

Agenda

Housing and Health Committee Meeting

Date: Thursday, 1 August 2024

Time 7.00 pm

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

Membership:

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

Quorum = 5

Pages

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2. Apologies for Absence

3. Minutes

To approve the [Minutes](#) of the meetings held on 5 March 2024 (Minute Nos. 727 – 734) and [15 May 2024](#) (Minute Nos. 25 – 26) as correct records.

4. 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.

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|----|---|---------|
| 5. | Controlling Spend on Temporary Accommodation - Virement request | 5 - 10 |
| 6. | Annual Report - Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy | 11 - 18 |
| 7. | Forward Decisions Plan | 19 - 20 |

Issued on Tuesday, 23 July 2024

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

Housing and Health Committee	
Meeting Date	1 st August 2024
Report Title	Temporary Accommodation (TA) Budget Virement
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	The committee is recommended to: 1. To recommend to Policy and Resources Committee to approve a virement of £421k from the Temporary Accommodation Budget to Housing Salary Budget.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the Housing and Health Committee with an update on the current controls in place to manage the TA budget, and proposals for investment in resources within the Housing Options team, funded from the existing TA budget.
- 1.2 The report seeks endorsement from the Housing and Health Committee of the proposal, prior to seeking authority for a virement between the TA Budget to the Housing Salary Budget from Policy and Resources Committee.

2 Background

- 2.1 There is a statutory responsibility for the Council to provide 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. The 2024/25 budget for TA is £2.1m.
- 2.2 A Housing Options Improvement project was instigated two years ago; this has seen a long-term transformation project put in place to look at the issues that the team were experiencing. At the beginning of the project Swale was experiencing the highest level of Households in TA in Kent, at its peak 420 households and the spend on TA was £2.7m and growing year on year. Nationally, homelessness is increasing significantly due to economic and social issues with many authorities including Swale declaring a Housing Emergency. It is anticipated that demand for homelessness services will continue to increase in the short and medium term, with a backdrop of reduced delivery of affordable housing. In addition, the complex nature of clients is increasing requiring more and specialist support to deal with the issues presented. Therefore, having a strong and robust response to homelessness services is paramount at this time.
- 2.3 A series of workshops were run with the whole of the Housing Options team to identify the issues relating to the service on a team-by-team basis, using

systems thinking approaches and analysis. Work has also been undertaken to review best practice with other authorities. The Council has also participated in national lobbying to address funding for homelessness services.

- 2.4 During the past 12 months a series of interventions have been piloted which included introducing 5 new posts. These additional posts have been funded using the COVID Outbreak Management Fund and were recruited on a fixed term basis.
- 2.5 In addition, the Housing and Health Committee agreed to purchase our own TA. The initial modelling for the TA purchase programme assumed that we would outsource the operational management, following discussion with other authorities we have decided to operate this in house, therefore the resourcing proposals take this into account. As well as the TA purchase programme an accommodation strategy has been developed to minimise our use of Nightly Let Accommodation.

The changes implemented in 2023/24 has seen the following results:

- Through the enhanced triage process, we have reduced the initial decisions from 804 (22/23) to 629 (23/24).
 - Since enhanced triage began in Jan 2023, they have dealt with 1,576 clients to end of June 2024, 75% were advice only and 21% made a homeless tonight appointment on first approach and 4.5% after repeat contact.
 - Households in TA at the end of 2023/24 was 304, which is a significant reduction from the height of 420 in July 2022. At the time of writing the report it was 278.
 - Swale is now the 4th highest district for TA numbers in Kent, down from being the highest for the past 2 years. This is more in line with where we would expect to be due to our population size and demographics.
 - In 2022/23 the net spend on TA was £2.7m and in 2023/24 the net spend on TA was £2.3m. Although this was still over the current budget by £163k. We are currently averaging gross costs of TA at £12k per day at its peak it was £14.5k per day.
- 2.6 The impact of the Accommodation Strategy changes is not reflected in the above results as the initial purchased properties went to Ukraine Households due to the LAHF funding and these households are fully subsidised through the Ukraine grant. We therefore expect a significant step away from nighty let accommodation during 2024/25 as our TA purchase programme is fully implemented and we bring on stream the decommissioned KCC services. This will have a significant impact on costs of TA. The average annual placement is around £8k a year (net) however this can vary from our cheapest accommodation £10/night to £95/night (gross).
- 2.7 To move the service forward and provide resilience, there are several issues that need to be addressed through additional investment in team resources, they are:

- Increase management capacity both at a strategic and operational manager level.
- Ensure resource is in place to manage the demand coming into the service and that cases are dealt with efficiently.
- Ensure we have capacity and resilience to respond to changing and complex issues.
- Ensure resource is in place to manage our own TA.
- Ensure resource is in place to work with landlords for effective move on.

