

21 September 2021		ITEM: 8
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Homelessness Update – Everyone In		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: None	
Report of: Ben Tovey – Strategic Lead – Housing Solutions		
Accountable Assistant Director: Ewelina Sorbjan – Assistant Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Ian Wake – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

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

1. Recommendation(s)

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

2. Housing Solutions response to ‘Everyone In’.

2.1. Following Government guidance on 26 March 2020 to bring ‘everyone in’ until June of 2021 when this programme ended, Thurrock’s Housing Solutions team provided emergency accommodation to 78 people and housed a further five directly into long term accommodation from the streets.

2.2. Half of those that presented were identified in the first three months after lockdown March – May 2020, which quickly saturated our own temporary accommodation and it was necessary to requisition all the units at Stifford Clays B&B in addition to finding individual private lets. Voluntary organisations worked alongside the Council staff and our commissioned support providers throughout this period, providing logistical support in getting food packages and equipment out to the most vulnerable, providing intelligence about potential rough sleepers and checking in on those we’d accommodated, highlighting potential risks.

2.3. Given the anxiety generated by the pandemic and the additional trauma of being roofless during this period, we made an early decision that every person brought in would be assessed by our Approved Mental Health Social Worker

to contribute to our understanding of individuals care needs. Tailored offers of support were provided to all with an aim to ensure that no-one accommodated returns to the street and that everyone got at least one offer of settled accommodation. We saw this as an opportunity for people to make positive transitions into independent living. We created new positions to focus on training & employment, on becoming tenancy ready and in sustaining the tenancies we assisted them to achieve.

- 2.4. Identifying move on accommodation at that scale has been a massive challenge and the desire to see as many as possible remain close to familial and/or professional support networks meant making our landlord incentives available to all and increasing the size of those incentives. Those eligible were able to access our choice based lettings and we made direct offers in to council stock for those eligible but unable to bid. Where very high support needs were identified, we managed to secure supported accommodation (MIND) in two cases.
- 2.5. At the time of writing, we have achieved a total of 54 successful moves into longer-term secure housing. All of those moves have included a support package with particular focus on building resilience and financial independence. In the vast majority of cases, we were able to achieve self-contained accommodation with Housing Benefit being supplemented for those under 35. This involved strategic meetings with the DWP and accessing discretionary housing payments to bridge gaps in affordability. We have worked hard to be responsive to needs beyond any legal requirements and this has involved making multiple offers in the majority of cases. Seven individuals remain in TA, three of whom we have accepted a duty to house and registered on our choice based lettings system and we've committed to making private sector offers to the remaining four.
- 2.6. Where clients had no recourse to public funds and no immediate capacity for paid employment, we involved relevant government departments and Adult Social Care colleagues. Via these channels, two further people sustained their temporary accommodation with Red Cross taking responsibility for one individual and Adult Social Care another.
- 2.7. This cohort presented a myriad of challenges with over half being diagnosed with a mental health condition or having issues relating to substance misuse. We maintained a face-to-face service throughout and the work of our Approved Mental Health Social Worker helped manage risks and almost certainly saved lives. Not all the clients achieved successful outcomes with five returning to prison, five leaving the accommodation voluntarily (without notifying us or providing onward contact details), and a further ten being evicted from their TA: (five for declining suitable offers, four for not living in the TA provided, and one for violence toward another household member). None of the 54 housed long term have seen their tenancy break down.
- 2.8. Our Rough Sleeper Coordinator made an outreach video during winter to help share the word about our work. Faith groups assisted in production and provided equipment. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3MV0aBnD4c>

- 2.9. We engaged with DWP officials and where other boroughs had ended up covering money themselves, perhaps via DHP (which quickly ran out) we managed to secure exceptional Universal Credit payments. We had great success in turning around rent arrears for clients threatened with homelessness in amounts regularly running to thousands of pounds.
- 2.10. We worked collaboratively with Rough Sleeper Coordinators across Essex to help elevate our work and act on issues as they were happening, sharing crucial insights and knowledge.
- 2.11. Our team is reflective of the diverse community we serve and their ability to speak to clients in their first language has proved valuable. (Romanian, Farsi and Bangladeshi particularly so).
- 2.12. One of the most common causes of homelessness in Thurrock is as a result of landlords imposing eviction measures in the private rental sector. With the national moratorium on eviction proceedings expiring and court proceedings recommencing, there is concern that this will lead to an increase in the number of households presenting as homeless. As the wider economic impacts of the pandemic are felt, such as at the conclusion of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in September 2021, there may be an increase in pressure on the Housing Solutions service.

