

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Report to :** Overview & Scrutiny Committee    **DATE:** 11<sup>th</sup> January 2018

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Colin Moone, Service Lead - Strategic Housing Services  
Paul J Thomas, Interim Housing Supply Manager  
**(For all Enquiries)** (01753) 875300

**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I** **FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

#### **HOUSING STRATEGY – THEME 4: HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING NEED;** **THEME 5: SPECIAL NEEDS AND VULNERABLE GROUPS**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the second in a series of themed progress reports regarding the implementation of the Housing Strategy Action Plan approved by Cabinet in March 2017.
- 1.2 Given the wide range of cross-cutting issues the Housing Strategy addresses, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that all 5 Themes of the Housing Strategy, published in March 2017, were considered and reported sequentially and on request to this Committee for scrutiny.
- 1.3 The 5 Housing Strategy Themes:
  - Theme 1: New Housing Supply
  - Theme 2: Private Rented Sector
  - Theme 3: Council Homes
  - Theme 4: Homelessness and Housing Need
  - Theme 5: Special Needs and Vulnerable Groups
- 1.4 At the previous meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 2017, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered Theme 1: New Housing Supply as the overarching theme of the Housing Strategy, which aims to deliver around 1000 new homes each year to meet the needs of Slough residents.
- 1.5 The Committee asked for this second report to consider both Theme 4 and Theme 5 together due to their strategic and operational links. These themes also represent some of the highest priorities for the Council in meeting the needs of its vulnerable residents.
- 1.6 This report provides an opportunity for consideration and comment in regarding these themes in the context of delivering the Council's Manifesto and relevant strategies and plans.

## 2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

- Note the escalating homelessness situation and the interventions being made to help reduce the numbers of homeless households in the borough; whilst assisting Adult Social Care and Slough Children Services Trust in line with the Council's Manifesto and relevant strategies and plans;
- Consider what comments it would like to make to Cabinet, the Wellbeing Board and the Neighbourhoods & Community Service Scrutiny Panel regarding tackling the growing homeless pressures and meeting the housing needs of vulnerable adults and children in the Borough.

## 3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five-Year Plan**

- Housing is a key priority of the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS) with our partners' objectives being taken full account of in the production of the Housing Strategy. The strategy is cross linked to the JSNA and the Five-Year Plan.
- The Housing Strategy itself sets out priorities which will form the focus of activities and resources over the next 5 years. It is in line with Slough's Five-Year Plan and Local Plan by seeking to deliver more and better homes in the borough to help address broader health and economic outcomes for Slough residents.
- Theme 4 of the Housing Strategy focuses on increasing the range of housing options and prevention services for homeless households; whilst Theme 5 looks at a broad range of partnership approaches to deliver more and better housing choices for vulnerable adults and children. Examples include building more extra-care housing schemes for older people and increasing housing choice for young people leaving care.
- The specific aim of both housing themes is to deliver a better range of safe and affordable housing solutions to enable wider health, economic and educational benefits for our vulnerable residents.

### 3.1 **Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

3.1.1 The availability and quality of housing including specialist housing is recognised as a key determinant of health and wellbeing and it is a priority in the new Wellbeing Strategy.

3.1.2 Strategically, the delivery of the Housing Strategy aims to ensure:

- The right supply and mix of new homes including affordable housing is available to meet the needs of all residents in the borough including for homeless households and those with vulnerabilities.

## 3.2 **The JSNA**

3.2.1 The Housing Strategy's needs data ranged from specific client group needs and wider determinants of public health gained through consultation and research as part of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for the Borough.

