

19 January 2021		ITEM: 9
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Housing Service COVID-19 Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Ryan Farmer – Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Carol Hinvest – Assistant Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides an update regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the Housing department, primarily with regards to the Housing Solutions service.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment on the contents of this update report.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1.** The Government's 'Stay at Home' guidance on 23 March 2020, introduced as a result of the COVID-10 pandemic, has had a significant impact on the delivery of services as well as on the lives of citizens who use the Council's Housing services.

The Housing service of Thurrock Council, much like the wider organisation, has worked to mitigate and manage the operational and financial challenges brought by COVID-19.

- 2.2.** Temporary suspensions, alterations and reductions in service provision have been implemented throughout the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report provides further details and also outlines the efforts which have been made to address these challenges.

3. Housing Solutions

- 3.1. Following Government guidance on 26 March 2020 to bring 'everyone in', the Council worked to identify and provide accommodation to all known rough sleepers. By the end of December 2020, accommodation had been provided to 58 individuals (55 'households' comprised of 52 single people and three couples) who were rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping.
- 3.2. Temporary accommodation for 26 households has been provided locally, with 29 households provided with temporary accommodation in nearby areas. Support services and voluntary organisations have worked alongside the Council to provide food and supplies to those who have been provided with bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 3.3. Each of the 14 individuals with identified mental health needs accommodated by the Council has received an assessment by the Senior Mental Health Practitioner in the Housing Solutions team, as well as being offered a robust care, housing and support assessment undertaken by the Council's support provider Sanctuary Housing to ensure that there was a clear picture of each individual's support needs.
- 3.4. Tailored offers of support have been provided to individuals, and the team are continuing to work to ensure that no-one accommodated returns to the street. The Council aims to provide settled accommodation for long-term housing for these individuals, to help to support them to make positive transitions into independent living.
- 3.5. At the time of writing, a total of 25 households had moved on from the temporary accommodation which had been provided by the Council. 20 of these households have been assisted to find and secure accommodation in the private rental sector, of which nine are located within Thurrock. Twelve households have moved on from the temporary accommodation of their own accord, and nine individuals have returned to prison. Regular contact continues to be made to all those who the Council continues to accommodate as part of this work.
- 3.6. One of the most common causes of homelessness in Thurrock is as a result of landlords imposing eviction measures in the private rental sector. A national moratorium on eviction proceedings which was implemented by the Government in March 2020 expired in September 2020.

There is concern that court proceedings recommencing will lead to an increase in the number of households presenting as homeless throughout winter. However, the Government has taken mitigating action by extending the eviction notice period which landlords must give to tenants to six months in all but the most serious cases, such as where anti-social behaviour or domestic abuse is a factor.

As the wider economic impacts of the pandemic are felt, such as at the conclusion of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme at the end of April 2021, there may be an increase in pressure on the Housing Solutions service.

3.7. Grants and Funding

- 3.7.1 At the time of writing, there were no further updates to the amounts of grants or additional funding for Housing services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the figures reported to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2020. For ease of reference, these tables are provided again in this report.

Funding	Amount
Overall Council Allocation of COVID-19 Support Fund	£14,257,000
Allocation to Housing General Fund	£ 2,041,000

Income Loss Compensation Scheme	Amount
Private Sector Housing	£ 97,000

Central Grant Funding	Amount
Cold Weather Fund	£ TBC
Flexible Homelessness Support Grant	£ 512,504
Homelessness Reduction Grant	£ 195,794
Rough Sleeping Funding	£ 258,674
COVID-19 Response Funding	£ 6,000
Next Steps Accommodation Payment	£ 75,000

4. Ongoing Response and Impact on Service Delivery

- 4.1. The COVID-19 pandemic presents an ever-changing challenge for the Housing service to manage. The Housing service actively reviews public health and government guidance to ensure that services continue to be delivered safely wherever possible, in line with any changing legislation. This activity also means that appropriate action can be taken to alter or reduce services if necessary due to local restrictions.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to test the resilience of the Housing service, and this report continues to detail the action taken in response to maintain the provision of critical services in the most challenging of times. This document can be referred to in any upcoming exercises to identify and review the 'lessons learned'.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1. There is no impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance or to wider communities as a result of this update paper.

7. Implications

7.1. Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Assistant Director - Finance

COVID-19 has had a financial impact on service delivery across the Housing service. Where relevant, namely in relation to financial demands relating to homelessness and rough sleeping, additional costs are being recorded against the central government funding allocations.

In relation to rent loss, this will continue to be monitored as part of the Housing Revenue Account's forecast budget outturn position, and reported corporately.

A continued increase in the number of existing tenants claiming Universal Credit poses a significant financial risk to the stability of the Housing Revenue Account.

7.2. Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer

As an update report on action taken, there are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

7.3. Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

As an update report on action taken, there are no diversity and equality implications directly arising from this report.

7.4. **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

9. **Appendices to the report**

- N/A

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