3. **Housing outcomes**

Outcome	Total
Housed Directly to Assured Shorthold Tenancy	5
Placed in TA and then housed in Long Term Tenancy	49
Placed in TA and subsequently evicted	10
Placed in TA and then returned to prison	5
Placed in TA and left with no forward details	5
Placed in TA and remain in TA	7
Placed in TA with responsibility passed to another agency	2
TOTAL	83

4. **Next steps on *Everyone In***

- 4.1. Seven people remain in TA and all will be offered a suitable move on property before duty is discharged with support provided to sustain the tenancy.
- 4.2. This was a hugely successful programme working with a very challenging client group. The success of the programme saw some people approaching who didn't really have a strong connection to Thurrock but who were genuinely roofless and in need of help. The volume of applications was far higher than our rough sleeper counts and Street Link reports would suggest. We saw a lot of people who have insecure accommodation such as sofa surfing suddenly asked to leave as social distancing was introduced. This partly explained why some disappeared as restrictions eased and they were able to return to previous arrangements and it's an indication of how much 'hidden homelessness' exists within Thurrock and surrounding areas.

- 4.3. The difficulty and risks involved in working with such an influx of vulnerable adults demonstrated the importance of collaborative working. Completing a mental health assessment of everyone who entered the programme, ensuring weekly check in's and careful planning on who could share accommodation helped us mitigate the risks involved. Colleagues from probation services, health and social care settings and the brilliant Local Area Coordination (LAC) service were all crucial in trying to engage the most chaotic presentations. With the doors to the Civic centre closed, intelligence and support provided by the voluntary sector demonstrated the importance of joined up working in identifying and engaging the hardest to reach.
- 4.4. Even with all this support, the many specialist posts funded by MHCLG, the supplemented LHA rates and DHP claims, the funding from our Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) and Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) programmes, we still spent an additional £776k and contributed to a monthly private rented sector bill, for nightly purchase accommodation, approaching £100k. We saturated the local market for one bedroomed properties and found neighbouring areas constantly outbidding us for properties in their desperation to find accommodation. In these circumstances it was necessary to place people outside of borough with an ambition to return them when awarding the 'move on' accommodation.
- 4.5. This competitive market has made it harder to find properties within LHA rates and seen landlord expectations around incentives increase exponentially. It also encourages landlords to target the nightly purchase market rather than offering properties on assured short hold tenancies. We have negotiated with some large private providers that properties are awarded as nightly purchase for three months and then convert to an AST (within LHA rates) at the end of that period which creates more stability for those placed and less logistical support required from our team in achieving a move on.
- 4.6. Going forward we will aim to make a suitable offer of accommodation to anyone who finds themselves roofless regardless of their ability to demonstrate they meet 'Priority Need' status. We've seen what can be achieved with the right amount of support but we've also seen the scale of the challenge and its impact on our resources. We will continue to encourage those with well-established community links to seek assistance within their own areas.
- 4.7. To achieve our goals we need to transform the provision of temporary accommodation, increasing the supply of council-owned TA. We have recently had business case approved which proposes using 'Right to Buy' receipts, combined with HRA prudential borrowing, to purchase properties in line with need. This will allow more individuals and families, who we believe to be homeless, to remain within Thurrock while we make further inquiries and help us to manage our costs. In relation to those we find sleeping rough who are unlikely to meet 'Priority Need' we have traditionally relied on places within our hostels, but these also quickly become saturated with suitable move on accommodation an issue. We have submitted a bid to the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme (RSAP) administered by 'Homes England' with a

view to providing 20 self-contained units of accommodation specifically for this client group. We'll continue to innovate, to work collaboratively and remain ambitious in our outlook.

5. 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):

- None

6. Implications

6.1. Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
**Strategic Lead - Corporate Finance –
Resources and Place Delivery**

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a significant increase in the costs of the delivery of Housing services. Where relevant, namely in relation to financial demands relating to homelessness and rough sleeping, additional costs are being recorded against and funded through the central government grant allocations.

As detailed in para 4.7, a more cost effective, long term solution has been formulated in order to use more of Council owned dwelling to offer accommodation solutions, and address the increasing cost pressures

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

6.2. Legal

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

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

6.3. Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
**Team Manager - Community Development and
Equalities**

The Everyone In programme is designed to work and support people that are vulnerable and are either experiencing or at risk of homelessness. During the course of the pandemic, each person accessing the service was assessed by an Approved Mental Health Social Worker revealing that almost half (40 of 83) were experiencing mental health issues. Services have been tailored in accordance with individual needs with information on housing outcomes for individuals detailed in the body of this update report.

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

Not applicable

7. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

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Housing Solutions