3.2.2 Key objectives identified:

- That specialist accommodation is available for adults and children (if needs cannot be met within ordinary housing solutions)
- That homelessness and rough sleeping is reduced
- That professionally managed and well-maintained homes are delivered including increased controls and regulation of the Private Sector
- That we ensure green and healthy homes wherever possible

## 3.3 **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

3.3.1 The key driver for the Housing Strategy is to deliver Outcome 4 of the 2017 Five Year Plan; *our residents will have access to good quality homes*. It also helps to deliver and makes contributions to each of the other outcomes:

- 1) Our children and young people will have the best start in life and opportunities to give them positive lives
- 2) Our people will become healthier and will manage their own health, care and support needs
- 3) Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and visit
- 4) Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide jobs and opportunities for our residents.

## 4. **Other Implications**

### a) **Financial**

This is a potential and significant risk to the Council's General Fund in regard to the rising homeless pressures that the borough is facing and this needs to be balanced against possible capital and revenue investment that the Council may choose to make to control rising homelessness and plan longer term solutions.

### b) **Risk Management**

The financial risks to the Council are tightly managed through relevant Boards and Committees. Likewise, the delivery of each of the Five-Year Plan Outcomes is tightly managed. However, the above outcomes are dependent on the successful delivery of the Housing Strategy and specifically on increasing the supply of homes and housing options for homeless households and vulnerable groups. The key challenge is delivering on the ambitious scale outlined in the Housing Strategy, which will require significant capital and revenue investment from the Council over the life of the Housing Strategy and beyond.

### c) **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications**

There are no Human Rights implications arising specifically from this report, however, homeless legislation and allocations of social housing (by both council and housing associations) have long been subject to large numbers of legal challenges nationally on human rights grounds and considerable case law exists.

It is likely that this trend will continue with the introduction of the *Homelessness Reduction Act* from April 2018 and inevitably new legal challenges and case law will follow presenting an on-going risk to all councils.

d) Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in relation to the production of the Housing Strategy and its implementation plan for all 5 themes.

5. **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 The council has several important objectives and legal duties in addressing Homelessness in the borough including preventing homelessness and reducing the need to place households in temporary accommodation. These also include minimizing the cost of homelessness to the council tax payer and ensuring that there is a supply of affordable alternative accommodation for homeless households.
- 5.2 The new Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) effective from April 2018 places new duties on local authorities to prevent homelessness at much earlier stages - 56 days as opposed to the current 28 days of the existing legislation. The ethos of this legislation is to widen the responsibility for homelessness beyond housing departments across the Health, Social Care, and Wellbeing sectors.
- 5.3 In Slough, this means addressing the needs of vulnerable homeless households in partnership with Adult Social Care, Slough Children's Services Trust (the Trust), Mental Health, Probation Services, Voluntary sector providers, Health, Youth Services etc, whilst increasing resources to directly intervene in the private rented sector to prevent evictions of vulnerable households. Currently, the growing number of homeless households and increased demand for our housing options service is one of the big issues facing Slough. The homeless population is growing and rough sleeping (living on the streets) appears to be on the increase.
- 5.4 It is Government policy for each authority to have a new Homeless Strategy which includes the changes in law encompassing the Homeless Reduction Act and prevention measures, it will need to fully address housing supply and joined-up services to meet each Borough's needs.
- 5.5 Our existing evidence base of need is as follows:
- a) There have been around 2,500 applicants on the Housing Register (people needing accommodation) for the last 4 years despite around 300 to 400 social housing allocations being made each year.
  - b) The council had a total of 1905 homelessness approaches in 2016/17; of these 1440 needed housing advice and 465 were on an emergency basis.
  - c) The number of households accepted as homeless in Slough was 237.
  - d) The number of homeless households in temporary accommodation has increased from 74 in 2013/14 to 378 in 2017/18 an increase of 510% in 4 years, or simply five times as many households. The current number is 388.
  - e) The private rented market in Slough continues to experience increasing pressures from London/outside Boroughs, who have notified the Housing Demand Team of around 500 families places in the last 3 years. This is considered a large underestimate at around a third of the numbers placed

in Slough. We are only advised, legally, of other boroughs placing into Slough, of temporary housing placements e.g. not into accommodation via the Private Sector route.

