

Agenda

Housing and Health Committee Meeting

Date: Tuesday, 12 September 2023

Time 7.00 pm

Venue: Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT*

Membership:

Councillors Hayden Brawn, Ann Cavanagh, Lloyd Chapman, Kieran Golding, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison (Chair), Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Pete Neal, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Angie Valls and Karen Watson (Vice-Chair) and one vacancy.

Quorum = 5

Pages

Information about this meeting

*Members of the press and public can listen to this meeting live. Details of how to join the meeting will be added to the website by 11 September 2023.

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2. Apologies for Absence

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillors should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their families or friends.

The Chair will ask Members if they have any disclosable pecuniary interests (DPIs) or disclosable non-pecuniary interests (DNPis) to declare in respect of items on the agenda. Members with a DPI in an item must leave the room for that item and may not participate in the debate or vote.

Aside from disclosable interests, where a fair-minded and informed observer would think there was a real possibility that a Member might be biased or predetermined on an item, the Member should declare this and leave the room while that item is considered.

Members who are in any doubt about interests, bias or predetermination should contact the monitoring officer for advice prior to the meeting.

4. Minutes

To approve the [Minutes](#) of the meeting held on 4 July 2023 (Minute Nos. 170 – 177) as a correct record.

Part B Reports for Housing and Health Committee to decide

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|---------|
| 5. | Forward Decisions Plan | 5 - 6 |
| 6. | Housing Assistance Policy Review | 7 - 10 |
| 7. | Temporary Accommodation Spend | 11 - 20 |

Issued on Monday, 4 September 2023

The reports included in Part I of this agenda can be made available in alternative formats. For further information about this service, or to arrange for special facilities to be provided at the meeting, please contact Democratic Services at democraticservices@swale.gov.uk. To find out more about the work of the Committee, please visit www.swale.gov.uk

**Chief Executive, Swale Borough Council,
Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT**

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Housing and Health Committee Forward Decisions Plan – September 2023

| Report title, background information and recommendation(s) | Date of meeting | Open or exempt? | Lead Officer and report author |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
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| Housing and Health Committee | |
| Meeting Date | 12 th September 2023 |
| Report Title | Housing Assistance Policy Review |
| EMT Lead | Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods |
| Head of Service | Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities |
| Lead Officer | Glyn Pritchard, Private Sector Housing Manager |
| Classification | Open |
| Recommendations | <p>The committee is recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To identify members of the committee to form a working group to support the policy review: 2. To agree the terms of reference of the review. |

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the Housing and Health Committee with an overview of the current Housing Assistance Policy and seeks direction from the committee on the review.

2 Background

- 2.1 The current Housing Assistance Policy was adopted by Cabinet in May 2018. Part of the Cabinet decision provided delegations for minor amendments to be made to the policy by the Head of Service in consultation with the Cabinet Member and the policy has been subject to minor amendments regularly. The last changes to the policy were made in 2021. The current policy is available here, [Housing Assistance Policy - April 2021.indd \(swale.gov.uk\)](#)
- 2.2 The Housing Assistance Policy sets out what assistance the Council is able to offer by way of grants, loans, practical assistance and advice to households. This policy has been adopted under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. The Order enables local authorities to develop a means of providing assistance to households living in the private sector to carry out repairs, improvements and adaptations so that they can address local needs and priorities and enable residents to remain independent in their homes.
- 2.3 The policy addresses the following aims:
- To provide adaptations to existing homes to meet disabled people's needs;
 - To assist with essential works to help disabled, elderly and vulnerable people to remain safe and independent in their home;
 - To assist in schemes that provide help to enable residents to be discharged from hospital back into their home safely, and to reduce the risk

of admission or re-admission to hospital by ensuring that the home environment is free from hazards; and

- To ensure that assistance is used as effectively as possible; that monies are recycled where possible and to provide assistance to those persons in greatest need.

2.4 The support currently available falls within the following schemes:

- Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)
- Discretionary Grant and Loan Assistance
- Decent Home Loans (DHL)
- Home Repair Grant (HRG)
- Winter Warmth Grant (WWG)
- Relocation assistance (RA)
- No Use Empty Loans (NUE)
- Heating and Energy Advice Schemes
- Staying Put Services
- Kent Landlord Accreditation

2.5 The policy is funded principally through the Better Care Fund (BCF monitored by KCC and Government). In 2022/23 the allocation to Swale was £2,917,102 and in 2023/24 our allocation remained the same £2,917,102. This funds the Mandatory and Discretionary DFG schemes and elements of the Staying Put Services, and services provided by Kent County Council to the value of £391,552 and a further £55,000 for a dedicated KCC occupational therapist as part BCF agreements in Kent. The Better Care Fund must be spent in line with the BCF grant conditions and adhere to the [Disabled Facilities Grant \(DFG\) delivery: Guidance for Local Authorities in England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#). The other schemes are funded through a range of mechanisms and either charges are recouped, or loans provided, and charges are placed on properties.