2.8 Virements over £100k to any budget need to be approved by Policy and Resources. Prior to seeking authority for the virement, endorsement is sought from the Housing and Health Committee who oversee the relevant budgets is required.

2.9 If the virement is approved then close monitoring to ensure that the anticipated impacts are achieved. The Head of Housing and Communities will monitor monthly through the budget monitoring process and the Scrutiny update reports will continue to come forward to Housing and Health Committee (currently 6 monthly).

3 Proposals

3.1 To recommend to Policy and Resources Committee to approve a virement of £421k from the Temporary Accommodation Budget to Housing Salary Budget.

4 Alternative Options

4.1 To not endorse the virement proposal, this is not recommended as the results to date have evidenced that investment in staff to manage clients quickly and effectively has reduced costs to the Council and TA budget.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 A restructure consultation is currently taking place with staff from the Housing Options team.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	<p>Health & Housing - To aspire to be a borough where everyone has access to a decent home and improved health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Running the Council - Working within our resources to proactively engage with communities and outside bodies to deliver in a transparent and efficient way</p>
Financial, Resource and Property	The report seeks the virement of £421k from the Temporary Accommodation Budget to Housing Salary budget.

	The TA budget is currently £2.1m
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	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.
Crime and Disorder	By increasing resource within the team, we can focus more on client's needs and working with criminal justice partners to deal with complex cases with offending/ex-offending backgrounds. The proposals are also looking to increase dedicated support to victims of domestic abuse. The proposals are seeking to ensure we have enough resource to manage ASB that takes place within TA and in particular the SBC owned properties.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None at this stage.
Health and Wellbeing	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.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	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. Increased resources will ensure we have more regular contact with clients to support and identify any concerns.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The TA budget has been identified as a corporate risk, due to demand on the service and the budgetary impacts. There is a risk that the changes will not realise the level of savings required within the TA budget, especially if there is also further increased demand on the service. This will be monitored closely by Officers on a monthly basis as part of budget monitoring and reported regularly to the Housing and Health Committee through the TA Scrutiny process and to Policy and Resources through the budget monitoring reporting.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

7 Appendices

None

8 Background Papers

8.1 There are no background papers.

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Housing and Health Committee	
Meeting Date	1 st August 2024
Report Title	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 2027 Annual Update
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	The committee is recommended to: 1. To note progress on the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 27.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the Housing and Health Committee with an update on the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 27.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 27, was adopted by the Housing and Health Committee on 4th July 2023. As part of the Strategy governance, it was agreed to bring an annual report to the Committee to ensure the Strategy is progressing and to highlight any risk or issues to delivery.
- 2.2 The priorities within the Strategy are:
- Delivering Affordable Homes;
 - Preventing Homelessness;
 - Developing a more efficient housing options service; and
 - Improve conditions in existing homes.
- 2.3 A progress report on work to date is shown in Appendix I.
- 2.4 We are currently only one year into the Strategy and it is felt that the priorities are still relevant and there is currently no requirement to make any amendments or alterations to the main priorities or objectives. Good progress has been made in all areas of the Strategy, with 2023/24 having had a large focus on the homelessness services as this is where the biggest demand is and challenging financial position. A greater focus will be given to the Private Sector housing team this year to progress these priorities and to respond to the Renters Reform Bill.

3 Proposals

3.1 To note progress on the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 27.

4 Alternative Options

4.1 None

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 This is an update progress report and therefore no consultation has taken place. The Strategy went out to consultation last year before adoption.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	<p>Health & Housing - To aspire to be a borough where everyone has access to a decent home and improved health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Running the Council - Working within our resources to proactively engage with communities and outside bodies to deliver in a transparent and efficient way</p>
Financial, Resource and Property	<p>The report seeks the virement of £421k from the Temporary Accommodation Budget to Housing Salary budget.</p> <p>The TA budget is currently £2.1m</p>
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	<p>Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must carry out a review of homelessness in their area and publish a homelessness strategy which sets out what it plans to do to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.</p> <p>The Renters Reform Bill 2023 has just been introduced in parliament and is likely to have impacts on Council Services.</p>
Crime and Disorder	<p>The housing service works closely with the Community Safety Partnership in managing clients that have an offending background. Having stable and affordable housing, can assist in breaking the re-offending cycle.</p>
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	<p>Grants promoted by the Private Sector Housing Scheme can assist with improvements with EPC ratings.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	<p>Housing is a wider determinant of health and having secure and decent homes significantly improves the health and wellbeing on residents.</p>

Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	The housing service undertakes the most Safeguarding referrals than any other department in the Council, the nature and circumstances of some of the clients mean they are very vulnerable and therefore support is required from partner agencies.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The provision and affordability of Temporary Accommodation continues to be a corporate risk.
Equality and Diversity	This was considered at the time of the adoption of the Strategy. Due consideration to the Equalities Act is embedded in the Housing teams processes.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

7 Appendices

Appendix I - Annual Progress Report

8 Background Papers

8.1 Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping 2023 - 2027

Appendix I – Annual Progress Report

Housing, Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 2027

Update July 2024

Priority One – Delivering Affordable Homes

Objective	Update
Deliver affordable homes through Swale Rainbow Homes.	Swale Rainbow Homes has secured Planning permission at Cockleshell Walk for 51 homes. The financial viability of the scheme is being addressed by accessing grant. A successful application has been made to the Brown Fields Land Release Fund, on-going talks is taking place with Homes England to secure funding from the Affordable Homes Programme to progress the scheme.
Assist developers in promoting affordable homes to RP's in the borough.	A long-term and consistent approach to partnership working is ongoing with Registered Providers (Housing Associations) and Developers to enable the delivery of affordable homes across Swale. It is currently very challenging for RPs to take on small sites and the financial pressures on RPs due to investment in the condition of their current stock due to new regulations. The Affordable Housing Manager is working extremely closely with RPs to enable as many affordable homes as possible. There are currently circa. 500 homes that have been secured through planning that have no RP to secure the homes.
Work with Homes England, Registered Providers, and institutional investors to secure additional affordable housing in the borough.	Work is ongoing to deliver additional affordable homes with several sites secured that are or will be delivering affordable rent tenure, social rented and shared ownership homes.

Support Community Led Housing schemes and other initiatives for residents to secure housing in the borough.	The development of the Kent wide Rural & Community Housing Enabling Service (RACE) has been established to enable continued work with the Council and Local Community Groups to bring forward small local needs led affordable housing schemes.
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Priority Two – Preventing Homelessness

Objective	Update
Develop an enhanced triage service.	The enhanced triage process was introduced last year, initially starting with one role but increasing two due to the immediate effectiveness of this function. This has enabled the team to deal with the increased demand in homelessness queries at the first point of contact. Further resource need has been identified and service improvements to this area have been planned
Promote the prevention services to residents.	The service is currently working at capacity, so promotion has not yet begun. Link with the Community Development team and promotion of the Cost-of-Living work to assist clients who are in financial difficulty. The team are also referring into the BEAM programme, which has enabled a number of clients to either maintain or access PRS properties.
Develop a PRS offer for landlords and tenant support.	Offers to landlords are in place which also offer landlords and tenants ongoing tenancy support to maintain new and existing tenancies. The Landlord Introduction scheme continues to be a positive tool for supporting landlords with new tenants. The team have also had a dedicated work to support the Homes for Ukraine scheme and support those clients where host family support was unable to continue.
Use analytical tools to identify individuals at risk of homelessness and offer support.	We are working with KCC on the Xantura programme which helps identify individuals that may be at risk of homelessness. We have employed a specialist Officer to contact the cohort of people and provide them with support. We are also utilising the LIFT programme which also identified risk factors and again can offer support to clients. This is also being fed into the welfare support project run by the Community Development Team to assist with long-term prevention.
Deliver focused prevention work in relation to family evictions	The prevention team currently work with families to find solutions to avoid eviction. Work is in progress to provide a specialist Prevention Officer to streamline this work further.