- f) The effect of the Government's Welfare Reforms has and will continue to create more homelessness, with Universal Credit being introduced across the board (for all claimants) in Slough, April 2018, many families on benefits cannot afford to house themselves in the private rented sector.
  - g) Rough sleeping (living on the streets) is an issue that may be increasing and requires a better joined-up approach.
- 5.6 Affordability of the private rented sector is one of the biggest issues facing Slough. The last 4 years of rapid increases in homelessness mirrors the Borough's house price growth and private sector rent increases, which represent some of the highest in the Country. At the same time, many of Slough's local working households who cannot access home ownership or social housing are accommodated in the growing private rented sector. This sector was already one of the largest in the Country at around 20% of all households. These families have been under increasing financial pressures over the last 4 years and now represent the largest group of households presenting as homeless to the Council.
- 5.7 Slough's increasing population and the successful regeneration of the Borough is delivering broader strategic objectives for the Council. These factors also continue to drive up housing competition and rent levels for local working families to now largely unsustainable levels. Hence the increase in homelessness is largely due to the outlined factors of rapidly increasing rents in the private rented sector and increasing restrictions in the availability of benefits. For example, the Local Housing Allowance or housing benefit levels only represent about 65% of current rental levels, leaving a 35% affordability gap for those reliant on benefits to pay their rent.
- 5.8 Slough's introduction of a Living Rent (SLR) also recognised the situation of many of the borough's working residents who cannot afford market rents and do not qualify for the council's Housing Register. The aim of the Slough Living Rent is therefore to offer this large section of the community an opportunity for intermediate-type housing solutions, which they can afford as rent levels have effectively doubled in the last 4 years and Slough Living Rent is linked to actual household incomes.
- 5.9 A further impact of these financial restrictions is increased overcrowding. Slough is already in the top ten of overcrowded boroughs and this factor masks a growing "hidden homeless" population for Slough. Overcrowding is widely agreed as detrimental to the health and wellbeing of our residents. Thus, demands on services provided by health, education and social care are also increasing due to a result of these local housing market factors.
- 5.10 The overall concern is that all these factors will combine to continually increase the levels of homelessness in the Borough and whilst the council's primary interests remain to improving the position of homeless families and vulnerable people, there is also a pressing financial reason to do so. For example, Temporary Accommodation provided by the private rented sector is very expensive at around £100 per household per night. It is also largely unsuitable for the families concerned. It is therefore vital to tackle these issues to protect the financial resources available for other critical services namely Adult Social Care and the

Trust through minimising homelessness and particularly the use of temporary accommodation. Officers have taken a number of actions to mitigate the problem, including a revised incentives package for accommodation in the private sector and utilising properties from James Elliman Homes, once they are ready. Officers are discussing other actions including: -

- A further revision of the incentives package for properties in the private sector as the current package cannot compete with London Councils
- Investing further in James Elliman Homes so that properties acquired can be used for homeless households
- Exploring a discharge of duty policy out of the borough
- Introducing a one offer only policy to homeless households before this is adopted in April 2018
- Allocating at least 70% of council and housing association vacancies to homeless households

5.11 The following section summarises the targets and progress against each of the key actions detailed in the Housing Strategy Action Plan related to Theme 4: Homelessness and Housing Need;

***The Council will develop and adopt a Homelessness Strategy, including prevention measures in collaboration with clients, landlords, the voluntary sector and other partner agencies.***

5.12 The Council through its strategic documents including the Housing Strategy has explained that it wants to adopt an interventionist approach to housing its own residents and not rely solely on private sector landlords to deliver the required housing solutions. This is especially relevant to tackle the current homelessness situation and to prevent the situation becoming worse and Slough reaching the levels of homelessness currently being experienced by its neighbouring London Boroughs.