2.6 The spend and performance data is shown below in relation to work under the policy during 2022/23.

DFG Committed (Approved) = £2,176,266

DFG Expenditure (Paid) = £1,607,353

DFG Discretionary Grants (inc. Home Improvement Agency (HIA) spend = £496047

HRG Committed (Approved) = £1,998

HRG Expenditure (Paid) = £1,998

Winter Warmth Committed (Approved) = £85,463

Winter Warmth Expenditure (Paid) = £71,582

Loans Committed (Approved) = £32,662

Loans Expenditure (Paid) = £24,937

Number of DFG approvals = 135

Number of DFG referrals received = 244

Number of means test cases = 12
Number of non-means test cases = 232

- 2.7 The Council operates the Home Improvement Agency in-house, the staying put team exists to support clients to access the relevant support and this can be through low level interventions which enable residents to be discharged from hospital or reduce the likelihood of falls. The performance data from 2022/23 is shown below:

Enquires = 1,345
HIA Grant Case work = 182 cases
Handy Person Case work = 606 cases
Health referrals = 395
Clutter cases = 68 cases
Early discharges = 83 cases
Health and Safety Checks = 99 cases
Preventative Falls/ Hospital Admission Cases = 303 cases

- 2.8 As part of the policy review the committee is asked to identify members to form a working group and agree the scope of the review.

- 2.9 Proposed terms of reference for the review:

- To consider if the policy is providing the right assistance to households in the borough;
- To consider if the financial thresholds and means test are at the appropriate levels (some of these are set nationally);
- To consider if the policy is reaching the right residents in the borough;
- To ensure the policy can be resourced both in terms of funding availability and officer resource to administer.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 To identify members of the committee to form a working group to support the policy review:

- 3.2 To agree the terms of reference of the review.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 None

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 None

6 Implications

| Issue | Implications |
|--|---|
| Corporate Plan | Priority 3: Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone. |
| Financial, Resource and Property | The BCF for 2023/24 is after committed deductions £2,470,550. The Private Sector Housing Team have 7 x FTE officers. The Staying Put Team has 4.5 FTE officer. |
| Legal, Statutory and Procurement | This policy has been adopted under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. |
| Crime and Disorder | None identified at this stage. |
| Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency | Winter warmth work makes homes more efficient and therefore would contribute towards the climate and ecological emergency. |
| Health and Wellbeing | The majority of work delivered under this policy directly supports the health and wellbeing of residents to live independently and improve conditions. The work of the staying put team directly reduces hospital admissions and carries out preventative work. |
| Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults | The team work with vulnerable clients and will make appropriate referrals should they be required. |
| Risk Management and Health and Safety | None identified at this stage. |
| Equality and Diversity | As part of the policy review a community impact assessment will be conducted. |
| Privacy and Data Protection | The policy and associated database are managed in line with the Council policies. |

7 Appendices

7.1 None

8 Background Papers

8.1 There are no background papers.

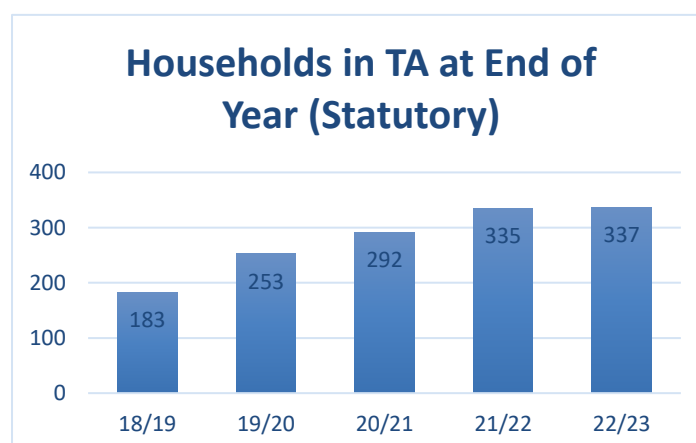
| Housing and Health Committee | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Meeting Date | 12 th September 2023 |
| Report Title | Temporary Accommodation Budget 2022/23 |
| EMT Lead | Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods |
| Head of Service | Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities |
| Lead Officer | Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities |
| Classification | Open |
| Recommendations | <p>The committee is recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> To discuss and scrutinise the current spend on Temporary Accommodation and note the current mitigation in place. |

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the Housing and Health Committee with an overview of the spend on temporary accommodation during 2022/23 and the current controls that are in place to manage this budget.

