

**Decision Maker:**        **HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD**

**Date:**                    **11<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

**Title:**                    Homelessness Update

**Contact Officer:**       Sara Bowrey, Director Housing Planning and Regeneration.  
Tel 0208 313 4013   E-mail: [sara.bowrey@bromley.gov.uk](mailto:sara.bowrey@bromley.gov.uk)

**Ward:**                    All Wards

---

1.    Summary

The Council and its partners have ensured that statutory services and support have been maintained and residents supported during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

---

2.    Reason for Report going to Health and Wellbeing Board

To provide an overview of the work undertaken by the Housing Department and partners in Health to support homeless households in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

---

3.    **SPECIFIC ACTION REQUIRED BY HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD AND ITS  
CONSTITUENT PARTNER ORGANISATIONS**

Members of the Board are asked to note and where appropriate comment on the contents of this report.

Health & Wellbeing Strategy

1. Related priority: [Delete as appropriate] Not Applicable

---

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: No Cost:
  2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
  3. Total savings: Not Applicable:
  4. Budget host organisation: LBB
  5. Source of funding: Operational Housing
  6. Beneficiary/beneficiaries of any savings: N/A
- 

Supporting Public Health Outcome Indicator(s)

Not Applicable

---

## 4. COMMENTARY

- 4.1 For Bromley, like most London boroughs one of the most significant long-term pressures is the impact of homelessness and provision of temporary accommodation.
- 4.2 There are currently approximately 1,800 households in Temporary Accommodation (TA) this is a net increase of 21 per month and approximately 1,100 households are in costly forms of nightly paid TA, putting a continued strain on the Council's revenue budget.
- 4.3 Staff in Housing Planning and Regeneration responded swiftly to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; ensuring that all frontline emergency services remained operational and that resources were diverted to those most in need of critical assistance.
- 4.4 Whilst a small number of officers have continued to provide in-person assistance at the Civic Centre, in order to assist those presenting in an emergency, the majority of staff have been working at home since March 2020. Services have quickly adapted, and a significant amount of work has been undertaken in order to maintain contact with clients and provide the necessary support and essential services.
- 4.5 We worked jointly with colleagues providing supported accommodation and received support from Public Health, to ensure that schemes were able to operate in a "Covid Safe" manner and that additional practical and financial support was made available to both organisations and residents.
- 4.6 A particular challenge for the service has been the additional assistance given to assist those effected by rough sleeping as part of the government's "Everyone In" initiative and the subsequent work that has arisen. In excess of 90 clients who were identified as sleeping rough or at risk of rough sleeping were accommodated into emergency accommodation and work to support this cohort is ongoing. Across London more than 5000 households have been assisted under "Everyone In".
- 4.7 Working jointly with colleagues from Public Health, MHCLG and Thamesreach we formed a Rough Sleepers Response group to provide critical oversight and additional support to those we are assisting. This has allowed for a clear referral and rehousing pathway to ensure any person or agency who has knowledge of a rough sleeper can refer them through to our services for assistance and for enhanced services to be allocated to those clients with the most complex needs, with colleagues working together to ensure that timely, joint interventions are put in place.
- 4.8 When officers carried out the rough sleepers headcount in November; an annual exercise which sees staff from housing, the police, charity workers and volunteers go out in the early hours of the morning to visit common bedding down sites and areas where there have been reports of rough sleepers we thankfully only identified 1 rough sleeper. They, unfortunately, are well known to the service and have not accepted repeated offers of assistance, but we continue to try to help.
- 4.9 Working closely with the MHCLG, officers applied for Next Steps Accommodation and Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding and received a combined grant award of £494,904. This has enabled us to meet the increased demands for accommodation as well as allowing access to more support and a wider variety of essential items to help those most in need. We are working closely with partner agencies to ensure that the grant is fully utilised in order to achieve the agreed delivery plan.
- 4.10 We are concerned about the number of families who are facing financial hardship as a result of job losses and reductions in income. Rent arrears are increasing and whilst evictions have been temporarily halted we are likely to see a surge of eviction action as we move through into

2021/22. Officers in Housing have been undertaking pre-emptive work through our Money Advice, Housing Management and Housing Options teams to intervene early and attempt to bring any increasing arrears down before they become unmanageable and run the risk of leading to eviction action being commenced. As well as reaching financial arrangements we have also sought to make best use of Discretionary Housing Payments to support households.

- 4.11 Bromley received £754k under the Covid Winter Grant Scheme; £151k of which is being utilised by Housing to provide assistance for vulnerable households buy food, pay utility bills and provide warm winter clothing for children.
- 4.12 Colleagues from Public Health and Housing worked collaboratively with other London Authorities to secure grant funding to support out of hospital models for people experiencing rough sleeping. £44k was awarded for the provision of an MST (HOT) clinic which will be delivered to local rough sleepers by the Bromley GP alliance.
- 4.13 We have worked to secure 50 ex-housing association homes that were earmarked for disposal and which will now be used as permanent homes for households on our Housing Register. We are also exploring other opportunities to further increase access to settled accommodation with other partners.
- 4.14 Bromley agreed to re-open its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in July 2020 and 3 sites have been approved for Planning Permission; Burnt Ash Lane (Bromley) – 25 new homes, Bushell Way (Chislehurst) – 25 new homes, Anerley Road (Anerley) – 10 new homes. These are exciting developments which will see Bromley innovatively using otherwise under-utilised land such as car parks and former care homes to provide good quality, affordable homes for households owed a rehousing duty by the Local Authority.

## **5 IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN**

- 5.1 This Pandemic has brought additional difficulties for all of our clients. In maintaining the service and ensuring that we remain in contact with clients and provided not only basic but enhanced support to those that need it we have been able to maintain our statutory functions.
- 5.2 Bromley received £754k under the Covid Winter Grant Scheme; £151k of which will be utilised by Housing to provide assistance for vulnerable households buy food, pay utility bills and provide warm winter clothing for children.

## **6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Housing budgets is currently estimated at around £1.9m, which mainly relates to additional/increased costs of nightly paid accommodation, and delays in the achievement of budgeted savings.
- 6.2 These costs are partly covered by specific grant allocations totalling £646k. The Council has also received non-specific COVID-19 grants which can fund some of the remaining costs.

## **7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 This report sets out how the Council has responded to the COVID-19 Pandemic in terms of the Council's housing and homelessness duties under the Housing Act 1985 and the Housing Act 1996, Part 7. As part of performing these duties the Council has received and distributed certain grants as permitted within the grant awards. The Council has also re-focused service provision including extending service contracts in compliance with procurement law and the Contract Procedure Rules.

- 7.2 The demand for homeless accommodation has continued to increase following the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act 2018, as the duties towards homeless households are expanded. The Act placed a duty on councils to try to prevent homelessness and a duty on public bodies to refer people at risk of homelessness, flagging those most vulnerable to homelessness and rough sleeping so they could receive support
- 7.3 The Homelessness Code provides statutory guidance on how to interpret and apply the homelessness legislation and contains details of good practice that local authorities should adopt. It is not legally binding but local authorities are required to have regard to it. The Code has recently been updated to add further categories to those in priority need to reflect the impact of the coronavirus pandemic including people sleeping rough who should be carefully assessed, including their age and underlying health conditions.
- 7.4 Best Value Duty Guidance and case law under the Local Government Act 1999 is applicable where authorities are reviewing service provision and making arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way its functions are exercised, an authority must regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness in considering overall value, including economic, environmental and social value.

<b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>	POLICY IMPLICATIONS / PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS / PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	[Title of document and date]