

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIROMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	14 NOVEMBER 2018		
TITLE:	REDUCTION IN BED AND BREAKFAST USE		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR JOHN ENNIS	PORTFOLIO:	HOUSING
SERVICE:	HOUSING NEEDS	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the measures the Housing Service has taken to bring about a reduction in the use of Bed and Breakfast as emergency accommodation for homeless households.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee note the reduction in the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in line with the Council's Homelessness Strategy objectives.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

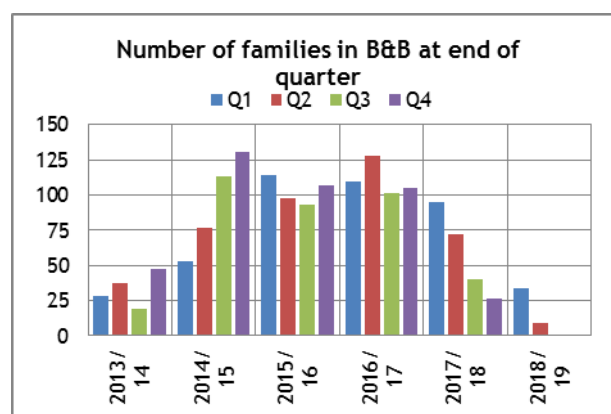
- 3.1 The Housing Act 1996 sets out the Council's responsibility to homeless households. Where the Council has reason to believe that a homeless household may have a priority need as determined by the legislation, then the Council has a responsibility to provide accommodation whilst it carries out further enquiries. If the Council determines that the household is homeless, in priority need, has a local connection and is not intentionally homeless then the Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation. This duty only ends if the Council provides an offer of accommodation through the Housing Register or through a suitable offer of private sector accommodation.
- 3.2 As of April this year the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 placed further statutory responsibilities on Local Authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness where a household is threatened with homelessness within 56 days. Where it is not possible to prevent homelessness then there is a duty to relieve homelessness by helping to secure accommodation. The responsibility to provide emergency accommodation for households who are in priority need still remains. Due to increasing levels of homelessness in the South East, like most local authorities Reading has had to rely on the use of Bed & Breakfast (B&B) establishments to meet this need.

3.3 The use of B&B for more than short periods is unsuitable, unsettling and disruptive for homeless households. Due to a shortage of affordable permanent accommodation, the use of temporary accommodation and B&B has grown in recent years. Reducing the use and length of stay in B&B has been a clear and driving focus for the Housing Service and the service has seen significant reductions in this use over the last 18 months.

4. CURRENT POSITION

4.1 The number of households in emergency B&B accommodation in Reading stood at 136 on 31st March 2017 but had fallen to 29 by 1st April 2018. There were 104 families in B&B in March 2017 mostly in shared accommodation but as at the end of October 2018 there were just 5 families in shared B& B accommodation.

4.2 The graph below illustrates the reduction in use of B&B in relation to families which has been a particular focus for the service.



4.2 The Housing Service has developed a proactive approach to prevention and early intervention, crucially doing as much upstream prevention work as possible and taking a holistic approach to solving homelessness issues. This includes linking households with services that may address other problems they face and which make it more difficult for them to find accommodation.

4.3 As well as working across teams and agencies the service has utilised a number of prevention tools including:

- A restructure of the service to provide a triage function to capture cases at risk of homelessness at the earliest point. Putting in place two teams of officers - one focused on single homeless people and one focused on families with both teams developing relevant specialisms that match the profile of clients coming into the service;
- Negotiating with landlords to retain/not to evict tenants and rectifying areas of contention;
- Building positive relationships with private sector landlords encouraging them to rehouse homeless households and
- Continuing to successfully procure properties for the Council's well-regarded Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS);
- Attendance at viewings of properties with clients to support them and persuade landlords to agree a letting;
- Payment of rent deposits, rent in advance and top ups to secure accommodation where required;
- Utilising Homes for Reading Ltd (the Council's Housing Company) properties where rent levels are affordable for homeless households;

- Working with Homefinder to accommodate households out of borough where households are happy to move out of area;
- Working with B&B landlords to move away from nightly paid accommodation and converting units into private sector accommodation through the RGS;
- Working across relevant Council teams to ensure a collaborative and targeted approach is taken to support families affected by welfare reforms;
- Making best use of partner accommodation supply and ensuring move-on e.g. refuge, safe houses, commissioned homelessness services, voluntary sector accommodation;
- Supporting clients to access supported accommodation or support packages which enable them to sustain their tenancies;
- Offering money advice and pre tenancy information sessions to better equip clients to manage their tenancies effectively.