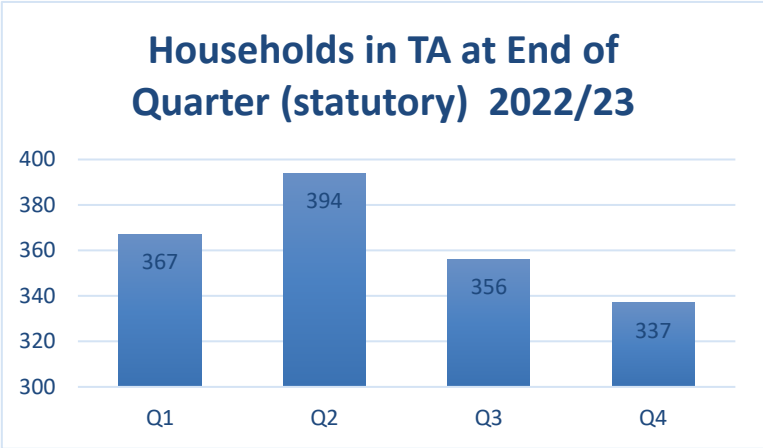
2 Background

- 2.1 There is a statutory responsibility for the Council to provide Temporary accommodation (TA) to clients if they are unintentionally homeless and are in priority need or at the relief stage 'reason to believe' they are in priority need. We also receive funding from DLUHC through the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) and part of this funding enables us to offer some TA to these clients. However, for the purposes of this report we are only focusing on statutory TA.
- 2.2 We have seen a significant increase in the number of households in Temporary accommodation with an 84% increase since 2019. Swale has the highest level of TA amongst Kent districts. A snapshot analysis showed that Swale had 5.93 cases per 1000 households in TA at the end of March 2023 where the south-east average is 3.17 per 1000 households. The Chart below shows the level of TA at year-end for the past 5 years.



2.3 The Council does not own its own social housing stock and therefore relies on procuring accommodation from other sources. We have partnered with Southern Housing who provide units for TA purposes, but the majority of TA is either Bed and Breakfast or Nightly Let Accommodation, which is the most expensive way to provide TA. As updated at the last committee, a procurement exercise to secure a framework for nightly let accommodation was unsuccessful.

2.4 The net budget for TA in 2022/23 was £1.4m and net spend was £2.7m, leaving an overspend on this cost centre of £1.3m. During 2022/23 we saw a steady increase in TA placements, Chart 2 below shows the households in TA at the end of each quarter throughout 2022/23. Although data returns to DLUHC are recorded in this way, at one point the daily rate of households in TA exceeded 400. At the same time our providers increased their nightly let charges due to increasing costs they were experiencing. This had a significant impact on our budget and increased pressure on the team.



2.5 Part of the costs of TA are offset by housing benefit claims, however, there are restrictions in place which only enable us to claim 90% of the LHA rate for TA purposes. We also receive the Housing Prevention Grant which was £662,077 in 2022/23. Contributions are sought from working households that are in TA.

2.6 As part of the budget setting process for the 2023/24 budget, growth to the budget of £800k was made. This took into consideration increasing demand and increased costs, and the transformation work being carried out by the team. At quarter 1 2023/24 budget monitoring, the initial forecast is a year-end overspend of £99k. However, it should be noted that it is incredibly difficult to accurately forecast costs due to the different circumstances and is based on a trend and seasonal forecast.

2.7 Temporary accommodation has been identified as a corporate risk for several years, however, during 2022/23 we steadily saw the numbers in TA rise at a faster rate and therefore more robust mitigations needed to be put in place. Therefore, a Housing Options Improvement project was initiated in July 2022. This work looked at a whole system approach to review the Housing Options service and the whole team have been fully engaged with the service review.

