

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC FOR WRITTEN RESPONSE BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR RENEWAL, RECREATION AND HOUSING

Question 1: From Dermot Mckibbin

How many private tenants' households are the Council likely to rehouse as homeless due to the economic implications of the COVID-19 virus emergency over the next 12 months, how much does it cost the Council to rehouse a homeless household, what reduction in homelessness would there be in the borough if the government were to implement their manifesto commitment to end no-fault evictions and how much money would the Council save?

Portfolio Holder's Response

Unfortunately there is no precedent set to enable us to accurately determine the number of households that may be effected by the economic implications of the COVID-19 virus to such an extent that they would be likely to lose their home. However we continue to work proactively with anyone experiencing difficulties and there are a number of services in place to support tenants who have been impacted financially as a result of COVID-19 to maintain their rental payments. In Bromley we have stepped up support to ensure we are able to provide money advice including loan and debt restructuring, advice on and access to claim benefits and where required financial support through the homeless prevention fund, discretionary housing payments and credit union - the key is for households to engage at an early stage to avoid debt spiralling.

Aside from the work done via the 'Everyone In Initiative' which has seen an increase in the number of rough sleepers assisted the number of households coming into the service has been broadly in line with the expected projections for the year. However, with the ban on evictions during the pandemic there are growing concerns that tenants are increasingly not engaging with money advice services and landlords to maintain rental payments or indeed maintain their responsibilities as a tenant which is simply storing up increased debt and more problems for the future. The initial ban on evictions has meant that they stopped for everyone not just those who have been impacted by Covid, but also those who will simply not engage to pay their rent or even those causing anti-social behaviour and distress to their neighbours and whilst the support previously outlined is offered to all that approach for assistance there is no way of knowing what the volume of approaches will be once evictions begin again in earnest.

In 2019/20 the average cost to secure private rented accommodation for a period of 12 months was £3720. For the same period the cost to house a family in nightly paid temporary accommodation was £6500.

With regards to no fault evictions our experience is that, in reality, the vast majority of landlords evict with established grounds for possession whether due to tenants behaviour or rent arrears or because they genuinely need to sell or even move into the property themselves – evictions cost time and money and so landlords do not usually progress without a real reason to do so. Whilst this may proceed, in order not to negatively disrupt the market there also needs to be further clarification for landlords to get possession through the courts where they have a legitimate reason to do so. Failure to address this could lead to hesitancy from existing or potential landlords to bring properties onto the market. This in turn could lead to increased difficulties in securing accommodation and

would mean that Council costs could actually increase as, with a diminished supply of private rented accommodation, we would be reliant on more expensive forms of accommodation; such as nightly paid temporary accommodation in order to meet our statutory duties.

Question 2: From Dermot Mckibbin

What are the implications for street homeless people in Bromley of the Council signing up to the pan-London Severe Weather Emergency protocol as announced by the London Mayor on 7 December, what extra resources is the Council devoting to help street homeless people in Bromley under this protocol, have local charities been informed and is there information about this protocol on the Council's website?

Portfolio Holder's Response

As with all Local Authorities, Bromley has been providing assistance under the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol for a number of years. This not a new initiative and Bromley has procedures embedded so that street homeless people in Bromley can receive additional support and assistance during periods of severe weather. This support is provided irrespective of the point of approach and the Council works closely with partners in the voluntary sector and faith groups in order to assist those in need.

It goes without saying that, in light of the pandemic, there have been additional challenges faced by those experiencing homelessness. The Council has secured extra funding from central government to assist with the increased demand and has worked closely with the MHCLG, Public Health and numerous other partners to ensure that this funding has been used to directly assist those who have experienced street homelessness or who were at risk of ending up on the streets.

The Bromley Homeless Shelter will not be opening in its traditional form this year as the Government has advised against dormitory style accommodation as part of its Covid related advice. Instead the general approach will be that the Council provides accommodation and support which can be further enhanced by the services provided by voluntary sector and faith groups. The Government is providing the Council with circa £46,000 to assist with winter pressures in particular, and £391,000 to assist with providing assistance to rough sleepers we have accommodated since the beginning of the "Everyone In" initiative earlier in the year. We have already assisted 4 rough sleepers since SWEP was triggered earlier this week, and 93 households that were identified as rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping in total since the start of the first lockdown. Each household was provided with self-contained accommodation and those that needed it were provided with essential items such as bedding and food. All have been supported by Council officers and individual personal housing plans and support plans are in place. In addition to this there have been several positive discussions with voluntary sector/faith groups and a clear referral pathway is in place that allows placements to be made 24 hours a day. The website gives information on services for rough sleepers and contact details for the public to notify when they have seen someone sleeping rough so that they can quickly be offered outreach support by our key partner Streetlink. Our approach this year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes implemented in the Code of Guidance, is to seek to assist those sleeping rough whether or not SWEP has been activated due to severe weather.

Question 1: From Chloe Ross

How many of the properties covered by the proposed categories for Article 4 Directions were built between 1948 and 2018 so that they would otherwise benefit from PDR?”

Portfolio Holder’s Response

The number of properties within the proposed Directions that were built between 1948 and 2018 is unknown. Definitive records on property construction dates are unavailable. When undertaking assessments to determine the extent of the proposed Directions, officers did refer to historic maps as a sense check, although these are not definitive and we do not have full Borough coverage.

Question 2: From Chloe Ross

Will the Council consider new requests for Special Areas?

Portfolio Holder’s Response

Ad hoc requests for Directions would not generally be considered. Officers will monitor the impacts of PD rights in the Borough and may suggest further Directions were actual or potential adverse impacts arise.