4.4 In addition the Council has a programme of building new affordable housing. A new development of 57 Council homes at Conwy Close (including a mix of 1, 2, 3 and 4 bed homes) is on site and the first units should be available to let shortly this year. 28 innovative new modular temporary accommodation units at Lowfield Rd have been developed and were let early this calendar year to homeless families. 14 small sites are being progressed to deliver a further 100 units with plans for phase 3 of the programme in development.

5. CASE STUDIES

5.1 The following case studies show the range of work officers are carrying out to prevent homelessness and to reduce the use of B&B accommodation.

Case Study A

5.2 Mrs Y is a pregnant single mother with one child. She was living in private rented sector accommodation and facing eviction from her landlord as she had built up a level of arrears totalling £8,000. Further investigations established the fact that Ms Y had failed to report relevant changes in circumstance which affected her benefit entitlement and the arrears had built up as a result of the termination of Housing Benefit payments. Mrs Y's landlord had served her with a notice requiring her to leave the accommodation on the basis of the rent arrears. Using their negotiation skills the officer working with Mrs Y was able to achieve a number of outcomes which culminated in Ms Y being able to remain in her home. The outcomes achieved were as follows:

- 25% of the arrears were paid off using the prevention fund and Ms Y agreed an affordable repayment plan to pay off the rest of the arrears
- In view of this the landlord agreed to put their property on the Rent Guarantee Scheme and to keep Mrs Y in her home
- As a result of the property being placed on the Rent Guarantee Scheme the landlord agreed an LHA level rent which made the property more affordable for Ms Y
- The officer ensured that all welfare benefit entitlements to the household were in payment
- The Housing Service will continue to monitor the situation to ensure Mrs Y sticks to her agreed payment plan.

Case Study B

5.3 Mr Z is a single male with mental health issues. He was recently released from prison and was subject to MAPPAs (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements). Mr Z became homeless following an initial placement and presented to the Council.

5.4 The Housing Service placed Mr Z in B&B accommodation as in immediate response to prevent him from rough sleeping and to reduce the risk of reoffending due to his

MAPPA status. The officer in Housing called a professionals meeting with the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) and Probation to discuss his case. The officer was able to demonstrate that Mr Z was not coping in managing to look after himself in B&B and as a result CMHT agreed to a support package which they then monitored to ensure it met his needs. Once Mr Z was stable and managing effectively with the support package, Housing undertook to find suitable alternative accommodation for Mr Z.

5.5 The outcomes achieved were as follows:

- The officer negotiated with CMHT to take responsibility for applying for Personal Independent Payment (PIP) which maximised Mr Z's income
- After contacting a number of Lettings Agents the officer found a one bedroom property which would suit Mr Z's needs
- The officer accompanied Mr Z on the viewing and persuaded the landlord to agree to the letting
- The landlord agreed to their property being placed within the Rent Guarantee Scheme which kept the rent at an affordable level for Mr Z
- Mr Z has now moved into the property and is managing effectively.

5.6 The Housing Service will continue to monitor Mr Z's progress and to work with the CMHT and Probation to make sure that he continues to receive the right level of support. A further multi-agency meeting will be set up to review the situation and feed back to MAPPA.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

6.1 Prevention of homelessness and reducing the use of B&B ensures access to decent housing and protects and enhances the lives of vulnerable adults and Children. It also promotes equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 No community engagement is required for this report

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for this report

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 set out the Council's responsibilities to homeless households

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The use of B&B peaked in 2016/17 when the annual expenditure was £1.59m. Throughout 2017/18 and 2018/19 to date the reduction in the use of B&B has resulted in substantive savings to the local authority. A saving of £300k was delivered in 2017/18 and the Housing Service is on target to exceed the £600k saving agreed for this financial year with further savings agreed of £450k over the next two financial years. This totals £1.35m savings.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None