5.13 A staff resource has been allocated to the task of developing a Homelessness Strategy. This will be in collaboration with our identified partners as a primary mechanism to deliver new homelessness/prevention approaches, recognising that the Council does not have all the resources to tackle this issue alone. For example we have adopted a MEAM (Making every adult matter) approach, along with Mental Health, Thames Valley Police, London & Slough Soup Run, Shelter, Adult Social care etc. It is planned to complete this new strategy by March , before the Homeless Reduction Act comes into force on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018.

***Develop new partnerships with private and third sector landlords to maximise opportunities for tenancies for homeless families and individuals.***

5.14 Despite the many outlined challenges of securing properties in the private rented sector for homeless families and individuals, we have revised our incentives offer to private landlords to secure properties to let to these households.

***Establish a Subsidiary Housing Company to acquire homes to alleviate the pressures on temporary accommodation and Bed & Breakfast provision.***

- 5.15 The Council set up James Elliman Homes earlier in 2017 to fulfil this ambition. To date, the company has purchased the existing Temporary Accommodation schemes from the Council at Pendeen Court and High Street, Langley. The aim is both to alleviate the current financial burdens on the Council by using a full cost recovery model for providing the accommodation and to improve the quality and security of the existing accommodation. A large refurbishment of Pendeen Court's 29 units of accommodation has already been planned over the summer of 2018 and the works are currently being tendered by Property Services on behalf of James Elliman Homes.
- 5.16 James Elliman Homes has also committed to purchasing homes from the local housing market for use by homeless families. It is on target to have directly acquired 20 family homes by April 2018, which will be used for either families currently in temporary accommodation or for those families whom the Council has agreed a homeless duty and would otherwise be discharged to the private rented sector at a very high financial cost to the General Fund.
- 5.17 James Elliman Homes is also progressing the acquisition of affordable housing on private development sites under Section 106 agreements to ensure these units remain affordable in the long term. Currently 21 flatted units under development at 2 Town Centre sites on Stoke Road are being purchased.

***End the use of Bed & Breakfast for families with children***

- 5.18 This target was achieved within weeks of publishing the Housing Strategy Action Plan, however due to the increasing homeless pressures throughout the summer a small number of families with children are placed into Bed & Breakfast accommodation on an emergency basis. It remains a Key Performance Indicator for Strategic Housing outside of emergency usage.

***Review the Council's Allocation Scheme to re-evaluate the priority which homeless people receive under the scheme.***

- 5.19 The Housing Strategy Action Plan includes reviewing the Council's Scheme of Allocations regarding homeless households. This work has been in progress over the last six months and relevant changes will be sought via the Council's approval system following further consultation. The Council's housing stock cannot accommodate the full homelessness demands in the short term.

***Work with the Health Sector and other agencies to monitor and address the health and care needs of vulnerable people placed in Slough by other Local Authorities and require those authorities to review their placement and notification policies.***

- 5.20 With only about a third of those vulnerable families placed by other authorities being notified to Slough and without any legal recourse for Slough to require other authorities to review their placement and notification policies, we remain dependent on developing better relations with Housing Demand Teams across London.
- 5.21 Addressing the health and care needs of placed vulnerable people in the absence of shared data monitoring solutions between authorities, agencies and departments are challenging to deliver. However, there are improving

operational links between agencies in Slough and information is shared on a case by case basis or when emergencies arise. This information whilst sometimes anecdotal indicates the huge impact of imported homeless families with complex needs are having, not only on housing resources, but on local GPs, hospitals and schools and the need for Slough to build and provide more.

- 5.22 Overall, this factor has been recognised as a significant issue by the Wellbeing Board.

***Produce service proposals for multi-agency working for rough sleepers during periods of cold weather.***

- 5.23 The voluntary and statutory agencies working in this field continue to meet regularly at the Slough Homelessness Forum. The provision of a winter night shelter during periods of cold weather is co-ordinated by the Housing Demand Team, on behalf of Slough Borough Council. This has been run in partnership for the last 2-3 years, with the London & Slough Soup Run, from late December until end March, 7 nights per week.