- 2.8 The service review has led to a range of interventions being implemented, some are very small but have made the service more efficient and others are more substantive but will take longer to implement. The work is on-going and is being regularly reviewed, monitored, and evaluated. Some interventions are on hold due to team capacity or because it was appropriate to wait for the new Kent wide housing database but will be prioritised and brought forward in due course. Appendix I list all the interventions currently in place or agreed and due for implementation.
- 2.9 As members are aware, the current economic climate and the Cost-of-Living Crisis places uncertainty on the levels of demand that the service may experience. Although we cannot control the levels of demand, we can ensure that we are delivering the service as efficiently as possible and ensuring prevention work is targeted appropriately.
- 2.10 The PRS sector is becoming increasingly difficult to access or for tenancies to be maintained. We are also seeing many landlords exiting the market. One of the key issues is the difference in the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Rates and current rent levels. LHA rates were raised to 30th percentile rent levels in April 2020 but have subsequently been frozen in cash terms. The average rent for a 3-bed property in Sittingbourne is currently £1350 per month and the LHA rate is £848 and the average rent for a 3-bed property in Sheerness is £1200 per month with the same LHA. Lobbying is happening across the sector to make the case for LHA rates to be uprated to cover at least the 30th percentile of local rents, alongside relinking rates to the real cost of renting for future years.
- 2.11 In addition to the interventions outlined in Appendix I, we are looking at longer-term interventions focusing on the causal factors of homelessness and looking at employment, health, and young people pathways.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 To discuss and scrutinise the current spend on Temporary Accommodation and note the current mitigation in place.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 None

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 None

6 Implications

| Issue | Implications |
|--|---|
| Corporate Plan | <p>Priority 1: Building the right homes in the right places and supporting quality jobs for all</p> <p>Priority 3: Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone</p> |
| Financial, Resource and Property | <p>The substantive report discusses the budget position for 2022/23 and the purpose of this report is to ensure the committee has oversight and scrutiny of the TA budget.</p> |
| Legal, Statutory and Procurement | <p>Local housing authorities have a duty to secure accommodation for unintentionally homeless households in priority need under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). Households might be placed in temporary accommodation pending the completion of inquiries into an application, or they might spend time waiting in temporary accommodation after an application is accepted until suitable secure accommodation becomes available.</p> |
| Crime and Disorder | <p>The Housing Options Service works closely with the Police, Probation and Prison Service to support clients with offending/ex-offending backgrounds.</p> <p>The Housing Options Service supports victims of domestic abuse and provides appropriate housing support.</p> <p>ASB that takes place within TA is managed by the team.</p> |
| Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency | <p>None at this stage.</p> |
| Health and Wellbeing | <p>There is a significant link between the impact of homelessness and the wider determinants of health. We are working with the Health and Care Partnership looking at prevention pathways.</p> |
| Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults | <p>The Housing Options Service work with a wide range of vulnerable clients and work extensively with partner agencies to support and refer clients to relevant services.</p> |
| Risk Management and Health and Safety | <p>The TA budget has been identified as a corporate risk, due to demand on the service and the budgetary impacts.</p> |
| Equality and Diversity | <p>As part of the Housing Assessment process and interview, equality and diversity is taken into consideration.</p> |

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| Privacy and Data Protection | The Housing Options service deals with a wide range of sensitive data and this is managed inline with our corporate policies and is held on a secure database. |
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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix I – Summary of Interventions

8 Background Papers

8.1 There are no background papers.

Appendix I – Summary Intervention Plan

| Intervention | Intervention Type | Description | Status |
|---|------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Use of Discretionary Housing Payments | Prevention | DHPs are made to households who are struggling with housing costs and administered by Revenue and Benefits, with part of the budget assigned to Housing. We are working closely with Revenue and Benefits to ensure that payments are maximised to relieve homelessness on a long-term basis. | Implemented |
| Faster payments process for securing PRS properties | Prevention | The prevention and landlord teams were finding it difficult to assist in securing PRS accommodation, as a rent deposit was required. Although we operate a rent deposit scheme for our clients, we could not make the payment quick enough to secure the property. Finance have supported this by facilitating a faster payment process. | Implemented |
| Landlord Intervention | Prevention and Move on | We have recruited an additional officer to support our Landlord Team. They are working to engage more landlords and look at new products that can encourage landlords to work with us. | Implemented |
| BEAM | Prevention | BEAM provide employment and housing advice to clients. | Implemented |
| Xantura and PIP | Prevention | We have access to data analytical tools which help to identify clients that may be at risk of homelessness, we also have an additional worker funded externally to support these clients. | Partially implemented |
| Additional training and implementation of toolkits for officers | System improvement | A 2-day training session was provided by an industry leading housing expert to the whole team, in addition toolkits were provided to embed the training. | Implemented |
| TA sign off | System improvement | The Housing Options Manager is required to authorise every TA Placement. To ensure consistency and accuracy of placements. | Implemented |

