

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD**24TH JULY 2014****3. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
FROM MRS SUSAN SULIS, COMMUNITY CARE PROTECTION GROUP**

1. STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF THE 'BEDROOM TAX' ON LOW INCOME TENANTS, PUBLISHED THIS WEEK BY THE DEPARTMENT OF WORK AND PENSIONS.

This report found that thousands of low income tenants have been plunged into "heat or eat" hardship as result of the bedroom tax.

- (a) How many tenants in Bromley have been affected by these changes?
- (b) What is the Council doing to ameliorate their impact?
- (c) Are the effects monitored for Health Inequality Impacts?

(a) The introduction of the housing benefit spare room subsidy aims to ensure that support is provided only for the number of bedrooms that a household need. This legislative change brings the calculation of housing benefit for social sector tenants closer in line with those renting from private landlords which already took into account the size of accommodation required by the household.

As at 2.10.2014 there were 1407 households affected by the spare room subsidy. Of the 1407 households, 1167 have their housing benefit reduced by 14% and 240 by 25%. The number has reduced from 1800 in April 2013 when the change was introduced.

(b) The authority provides a range of support and advice to assist those households affected by the legislative change to take steps to ameliorate the potential impact.

To assist as a safeguard against resultant hardship, the Government's Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) contribution for Bromley increased and the policy for use of the DHP was presented to Members of the Executive and Resources PDS Committee on 18th July 2013. Currently 378 tenants are receiving DHP assistance to effectively top up the shortfall in housing benefit. Some of this support is time limited to enable claimants time to find more affordable accommodation or move into employment.

The London Borough of Bromley does not own a housing stock and housing associations provide the social housing in the borough. As such Bromley has very limited information as to the "state" of an individual's rent account, or the reason as to why any arrears have accrued. Officers have however worked closely with our housing association partners and have developed a range of protocols around support and assistance to those affected by the spare room subsidy. The majority of

housing associations have specialist officers working with their tenants who are affected by the spare room subsidy to ameliorate risk of financial hardship, rent arrears and potential eviction.

The Benefits Section does meet regularly with representatives from the housing associations, both at an operational and management level. Attendees of these meetings have all been advised as to the existence of DHP's and the content of Bromley's policy. Publicity of the scheme both locally and nationally has led to a large request in DHP applications (estimated at a 300% increase in Bromley), for consideration against the said policy. During 2013/14 awards of discretionary housing payments exceeded the Government's contribution.

The housing needs service also has a small dedicated team who work with those households affected by the range welfare reform changes including the spare room subsidy. The officers work in partnership with the DWP, housing associations and a range of agencies to provide advice and assistance regarding options to resolve any negative impact of welfare reform including access to training and employment, moving to more affordable accommodation, budgeting and so forth.

(c) The housing needs section monitor the outcomes for all households they are working with and are also working with RSLs to monitor the impact of the spare room subsidy on their tenants and to feed this into the regional and national research being undertaken. In addition the joint strategic needs assessment does include the impact of housing and welfare reform in terms of assessing health needs and so forth.

2. PROVISION OF BREAKFAST CLUBS AND FREE SCHOOL MEALS IN AREAS OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION.

- (a) How many Breakfast Clubs operate, and in which wards?
- (b) In each ward in quintiles 1,2, and 3, how many children are assessed as needing free school meals?
- (c) What provision for these meals is made during holiday periods?
- (d) How many children live in poverty in each of these wards?

The Council does not hold information specific to parts (a) to (c).

(d) The 2014 JSNA ward profiles include an IDACI score for each ward. IDACI stands for Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index and is defined as the percentage of children aged 0-15 living in income-deprived households. Families are classed as income-deprived if they are in receipt of income support, income based jobseekers allowance or pension credit, or child tax credit with an equivalised income (excluding housing benefits) below 60% of the national median before housing costs.

3. USE OF £769,000 PUBLIC HEALTH BUDGET UNDERSPEND FROM 2013/14.

Other local authorities, Labour and Conservative, are spending money from their Public Health Budgets to support charities helping those suffering from food poverty.

If Councillors wished, could they remove the barrier of the £8,400 commercial rental threatening the closure of the Orpington Foodbank, by funding this from the Public Health budget?

The Oak Community Church (OCC) occupied, on a temporary basis, a Council property in Cotmandene Crescent rather than return to their original premises in Ranmore Path. The OCC subsequently chose not to return to Ranmore Path and agreed to take a lease of and pay a rent for the property in Cotmandene Crescent.

A report to the Executive and Resources PDS Committee on 10th October 2013 set out the reasons for the Council's decision to demand commercial rent from the OCC. This included commercial property factors; the need to maximise income; the established policy that Council properties should be let at market rent to ensure transparency and to avoid hidden subsidies when letting to charitable organisations; estate management issues; that the letting of 111 Cotmandene Crescent at nil rent was only a temporary arrangement following the fire at Ranmore Path; the services provided by the Foodbank; views of the OCC about the benefits of Cotmandene Crescent over Ranmore Path; and the existence of OCC's own property in Chipperfield Road.

The Public Health Grant is a ringfenced budget specifically for the Local Authority to discharge its public health responsibilities.