Deliver focused prevention work in relation to s.21 notices.	S21 notices are checked for validity, challenged where appropriate, negotiations are held with landlords to avoid evictions taking place, and legal rights are explained to both landlords and tenants
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Priority Three – Developing a more efficient housing options service

Objective	Update
Carry out a full service review of the relief and main duty process to speed up decision times.	This strand of work has featured in the Housing Options Improvement Project. The introduction of the enhanced triage role has reduced the number of cases that have progressed to requiring a homeless interview. This has enabled the Officers to have a reduced caseload and focus on these cases to make timely and effective decision. Cases are becoming more complex due to the needs of the clients which can also impact on the speed of decision making while gathering information. Caseloads are reviewed regularly to ensure cases are determined as quickly as they can be.
Review the type and use of temporary accommodation to ensure value for money and effectiveness for clients.	As part of the Housing Options Improvement Programme an Accommodation Strategy has been developed. The main component of this is undertaking a programme to acquire homes to be used as local and cost-effective temporary accommodation for homeless households. The Housing and Health Committee has approved the purchase of 50 homes and 13 homes have been acquired to date with another 30 currently in the legal process. This programme has also been supported by utilising the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF). We are also currently looking to secure further accommodation that has been decommissioned by KCC as supported accommodation to utilise as TA. We are also working with Kent Housing Group to conduct a piece of work on cost and quality of TA.
Review and monitor the Housing Allocations Policy to ensure those most in need access Affordable Housing.	The Allocation policy is monitored and analysed quarterly to ensure Affordable Housing is allocated to those most in need.
Implement a range of projects to support homeless households to enhance employment and housing	Employment options are discussed with households that are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and customers have had success in securing new job roles. Joint working with Beam has supported households into employment, and this has resulted in wider housing choices.

options and reduce time spent in TA.	A current project supporting rough sleepers into housing and employment has been started and outcomes will be monitored.
Deliver the RSI service in line with the bid submission.	The service is currently delivering year 3 services of the current 3-year Government funded programme. This programme has seen a significant service delivered which includes regular outreach to those on the streets several times a week. Accommodation is also provided to some individuals. Wider programmes have also been funded through this programme, including funding to continue the services at The Quays and a Housing First programme to support the most vulnerable clients. Work to support Drug and Alcohol addiction also forms part of this programme and the team have piloted a successful volunteering scheme with those with lived experience to support clients.

Priority Four – Improve conditions in existing homes

Objective	Update
Target enforcement on the worst private sector properties to improve living conditions.	11 enforcement notices have been issued to address the conditions of poorly managed properties, including imposition of around £40,000 worth of fixed penalty notices as alternatives to prosecutions. A fund of £130,000 has also been secured from DLUHC to enhance the capacity and capability of the team to enforce robust measures against damp and mould in residential dwellings.
Promote the Government energy schemes in Swale.	In March 2024, the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG Phase 2) was promoted through mailshots and on the Council's website to reach targeted residents in Swale. This new government grant scheme funds energy saving upgrades for residents with off-grid gas heating systems who are most affected by high energy costs.
Carry out a full service review on the Disabled Facilities Grant to ensure it is being delivered as efficiently as possible.	The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) process audit and review has been completed with resulting recommendations to streamline and optimize the existing process. The final report is now being awaited, with plans to implement the recommended actions.
Promote the Housing Improvement Agencies work.	In addition to web promotion of Home Improvement Agency work on the Swale website, the distribution of promotional leaflets through hospitals such as Medway Hospital is underway.

<p>Tackle empty properties that impact on local neighbourhoods the most.</p>	<p>The service is currently operating below capacity to effectively address problematic empty homes that are affecting neighbours. A previous decision to reduce the resource within this area. A review is taking place to establish how we can effectively tackle Empty Homes and how we can link in with other organisations and services.</p>
<p>Review and implement Council responsibilities in relation to Renters Reform Bill / Act.</p>	<p>The Renters (Reform) Bill is currently put on hold due to the General Election. Developments will be monitored closely, and resources allocated to respond accordingly.</p>

Housing and Health Committee Forward Decisions Plan – August 2024

Report title, background information and recommendation(s)	Date of meeting	Open or exempt	Lead Officer and report author
Temporary Accommodation - Scrutiny report	22 October 2024	Open	Head of Service: Charlotte Hudson Report Author: Charlotte Hudson
Housing Assistance Policy - Consultation Draft	22 October 2024	Open	Head of Service: Charlotte Hudson Report Author: Charlotte Hudson/San Nyunt
Affordable Housing Emergency - Consideration of interventions	22 October 2024	Open	Head of Service: Charlotte Hudson Report Author: Charlotte Hudson

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