticipated that most people will choose to remain in the property allocated. Executive Team are asked to confirm whether or not they are happy for this approach to be adopted.

In relation to the 'not allocated' category above two possible approaches could be taken to using them to help house homeless households.

- iii) Agree a direct let to a household who has been accepted as statutorily homeless and to whom we have a duty to provide accommodation. Could be seen to be jumping the queue as other such homeless households on the Register are on hold.
- iv) Take the properties into the Temporary Accommodation portfolio to house homeless households. Once the crisis has passed a decision could then be taken as to whether or not to leave some of the properties in the Temporary Accommodation portfolio to help address the temporary accommodation sufficiency gap that was discussed by Executive Team on the 3rd March 2020 or return them to the general housing stock for letting.

- 4.6. Places – Empty Council Homes Enhanced Lettable Standard and Home Starter Fund Pilot
KNH Property Services are continuing to repair and make ready to let the empty council properties. Due to some difficulties in sourcing all the materials needed to meet the enhanced lettable standards the properties are being repaired to a least the current lettable standard and where possible incorporating additional works such as decoration and carpets. It is proposed that those tenants who would have been eligible for additional works will be revisited at a later date so that additional works can be followed up. Executive Team are asked to confirm if they agree with this approach.

In addition, there may be some difficulty providing eligible tenants with all the furniture and white goods needed under the Home Starter Fund scheme. The contracted suppliers have confirmed they are able to continue supplying Kirklees Council / KNH as long as they have a letter confirming they are carrying out essential work and that they have or can source items requested. It is proposed that tenants who are able to move into their property without

some of the items can do so if they wish and the when supplies are available again, they will be provided. Executive Team are asked to confirm if they agree with this approach.

4.7 Home from Home Properties

These properties facilitate discharge from hospital or other care settings before moving back home or finding suitable alternative accommodation. There are currently 7 council Home from Home properties, 6 are occupied and one is vacant. The existing allocations panel process managed by Accessible Homes and Adult Social Care is considered fit for purpose during the current situation. The process map will be made available at the Executive Team meeting.

The key issues for consideration are how best to move people on from the Home from Home properties and whether or not additional Home from Home properties should be identified and made ready.

In relation to move on it is proposed that we adopt a case by case approach and where possible we facilitate move on in the same way as we have outlined above for moving people into other council properties above.

In relation to additional properties clarity is required from adult social care colleagues on whether or not more are needed. Initial discussions have been held around the possibility of securing hotel accommodation to address carer breakdown capacity rather than dispersed Home form Home properties.

4.8 Discharge to Assess Pathway

The Accessible Homes team are supporting the new health and adult social care Discharge to Assess pathway by offering Occupational Therapists and other staffing resources to facilitate urgent equipment and adaptation needs assessments that will enable people to move on or home.

The Accessible Homes Team, the Kirklees Integrated Community Equipment Service and KNH Property Services have developed plans to ensure that requests from hospitals to provide equipment and minor adaptations to facilitate discharge from hospitals over the 4-day Easter weekend can be dealt with.

4.9 Extra Care Allocations Panel

The current joint Housing and Adult Social Care allocations panel arrangements can be maintained on a virtual basis. Any vacancies in the Extra Care Housing schemes will be allocated and new tenants supported to move in. Pinnacle PSG are supportive of this approach.

5. Implications for the Council

5.1 Working with People

All people who present as homeless are supported to develop a Personal Housing Plan. This plan is an agreement between the authority and the individual which is based on the individual or households circumstances and support needs and sets out the actions that each will take to prevent them from becoming homeless or to find and secure suitable and affordable accommodation.

5.2 Working with Partners

It is recognised that ownership of the preventing and relieving homelessness agenda must be partnership based, across the council and its partners. The council cannot prevent

homelessness on its own, partners play a vital role in preventing and responding to homelessness. In developing our responses to the corona virus, we have and continue to work collaboratively with key services and partners including: -

- KC social care services
- Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing and registered providers of social housing
- Health services
- Providers of KC commissioned hostel accommodation
- B&B and hotel proprietors.

5.3 Place Based Working

In addressing issues of homelessness and rough sleeping, a Place Based approach is needed. This includes consideration of peoples support networks and where and how they access services. When providing temporary accommodation, we normally consider factors such as children's education / childcare arrangements / employment and health and support needs so that wherever possible the accommodation provided is suitable. We will continue to consider these aspects however may not due to the current situation always be able to meet all needs or expectations.

5.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

When providing temporary accommodation all efforts are made to ensure that the accommodation is located within walking distance of town centres or as near as possible to well served bus routes.

6. Financial, HR, Communications issues (including value for money)

- 6.1 MHCLG have announced a Coronavirus (COVID-19) Rough Sleeping Contingency Fund. KC can make a retrospective claim for additional costs associated with accommodating and supporting rough sleepers up to £12,000.
- 6.2 MHCLG have announced Coronavirus (COVID-19) Emergency Funding for Local Government, £12,227,930 for KC, which includes provision to provide additional support for the homeless and rough sleepers.
- 6.3 Housing Services have established a separate Covid 19 cost code so that all increased and additional expenditure associated with the Covid 19 response can be recorded.
- 6.4 Staff are continuing to deliver statutory homelessness services in accordance with government guidance on for example social distancing, travel and the use of PPE.
- 6.5 Communication with homeless people and other individuals and households is being maintained. All wider public communications will be produced and approved via the corporate Communications Team.

7. Options

- 7.1 The decisions section outlines options for consideration.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Executive Team are asked to note: -
- The approach being taken to maintain the delivery of statutory homelessness services, especially the requirements to provide temporary accommodation for an increasing and wider group of homeless people. (E.g. Rough Sleepers and those with no recourse to public funds).

- The work being done to increase temporary accommodation capacity, including how this links to the suspension of the letting of empty council housing.
- The services joint work with Adult Social Care and Health services on supporting the discharge of people from hospital and moving people through the care system.

8.2 Consider and confirm decisions requested in section 2 above.

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