

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel

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WARD(S): ALL

PART I

FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION

HOMELESS PREVENTION STRATEGY

1. **Purpose of Report**

This report updates the Scrutiny Panel on the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan and also touches on the current homelessness position.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

That the Panel considers and comments on the progress of the Action Plan and other homelessness issues.

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

The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA

3.1 Housing is one of the key priorities of Slough's Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS). It contributes to reducing inequalities in health through access to high quality housing. There are clear links between housing and the JSNA priorities around improving health conditions, particularly mental health and protecting vulnerable children.

3.2 **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Outcome 4 of Slough's Five Year Plan 2019-2024 states: "Our residents will live in good quality homes". This outcome recognises the critical links between improved health and wellbeing and affordable good quality housing.

4. **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

Accommodating statutory homeless households in temporary accommodation is one of the demand led services of the Council. The budget associated with this overspent last year by nearly £1m. Initial indications are that this will continue to be an issue for this year.

(b) **Risk Management**

The risk element of this report relates to temporary accommodation overspending.

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

There are no direct human rights implications arising from this report.

(d) **Equalities Impact Assessment**

An equality impact assessment is not necessary for this report.

5. **Background Information**

- 5.1 The Covid Pandemic has changed the landscape of much of what local authorities do and officers are bracing themselves when lockdown further eases and then eventually ends. There is a general fear across Councils that this will result in escalating levels of homelessness, when landlords are free to evict their tenants.

6 **Summary**

6.1 **The Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan**

- 6.1.1 The Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Action Plan was endorsed at Cabinet in October 2018. It can be found on the Council's website. Appendix A shows progress on the action plan.

6.2 **The End of Year (2019/20) Homelessness Position and Current**

- 6.2.1 The wider Council may generally view the homelessness situation in terms of how many households are in temporary accommodation. That measure is the ramification of a number of things, including the initial assessment of whether someone or a family may be statutorily homeless when they approach the Council for assistance. In assessing homelessness, five conditions have to be met: -

- Whether a household is eligible – a household must meet immigration conditions;
- A household is legally homeless;

- A household has a priority need;
- A household is homeless through no fault of their own and
- A customer needs a local connection with the area.

6.2.2 Since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act on 3rd April 2018, homeless approaches have tripled. Last year, 1,621 homeless households approached the Council for housing assistance. This was slightly more than the 1,600 projected for the year. At the end of the year there were 761 open cases at various stages of the process. These stages are described below but it essentially means that at any stage, any one of the 761 households (if not already) could enter temporary accommodation.

6.2.3 The Act introduced three stages: -

- Prevention Duty - Take 'reasonable steps to help the household to secure that accommodation does not cease to be available';
- Relief Duty - Take 'reasonable steps to help the household to secure that suitable accommodation becomes available' and
- Main Housing Duty - Secure that accommodation is available for occupation by the household.' (s.193 Housing Act 1996).

6.2.4 Only when households enter the last stage, as described above, the Main Housing Duty, is a final decision made about accepting them for the full Housing Duty, unless they are rejected for non-cooperation, for example, at an earlier stage. Last year 265 of the 602 households who were assessed in the Main Housing Duty phase were accepted for the Main Duty. If a homeless case presents with all of the conditions described above, in 6.2.1, they have to be accepted. Rejected cases receive advice and assistance. Appendix B, shows the Reasons for Homelessness for Accepted Cases last year, 2019/20.

6.2.5 Preventing homelessness is a key plank of the new act. The act puts the emphasis on Council's preventing homelessness but this depends on the household presenting to the Council in sufficient time to make this happen. Usually, because the majority of homelessness is derived from parental evictions and those from Assured Shorthold Tenancies in the private sector, prevention measures can be hit and miss, but the Council is getting better at preventing homelessness. Last year, 329 households were prevented from becoming homeless against the target of 238. This compares favourably to the 2018/19 end of year figure of 205. This significant improvement has played its part in managing the flow of households into temporary accommodation. Appendix C is a summary of some Prevention cases.

6.2.6 This housing system only works effectively when sufficient accommodation is made available to house the homeless in. This is a mix of social housing, from the Council and Housing Associations and increasingly from the private sector. Record numbers of acceptances were achieved last year, 132 from Council and housing association properties and 141 from the private sector. This included 52 lettings through the Council's Housing Company, James

Elliman Homes. If lettings to 'permanent' accommodation are reduced, the expansion tank is temporary accommodation and usually expensive nightly paid accommodation. Table 1, summarises the 2019/20 lettings for that year.

Lettings by bedroom size – 2019/20

Bedroom breakdown	Total SBC & RSL Lets	Total Private Sector Lets incl JEH	Total cases
0	9	3	12
1	18	37	55
2	62	58	120
3	43	35	78
4	1	25	26
5	1	2	3
Total	134	160	294

Table 1. 2019/20 Lets by bedroom size. Please note that the figures slightly differ from the numbers above as the report was run at a different time.

6.2.7 The Council introduced a policy of housing homeless households outside of Slough, in December 2019. These are summarised in Table 2, below.

7. The Year So Far (2020/21)

7.1 Table 2, below, shows the position so far up to the end of May 2020. It shows progress against the 2020/21 targets. There has been a significant impact from the Covid Pandemic. The significant non-performance has been lettings of Council and housing association properties, although this is now being addressed with safe viewing practices in place.

Performance Table Extract – 2020/21: May 2020 Position

No	Performance Indicator	Year Target	Month Actual (May)	Year to Date	RAG	DoT	Comment
1	Homelessness						
1.1	Homeless Approaches	1700	140	259		↓	837 open cases
1.2	Homeless Cases	600	32	60		↓	
1.3	Preventions	270	20	39		↑	
1.4	% Agreed	40%	30% (3/10)	30% (11/37)		↑	
2	Temp' Accommodation						
2.1	Numbers in TA	277	22 in 17 out	383		↑	
5	Lettings						
5.1	Homeless	130	1	1		↑	
5.4	Private Sector	220	16	26		↑	Inc. 4 JEH Ltd
5.5	Total Out of Borough	50	5	8		↑	May: Private = 4

						Social = 1
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Table 2. Note that the numbers on the left indicate the sequential number on the monthly performance report

8. **Temporary Accommodation**

8.1 Temporary accommodation is currently (as at 8th June 2020) at 388. Officers have a target to reduce this to 277 by the end of the financial year. There still, however, remains a budget pressure this year.

9. **Conclusion**

9.1 The homeless position in Slough is predicated on a number of key drivers, which manifest into the number of households in temporary accommodation. This area is demand led and homelessness is a major crisis for the people who have to endure it.

10. **Background Papers**

10.1 Housing Performance reports.

11. **Appendices**

Appendix A – Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan

Appendix B - Reasons for Homelessness – Accepted Cases (2019/20)

Appendix C – Summary of Prevention Cases