***Roll out the MEAM approach and develop new partnerships that makes homelessness everyone's business in Slough.***

- 5.24 Strategic Housing commissioned work through Homeless Link to help us deliver the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) approach across our homeless prevention partnerships. It has begun to offer some new opportunities for information sharing and development of joint solutions between Health, Adult Social Care, the Trust and housing teams to support new service delivery models. These will be important steps in helping the Council meet the demands of the new homeless legislation going forward.

## **Theme 5: Special Needs & Vulnerable Groups**

- 5.25 The following actions and targets feed into this overall target and Council plans for the borough as outlined in Theme 5: Special housing needs and vulnerable people.

***Build on the JSNA on health and disability housing needs and produce service proposals with partners for new housing options.***

- 5.26 The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment estimates that the number of people over the age of 65 will increase by 40% in Slough in the next 10 years. The number of older people aged over 85 will also increase by 120%. Hence the focus of the Housing Strategy on providing new extra care housing options and bespoke specialist housing for other vulnerable groups as determined by needs based evidence from the JSNA and other relevant data sources.

***Through our new subsidiary housing company, develop new partnerships with the Children's Trust, Health and Adult Social Care to maximise opportunities for specialist and alternative accommodation to be delivered locally and more cost effectively.***

- 5.27 James Elliman Homes have already offered both Adult Social Care and the Trust new housing options comprising cost effective shared housing in Slough with



bespoke properties. This is to specifically address the needs of those client groups such as people with learning disabilities who require ordinary housing solutions and may be currently accommodated in lower quality and more expensive private sector properties in Slough or out of Borough. These options are still under discussion.

***Use of Subsidiary Housing Companies to assist in providing homes for vulnerable groups within the community.***

5.28 This is outlined above, however an example worth noting is that James Elliman Homes has agreed the purchase of 6 brand new town centre flats and will offer these to key workers or vulnerable adults (once identified) at Slough Living Rent levels. This will be achieved by May 2018 as the properties are currently in development.

***In collaboration with the Children's Trust, ensure there is an adequate supply of accommodation for care leavers.***

5.29 Care Leavers are high priority and automatically placed in Band B on the Council's Housing Register. If their needs are straightforward in terms of requiring a one-bedroomed/studio property, then they can expect an offer from the Council or housing association relatively quickly as there are many such properties and a high turnover compared to larger properties. One of the critical issues however, is the readiness of care leavers to take on the responsibility of managing a tenancy independently. Over 50% of such tenancies break down within the first six months, leaving the vulnerable young person intentionally homeless following eviction for either rent arrears or Anti-Social Behaviour.

5.30 Housing offer tenancy sustainment to help support individuals and James Elliman Homes have already offered the Trust new housing options comprising cost effective shared housing with bespoke properties. This is to specifically address the needs of those care leavers identified as unable to go into an independent tenancy without support. Discussions continue about the take up of these opportunities.

***Undertake a review of housing-related support services in the borough.***

5.31 These are housing related support services originally funded by the Supporting People Programme and commissioned by Adult Social Care in Slough. The funding has rapidly decreased in recent years and the review has mostly been financial. However, a range of services have been lost to vulnerable groups such as young homeless people or those with mental health problems as a result of government funding cuts to the programme, leading inexorably to more pressures on homelessness services.

***Undertake a review of the Home Improvement Agency***

5.32 We have been undertaking a joint review of the functions and effectiveness of this service with Adult Social Care. This service carries out adaptations to the homes of vulnerable residents in both the private and social housing sectors. Its main aim is to prevent unnecessary use of residential care and faster hospital

discharges for older and vulnerable residents back to their own homes. We are currently pursuing a best practice model in assisting vulnerable people to better manage their own health, care and support needs in partnership with Adult Social Care. There have been some joint working improvements to date and there is considerable scope to expand the activities and efficiency of the agency given the high levels of need in Slough.

