

BRIEFING NOTE

Housing Update 11th July 2023

Strategies

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

Our Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy is due to be renewed for 2024, along with our corporate Domestic Abuse Strategy. We have agreed to use some of our safe accommodation funding this year to carry out a new comprehensive needs assessment which will help to inform our refresh of the strategies. This work is due to be carried out in September-October, following which one DA strategy incorporating both separate strategies will be drafted and completed over the winter period.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Reducing homelessness – we are working with Lookahead, who provide our young peoples supported accommodation provision, to renew their contract and improve the referral and support process. This is due to be completed by March 2024.

Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation – this is challenging currently due to the cost-of-living crisis and the increased pressure due to Ukrainian and Asylum Seeker cohorts who require support after their initial accommodation comes to an end. We are working with local providers of housing to block book temporary accommodation where this is possible to ensure that we can provide local accommodation for households in need wherever possible.

Supporting people into affordable accommodation – this month we will begin working with BEAM who provide a holistic support service for homeless households, including support with identifying employment and education opportunities and privately rented accommodation. A new Housing Allocations Policy has been drafted and will be considered by Cabinet this month, following which a 12-week public consultation will take place. The new policy will enable us to make better use of the available social housing stock and will introduce a choice-based lettings system to give applicants greater choice over the properties they wish to be considered for.

Reduce rough sleeping – a procurement exercise is currently underway to formalise the outsourcing of the support provisions available to those supported under stages 2 & 3 of our rough sleeper pathway and is due to be completed in March 2024. Funding for the redevelopment of John West House has been secured and works are due to start later in the year. The completion of John West House will provide onsite accommodation and support for those who have experienced, or been at risk of, rough sleeping.

Housing Strategy

Deliver new homes – proactive work is being undertaken with developers and social housing providers. Notable sites in the development programme include Ascot High Street and Windmill Road, the latter of which is a brownfield infill site on an existing

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estate. Housing have been supporting Planning colleagues with the new Supplementary Planning Documents and have supported with consultation events for social housing providers and developers.

Promote Health & Wellbeing – a new DFG and Housing assistance Policy has been drafted and will be going through the Cabinet process this month, following which a 12-week public consultation will be launched. The new policy will enable us to make use of discretionary funding options and will enable us to better support a larger cohort of disabled applicants. A new IT system is currently in development and will improve case management and reporting.

Support vulnerable residents to obtain and sustain accommodation – we are working with DLUHC to provide 22 units of accommodation under the Local Authority Housing Fund and will deliver 18 units of accommodation for Afghan or Ukrainian households in this financial year, along with four units of general needs temporary accommodation. To date we have supported 25 Ukrainian households into privately rented accommodation, and we continue to support the cohort with settling in the UK.

Housing Options

The Housing Options Team are responsible for providing housing advice and homelessness services to residents. Following on from the pandemic and in light of the cost-of-living crisis and Afghan and Ukrainian resettlement schemes, the team are currently encountering high numbers of residents who need support to obtain or sustain accommodation.

There are currently 213 live cases open to Options which are actively being worked on, in addition to 110 main duty cases and 219 additional cases that have been referred and need allocating, are being supported through the Ukrainian scheme or which require further investigation prior to triggering a prevention or relief duty case.

We are currently seeking to recruit to two new Housing Options Officer posts to support with our ongoing prevention work, which will be funded from the additional Homelessness Prevention Grant which has been recently announced for local authorities as a result of supporting the government's resettlement schemes, which will ensure that we can continue to provide a service for all who need it.

Temporary Accommodation

Temporary accommodation figures have been relatively stable so far in 2023, with 226 households currently occupying temporary accommodation, against a high of 232 and a low of 220. Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find accommodation in borough for homeless households, and consequently 56% of placements are outside of the borough. We are working with providers to try and increase the local supply of temporary accommodation and are considering other options for procurement.

UK Resettlement Team

Support continues to be provided for Ukrainian households who are living in accommodation with hosts under the sponsorship scheme, with 25 households now moved on into settled privately rented accommodation. We have supported 8 Afghans into settled accommodation in the borough and have a large family of 9 joining us imminently under the 'Find your own' accommodation pathway. The local contingency

hotels for Asylum Seekers continue to be of concern, with numbers occupying the two hotels due to increase to up to 558 in the next three weeks. With the new streamlined asylum processes now in place to support the government's aims to clear the backlog of applications by the end of 2023, there is significant concern about the demands on the Housing Service, who are likely to need to intervene once positive asylum decisions are made on this cohort.