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| Backlog of decisions and outsourcing reviews | System Improvement | <p>Due to the complex nature of cases, we were experiencing a backlog of case decisions. This can limit the options for move on/ or mean that we are accommodating people that are not entitled to accommodation. Focused work to reduce the backlog has taken place.</p> <p>Case reviews must be carried out by a more senior officer than the officer who made the decision, there were limited officers to deal with the most complex cases and reviews. We had previously outsourced reviews to another authority but due to their increased workload they were no longer able to provide this service, we have now secured a new provider.</p> | Implemented. |
| Enhanced Triage | System Improvement | We have created a new role of Senior Triage Officer and seconded an existing housing officer into this role. This officer carries out in-depth triage before a housing interview takes place and looks to see if there are any options to resolve homelessness. This has led to a significant reduction in clients needing to make a homeless application. | Implemented |
| Triage (New system processes) | System Improvement | As part of the roll out of the new Humme system, the system will enable more interaction with clients and access to advice and information. The initial contact system will be reviewed and integrated with the new system | Waiting for new system. |
| Review of management of complex cases and safeguarding responses. | System improvement | The team identified they were spending a lot of their time dealing with the complex nature of their client's cases, where other agencies had responsibility. Alongside the safeguarding team, we have been working on individual cases and working with partner agencies to improve this process and free up staff time to focus on housing case management. | Implemented |

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| Maximising Housing benefit Claims | Cost Control /Income Maximisation | We have improved the process of housing benefit claims on TA placements, to ensure we are claiming the maximum amount of housing benefit allowed. | Implemented |
| Contributions Policy | Cost Control /Income Maximisation | The Committee agreed the TA Policy, this also formalised the ability to collect contributions towards TA from working households. This was already taking place but formalised the position. | Implemented |
| Procurement of Night Let Accommodation | Cost Control /Income Maximisation | A joint tender with Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells to create a purchase framework for NL accommodation was run in order to stabilise and control costs, however the market failed to respond, and no contract was awarded. The existing spot purchase arrangements remain in place. | Paused. |
| TA Purchase | Cost Control /Income Maximisation | Committee agreed in Jan 2023, to purchase 50 properties for use of TA. This project is being implemented although no properties have been bought yet. This will enable the cost of TA Placement to be more efficient. | Being Implemented. |
| TA Case Focus (10) | Move on | When we analysed our TA data, we identified that we had a consistent flow in and out of TA. However, we also noted that we still had a large number of households we therefore took an in-depth review of 10 cases at a time to look at how we can look at what the barriers were to move on. We have also identified additional resource and are currently recruiting 2 visiting officers to increase this work. | Implemented. |
| TA 4+ Project | Move on | From the analysis we identified that households with a 4+ bedroom need had been in TA the longest, the cost of TA is also the highest. This is due to very limited properties coming through the housing register or affordable in the PRS. We are therefore taking a more detailed look at these cases and looking at longer-term strategies to support these households. | Being implemented |

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| Affordable Housing Delivery | Move on | We work with Registered Providers and negotiate with developers as part of the planning process to secure affordable housing in the borough. Swale Rainbow Homes has been set-up to increase delivery of affordable housing. | Implemented |
| Supported Accommodation | Move on | As part of the Kent Homeless Connect Contract changes at KCC, we managed to secure funding through RSI funding and transition funding to secure supported accommodation which is used for RSI clients but also move on accommodation for suitable clients. | Implemented |
| Strategic Relationship with Southern Housing | Partnerships | We regularly meet with Southern Housing (as our stock transfer RP) to look at how they can support us in tackling the TA problem. They are currently supporting us with TA Provision, they have also been looking to improve the time it takes to carry out void works so properties become available quicker. | Implemented |
| Linkage to Cost of Living Work | Partnerships | Extensive work has been done on the CoL in Swale, particularly through the Household Support Fund and in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. We are working with this partnership to identify households that need support. | Implemented |
| Increased staffing | Resources | We have managed to secure funding for additional posts to support the work of the team. Two posts have been recruited and started recently and we have a further five posts due to be advertised shortly. | Partially Implemented |
| Evidence Gathering and Campaigning on LHA Rates | Lobbying | Working in partnership with Kent Housing Group and also with Local Authorities in Sussex, we are looking at collective lobbying on LHA rates and impact of homelessness on council budgets. | Partially Implemented |

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