

BRIEFING NOTE

Housing Update 29th March 2022

Background:

The Housing service has a responsibility to ensure all strategies and policies relating to the service are implemented, delivered, and monitored in a timely manner. Below is a list of the strategies and policies relating to the service area and the current position on implementation and delivery.

Name of policy/strategy	Date of Implementation	Reports to	Comments
Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy	2018	Health and Wellbeing Board	Action plan is monitored and updated through the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Forum
Housing Strategy	2021	Health and Wellbeing Board	Action plan is monitored and updated through the Housing Strategy Steering Group
Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy	Spring 2022	Domestic Abuse Executive Group	Action plan is monitored through the DA Exec group and reported back through the Health and Wellbeing group
Private Rented Sector Access Strategy	February 2023	Health and Wellbeing Board	This strategy is due to be finalised in Feb next year.
Allocation Policy	Summer 2022	This is a policy so does not report to a board	The review of the allocation policy is currently underway and further details will be on the RBWM website shortly
Disabled Facilities Grant Policy	Summer 2022	This is a policy so does not report to a board	Work has commenced on writing the draft policy
Unauthorised encampments Policy	Autumn 2022	This is a policy so does not report to a board	The draft policy is current being circulated internally for comment
Harassment & Illegal Eviction Policy	Autumn 2022	This is a policy so does not report to a board	This is still in development
Empty Property Action Plan	Autumn 2022	This is an action plan so does not report to a board	The team are currently reviewing the requirements for the plan.

Strategy/Policy Update

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

Work with partners to improve pathways for young people leaving care to ensure sustainable accommodation and that tenancies are maintained

Improve pathways for young people leaving care to ensure sustainable accommodation and that tenancies are maintained

A working group has been set up between the Housing Service and Achieving for Children, supported by DLUHC, and a thorough action plan is in place to ensure we can deliver the best service to our young people moving forward

Develop and adopt an RBWM score card sharing key stats with our stakeholders

This was previously marked as complete, however we have expanded on our data collection within the scorecards for the 2022/23 year and we will also be publishing data in the public domain.

Actively bid for all relevant future funding streams and support partner bids

We continuously review the various funding streams on offer. Last year we were successful in securing funding through the DWP to run a programme aimed at getting single homeless people living in temporary accommodation into training and/or employment. We have recently submitted the Rough Sleeper Initiative 5 bid for a 3-year settlement to enable us to continue, and expand on, the work that we do to support rough sleepers.

Develop a response to harassment and illegal evictions

The Housing Options and Residential Services teams attending training on harassment and illegal eviction in January and full procedures for managing cases are in development.

Implement an alternative giving scheme

The Alternative giving Scheme is up and running and we have recently conducted further promotional activity. We will continue to consider ways to promote the scheme and maximise the benefits to our support partners.

Housing Strategy

Work with private landlords and Registered Providers to retrofit existing stock with zero carbon technologies, particularly with the least sustainable stock

We have formed a working group with our Registered Provider partners to work together to prepare a bid for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund in the next wave. We will continue to work together when new funding opportunities become available that can contribute towards the cost of making social properties more sustainable.

Review the current provision and need for sheltered accommodation, taking into consideration the wider social housing requirement and need for Extra Care accommodation

Commissioning have completed this piece of work and Housing will use the report to inform future demand and use of existing stock.

To work with the RBWM Property Company Limited to ensure opportunities for the purchase of temporary accommodation options are maximised

Work on this is ongoing and the Property Company are supporting Housing with consideration of properties or sites that may be suitable for use as temporary accommodation.

To refresh the Allocations Policy to ensure that it meets all legislative requirements, taking into consideration the transfer lists help by our Registered Provider partners

We have recruited a consultant to assist with the development of our new Allocations Policy and a number of focus groups have been held with staff and a draft policy is currently being reviewed and updated prior to wider consultation starting.

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy was agreed by Cabinet at the end of February and work has begun on progressing the action plan alongside colleagues in CSP, commissioning, social care and public health. The current priority is to determine how to use the 2022/23 funding of £241k to enable us to meet the safe accommodation duty. A number of working groups will be set up to deliver different actions within the plan in the coming weeks.

Housing Service Updates

Housing Options

The housing options team are responsible for providing housing advice and homelessness services to all residents. As a direct result of Covid, the demand for the service remained consistently high across the year, coupled with low staff capacity is bringing many challenges to the service. All households requiring temporary accommodation are being accommodated, however the early intervention work of the service is restricted due to the challenges above.

Despite the challenges, the team have successfully prevented over 30 households from becoming homeless so far this year.

Rough Sleeping Pathway/Alternative Giving Scheme

Our bid for the Rough Sleeper Initiative round 5, which is the first time a 3-year settlement is being offered, has been submitted, however an outcome is not expected until May/June, with 75% of previous years quarterly funding for the quarter being confirmed for quarter 1 of 2022/23. The team are considering how best to improve the current service offer for this cohort to ensure wrap around support is in place.

John West House – Capital funding has been approved to refurbish JWH to enable stage 1, stage 2 accommodation, partner agency support and activities and training to take place within JWH. The Property Company are supporting with the redevelopment plans and the project is in progress – timelines will be shared at the next meeting.

The first 'Housing First' placements will be made in the Spring of 2022 in partnership with our register provider partners, with the team reviewing how best to embed MEAM into our 'business as usual' model, to ensure that all households on the Rough Sleepers Pathway receive a flexible service and that barriers to them obtaining and sustaining accommodation are removed.

We continue to seek new partners to help us to promote the Alternative Giving Scheme and are considering whether there are additional promotional activities we could undertake, particularly that would help to reduce street activity from beggars etc.

Temporary Accommodation

The team have been working hard to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation, however due to the impact of covid and the limited access to private rented sector accommodation in borough, temporary accommodation numbers are higher than initially anticipated, including households still being placed out of borough in some cases.

A new rent accounting system is being implemented to support the team with managing and monitoring rent accounts whilst supporting the applicants to manage and review their accounts. The new system is almost ready to go live and we are hopeful we will be able to start using it in the new financial year.

Rents have been reviewed for the next financial year and have been increased to ensure that income is maximised, however rents remain affordable for low-income households.

The team are working strategically with our wider partners to increase the availability of temporary accommodation within the borough, including working with our registered provider partners to review current accommodation in borough and best use.

Disabled Facilities Grants

Our new substantive DFG Team Leader, Jordan Hatswell, joined us in January and is currently drafting the new DFG Policy which will include how we use the discretionary elements available to us. A new CRM system is also being considered which will enable the team to more efficiently manage the workload.