

REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 28 March 2024

Report of: Ian Collinson, Director

Title: Homelessness – 6 month progress report

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 Further to the report to October Customer Focus Committee this summary report updates members on key activity under the Council's Housing Needs and Homelessness services (relating to strategic priorities of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy 2023-27).

2. Recommendations:

The report is for information only.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

N/A.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources

At present no additional resource implications are noted.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

N/A

6. What are the legal aspects?

There are no specific legal aspects of note.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

N/A

8. Report details:

8.1 Statutory Homelessness Demand

Homelessness demand in terms of statutory homeless applications to the Council has continued at high volume over the last 6 months to January 2024. The number of homeless applications has increased by 9.5% (to 806 total in the last 6 months to end January 2024 when compared to the same 6 months ending January 2023).

Statutory "duty to refer" referrals of homeless or at-risk-of-homelessness households has increased in the same period by 28% (to 392 in the last 6 months). This is an average of 15

households per week referred by a limited selection of statutory agencies alone (e.g. hospital, prison).

8.2 Temporary Accommodation

Alongside the daily housing advice and homeless application and assessment processes, the temporary accommodation service has been exceptionally busy given the doubling over the last 3 years of temporary accommodation units under the Council's management to 150+. Tenancy sustainment and risk management have featured heavily in the TA team's daily workload as has dealing with setting up of new properties and decanting and transfer exercises between them. To date 6 new properties have been set up including a complex need housing project, a women's only house and the tenancing and support of clients into the 25 1-bed flats purchased under the dedicated rough sleeper accommodation programme (RSAP).

Additionally a newly commissioned higher support project at the former Great Western hotel has been set up prior to Christmas accommodating up to 29 homeless households including some from a decommissioned bed and breakfast service (Queens Crescent). The commissioning of new temporary accommodation has not only been necessary to ensure the Council continues to meet statutory homelessness need but is also the key strand to the Housing Needs savings commitment under the MTFP.

8.3 Housing Access and Resettlement

The resettlement service has continued to stretch its resource to support homeless household in ECC temporary accommodation and local supported housing to move on into more settled permanent accommodation in the private rented market and into social housing options. The team continues close working with Devon County Council and district partners in the resettlement of refugee households from Afghanistan, Ukraine and more recently Palestine.

The service continues to administer and support the HFU host scheme, bridging hotel households from Afghan cohorts and individual households resettling from other UK areas directly into Exeter via homeless applications. The team also continues to resettle Ukraine and Afghan families into the Council's recently acquired 13 new-build properties purchased under the Govt "LAHF" (Local Authority Housing Fund) scheme.

8.4 Key Strategic / Commissioning Priorities

Work has also continued at pace with Devon County Council to support the continuation of DCC's funding contribution to adult homelessness accommodation and support services across the city and wider County. Whilst an interim extension of the funding has been achieved for 2024-25 staff are now working on plans for a more sustainable proposal to secure services beyond March 2025.

Significant time and energy has also been put into supporting Exeter's care leavers as part of the Council's corporate parenting responsibility. Managers have been involved in the monthly joint CEX meetings and the new Care For Me governance sub-group working on transforming housing and living prospects for our local care leaver population.

Further challenges have arisen over the past 6 months in the form of the ending of a 10-year DCC funding grant for the probation hostel based in Exeter which has risked up to 19 people becoming street homeless on 1st April in the event of not being able to access alternative

accommodation (due to risk issues). Housing Needs stepped in to propose a temporary rescue plan involving re-funding and repurposing the service for street homeless accommodation whilst providing focused re-housing support for existing residents (to date 10 have successfully moved on).

8.5 Homelessness Strategy

The first year action plan for the strategy has been produced and is to be shared with key stakeholder partners imminently in order to update progress on the tracker and review the task and finish gant-chart.

A full report of progress tracked to the Strategy Action Plan will be provided to Members September 2024.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

9.1 Exeter City Council's Corporate Plan has the following priorities:

- Delivering net zero Exeter 2030
- Promoting active and healthy lifestyles
- Building great neighbourhoods
- Providing value-for-money services
- Leading a well-run council

Reducing homelessness is central to the key corporate strategic priority of "Housing and Building Great Neighbourhoods and Communities" through the tackling of social inequality and maximising homelessness preventions and reliefs. This is primarily achieved through the provision of housing advice and multi-faceted support and assistance. And through the supply of emergency, first and second stage housing options with suitable personalised support to address single and multiple needs. The priorities of the new homelessness strategy are reflected in the following 2022-26 Corporate Plan commitments:

Housing advice and homelessness support - We play a leading role in ensuring that the most vulnerable citizens receive the best advice and, where possible, an accommodation offer at the earliest opportunity with ongoing bespoke support.

We will:

- *Publish and implement a new Homelessness Strategy that supports our ambition to reduce rough sleeper numbers, and end rough sleeping where possible by 2025.*
- *Increase integrated offers of accommodation and treatment to build better recovery from homelessness as well as homelessness prevention in the first place.*
- *Continue co-production and partnership work with the voluntary sector to provide accommodation units with tenancy training and support where needed*

10 . What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

10.1 The main risk is internal and local sector capacity to deliver on the strategy actions. This is mitigated by the number that currently align with existing Council and partner priorities and workplans.

10.2 Another key risk is the failure to progress the recommendations and effect positive change (e.g. new capacity in homelessness prevention or relief) meaning risk of the Council being exposed to increasing statutory homelessness presentations. Mitigation includes the anticipated share of responsibilities across partners and the priority plans to strengthen joint commissioning and aligned funding arrangements for the longer term reduction of homelessness.

11 Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In putting forward recommendations no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because: because

11.4.1 The report is for information only and the parties likely to be affected by implementation of the recommendations are included in the EQIA submitted with the homelessness strategy report to Executive.

12 Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 Important to complete this section in light of the Council declaring a Climate Emergency. Consider whether the recommendations you are making in the report will help, hinder or have no direct impact on delivering our carbon reduction target (carbon neutral by 2030).

12.2 You should think about things like:-

- Travel (and, if travel is unavoidable, whether lower carbon options will be pursued e.g. walking, public transport, electric car);
- Infrastructure (e.g. LED lighting, energy efficient heating/hot water, solar panels, electric car charging points);
- Waste (e.g. recycling, composting, reducing non-recyclable waste); and
- Any other specific carbon reduction initiatives.

12.3 If there are no direct carbon/environmental implications for the decision please state:

No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

13 Are there any other options?

All recommendations and ensuing actions are optional but failure to progress the majority is likely to result in greater levels of local homelessness in the city and increased cost to the Council and key stakeholders in relation to its duties to assist, accommodate and resettle homeless households.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

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