***Deliver up to three new mixed use extra care schemes in the borough during the life of this strategy where there is established local need.***

5.33 Currently we are working with Adult Social Care to establish local needs for this type of provision. In lieu of an Older Persons Housing Strategy, the Options Appraisal and Community Hub Strategy is looking at the possibility of developing up to 3 new extra care schemes on existing housing sites through remodelling obsolete older persons schemes currently in the housing stock. We have also begun to re-engage housing associations as development and investment partners, who may in due course also take on the required development of new identified extra care schemes in the Borough.

***Develop an Older Persons Housing Strategy for Slough.***

5.34 The Housing Strategy commits the Council to produce a cross-cutting Older Persons Housing Strategy in partnership with Adult Social Care and other strategic partners. Work on this will commence shortly and an initial meeting to map the current provision and needs analysis has been set. It will be published later in 2018 after the Homelessness Strategy.

## **6. Comments of other Committees**

6.1 The draft Housing Strategy was discussed by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th December 2016. The Committee agreed that:

- They should be responsible for scrutinising the Housing Strategy and for formally reviewing progress against its accompanying action plan at six monthly intervals; and that
- The Council's Neighbourhood and Community Services Scrutiny Panel should be responsible for scrutinising all other housing related matters, including performance and operational issues.

6.2 The Council's Cabinet on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2017 approved the draft Housing Strategy and associated Action Plan following full public consultation and consideration by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 2017, considered Theme 1: New Housing Supply as the overarching theme of the Housing Strategy, which aims to deliver around 1000 new homes each year to meet the needs of Slough residents. This is the context in which all subsequent themed progress reports regarding the Housing Strategy are set including this one. Good progress on increasing housing supply in the Borough was noted.

## 7. **Conclusion**

- 7.1 The delivery of each of the Five-Year Plan Outcomes and the Council's Manifesto is very dependent on successfully increasing the supply of new quality homes in Slough on the scale outlined in the Local Plan and the Housing Strategy. The wider regeneration and economic development in Slough has been a great success for the Council and is set to continue at pace for the next five years at least. However, the unwanted effects of rapid house price growth and rent increases in the private sector has left many local working households at risk of homelessness. The consensus is that Slough has reached a tipping-point and the Council must re-prioritise homelessness as a corporate issue and consider investing significantly to support its priorities around local working households. Both in revenue terms for homeless prevention activities to deliver the new legislative requirements and in proven capital vehicles of new delivery such as James Elliman Homes.
- 7.2 The alternative is for Slough to experience the same levels of homelessness as many London Boroughs. The reality is most of our neighbouring boroughs deal with the thousands of homeless families in temporary accommodation rather than in the hundreds. They also have to pay huge incentives to private landlords in other local authorities including Slough to export these homeless households and discharge their legal duty for housing them. As outlined in this report, all the market conditions affecting London are now present in Slough.
- 7.3 At the same time, there has been steady progress in speeding up housing delivery and offering new housing solutions and services to the Trust and Adult Social Care. New council homes have been delivered on site with some properties adapted for families with disabilities and long - term development plans are in place.
- 7.4 Housing associations and the voluntary sector have been re-engaged and our subsidiary housing companies have been set up and are acquiring properties to better meet the needs of vulnerable residents who can't accommodate themselves in the market. This is however, only the start of the changes required and to achieve the ambitions of the Housing Strategy and the forthcoming Preventing Homelessness and Older Persons Housing strategies, these objectives will need constant focus and investment on a scale not seen before, combined with new means of financing, acquiring new homes and scaling up our partnership working across health, housing and social care to best meet the needs of all vulnerable residents in the Borough.

## 8. **Appendix**

None.

## 9. **Background Papers**

Equalities Impact Assessment – Available on request from author