

| <b>Policy and Resources Committee</b> |   |
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| <b>Meeting Date</b>                   | 11 <sup>th</sup> September 2024   |
| <b>Report Title</b>                   | Temporary Accommodation (TA) Budget Virement  |
| <b>EMT Lead</b>                       | Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods   |
| <b>Head of Service</b>                | Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities   |
| <b>Lead Officer</b>                   | Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities   |
| <b>Classification</b>                 | <b>Open</b>   |
| <b>Recommendations</b>                | The committee is recommended to:<br>1. 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 Policy and Resources 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 proposal was considered by the Housing and Health Committee at their meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024 and they have endorsed the proposals within this report.

## **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 295.
  - Swale is now the 4<sup>th</sup> 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 nightly 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 The restructure proposals are focusing on investing in the following areas:

- Creation of a housing advice team to build on the enhanced triage process this will ensure that eligibility is established early and that the most appropriate housing advice and service is provided to the client on initial contact.
- A stronger focus on prevention and the introduction of specialist officers focusing on domestic abuse and parental evictions.
- Appropriate resource to manage our own TA and to manage the clients that are in TA.
- Bringing together the PRS landlord team and Housing register, to ensure that the right clients get the most suitable move on accommodation.
- The management capacity is being increased to ensure longer term solutions can be put in place and we can improve our work with partner agencies which impact on the service, for example prison release and hospital discharge clients.

2.9 Virements over £100k to any budget need to be approved by Policy and Resources. Prior to seeking authority for the virement, endorsement has been sought from the Housing and Health Committee who oversee the relevant budgets and has regularly scrutinises the budget and improvement programme.

2.10 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, but this will increase from six monthly to quarterly.

### **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 &amp; 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>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>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.</p> <p>The proposals are also looking to increase dedicated support to victims of domestic abuse.</p> <p>The proposals are seeking to ensure we have enough resource to manage ASB that takes place within TA, and particularly the SBC owned properties.</p> |
| Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency | None at this stage.   |
| 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>   |

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| 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.<br>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 monthly 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 Housing and Health Committee Draft Minutes – 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024 [Agenda item - Controlling Spend on Temporary Accommodation - Virement request \(swale.gov.uk\)](#)