Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 9 July 2020

Homelessness Services – Use of Temporary Accommodation

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

1.1 To note the increased use of temporary accommodation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.2 To note the increased cost of temporary accommodation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.3 To request a further report to be presented by the end of August 2020 updating on the financial implications of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to temporary accommodation.

Alistair Gaw

Executive Director, Communities and Families

Contact: Nicky Brown, Homelessness and Housing Support Senior Manager

E-mail: nicky.brown@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 7598

Report

Homelessness Services – Use of Temporary Accommodation

2.   Executive Summary

2.1   During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council has used significantly more temporary accommodation in order to support vulnerable people and ensure the spread of the virus is minimised amongst the homeless population.

3.   Background

3.1   Since the beginning of lockdown restrictions, the Council has been required to secure additional temporary accommodation to meet public health objectives and manage a lack of throughput into all forms of settled accommodation, to fulfil its statutory duties to homeless people

3.2   Some of this additional accommodation has been part funded by the Scottish Government. There is no confirmation that this funding will extend beyond 30 June 2020.

4.   Main report

4.1   During the period of the Covid-19 restrictions, the Council has secured access to around 500 additional bed spaces, which could be used to accommodate homeless people.

4.2   Pre Covid-19, the average number of households in temporary accommodation was 2035. Currently there are 2394 households in temporary accommodation, excluding the Private Sector Leasing Scheme.

4.3   The increase in temporary accommodation use is mainly a result of three factors: the provision of additional accommodation for those rough sleeping, the provision of temporary accommodation for people who may have no recourse to public funds and a lack of move on or settled accommodation.

4.4   Pre Covid-19, rough sleeping counts had indicated that somewhere in the region of 120 people slept rough in the city each evening. Throughout the pandemic street based outreach has continued and now there are 12-15 people sleeping rough each

evening, all are known to services and efforts continue to try and assist them into accommodation.

4.5   During the pandemic, to support public health objectives the Council has accommodated around 80 people who may have no recourse to public funds. The Council is working with a range of partners to provide accommodation, support and advice to this group. The support includes translation services, housing support, advocacy support and where appropriate repatriation. The Scottish Government has written to the UK Government to request legislative changes and financial support to ensure services to this group can be maintained post Covid.

4.6   There are system challenges in many cases as they are trying to establish their rights but cannot get access to the provision of ID or their cases are not being progressed.

4.7   Once there is no longer a public health requirement to accommodate these people the Council will need to decide how to manage these cases. These options would be:

    4.7.1   Immediately stop providing accommodation, with the likelihood that many, if not all will be required to sleep rough,

    4.7.2   Provide accommodation on an interim basis, to allow continued support for their cases to be progressed. A three-month period would cost around £250,000,

    4.7.3   Continue to provide accommodation indefinitely, for this number of cases the cost would be in the region of £1million per annum

4.8   Full consideration of these options and the support that the Council will continue to provide will be progressed through the Council's adaptation and renewal programme.

4.9   Throughput from temporary accommodation services has slowed during the pandemic across all tenures including alternative temporary accommodation, the private rented sector and social housing.

4.10   Due to the Covid-19 emergency the Council and RSL landlords had to stop advertising and letting homes to protect customers and staff. It was not possible for viewing of properties to take place and services; such as furniture removals, utility connections etc were not available to enable people to move into permanent homes.

4.11   The Council and RSLs have continued, with the homelessness team to provide temporary accommodation and support urgent moves where possible. For example, during this period the Council and its partners have made around 40 homes, either mid-market rent or general stock, available for use as temporary accommodation. This ensured that the Council could move all families out of B&B's and Shared Houses.

4.12   As part of the services strategy to increase the level of short term let accommodation and reduce use of bed and breakfast and other unsuitable accommodation, a number of additional contracts have been entered into since

March 2020. This has increased short term let accommodation from 480 to 710 in the period 1 March 2020 – 1 July 2020, an increase of 48%.

4.13 Of the additional properties secured 106 are deemed to be short-medium term as a result of the COVID-19 situation and will in due course be expected to return to use as holiday accommodation. The remainder meet the services long term aims and contracts have been entered into for up to 3 years.

4.14 The COVID-19 situation presented a small number of opportunities for further additional properties traditionally used for holiday accommodation; however, landlords were only prepared to offer short term deals. This was not deemed to be suitable as it would not provide families with the security they require and would have necessitated identifying further move on accommodation at short notice that may not have been available.

4.15 Across the social letting sector, following government advice around staying at home, terminations of tenancies fell significantly ,meaning fewer homes were available to let. There has also been limited capacity for homeless households to move into empty homes due to difficulties with getting utility connections and furniture removals.

4.16 Returning homes to use is recognised as a priority to support demand for housing for people in extreme need as part of the immediate response and through the recovery phases of lockdown.

4.17 Social landlords have reviewed the re-let process to minimise face to face contact, where possible and safe working requirements put in place to minimise the risk to staff and the public. Homes have continued to be progressed to complete essential repairs, to resolve any utility meter issues and supplies for households moving in.

4.18 As we move forward with moving households into permanent homes it will be necessary to take full account of individual household circumstances; including their ability and willingness to move at this time. Consideration is also needed around assistance to enable households to access any personal or household belongings or secure them, as unlike temporary accommodation their new homes will be unfurnished.

4.19 The weekly advertising of available homes on Key to Choice has now been restarted with the first homes on the website for the public to bid on from 3.30pm on Friday 26 June. Advertising of available Council homes will target and prioritise homeless households and partner landlords have been requested to do likewise to continue to support positive outcomes for homeless households into permanent housing with the housing associations in Edinburgh.

4.20 Two large scale properties, between them accommodating around 120-130 people, have been set up in partnership with Streetwork and Bethany Christian Trust. The Scottish Government have provided around £300,000 to support the delivery of these services, until 30 June 2020. There is continued commitment to part fund these properties, while the Council and its partners complete their exit strategies from these properties.

5. Next Steps

5.1 The Council will progress its exit strategy from the two large scale hotels used to support the need for emergency accommodation during the pandemic.

5.2 Homeless households will be prioritised for available social rented housing; supporting access to settled homes for vulnerable people and reduced costs to the Council.

5.3 The Council will continue to liaise with civil servants to obtain the Scottish Governments position on the continued provision of support to people who may have no recourse to public funds.

6. Financial impact

6.1 The Finance Update reports presented to Policy and Sustainability Committee on 28 May and 25 June 2020 reported a pressure of £2.9m based on the additional costs for the period April – September 2020.

6.2 The financial implications of the position as set out in section 4 above are estimated to create a pressure of approximately £5.7m in 2020/21 and assumes rough sleepers and those with no recourse to public funds continue to be supported for the remainder of the financial year. This is an increase of £2.8m from the position previously reported in the Finance Update reports.

6.3 The UK government recently announced £105m of additional funding for local authorities in England and Wales to help address rough sleeping. We understand that Barnett consequentially will flow from at least part of the £105m announced. The amount Edinburgh can expect is not yet known but any funding received will help to partially address the pressure identified.

6.4 The Council will continue to make representations to the Scottish Government for further funding to address the residual pressures created by responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

7.1 This is an update report and did not require any specific stakeholder engagement.

8. Background reading/external references

8.1 Not applicable.

9.   Appendices

9.1   None.