



Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

Report of: Richard Webb, Executive Director Communities

Subject: Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless households

Author of Report: Belinda Gallup, Service Manager Housing Solutions
273 5239

Summary:

Scrutiny Committee Members have requested assurances about the suitability of the Bed and Breakfast accommodation used by the Council to house homeless households.

This report provides information about the Bed and Breakfast establishments that are used, the schedule of requirements issued by Housing Solutions to these establishments and the licensing requirements that establishments are required to adhere to.

It also provides an update about the short to medium term work plan in relation to the agreements that the Council currently has with Bed and Breakfast establishments.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	X
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Consider the report and comment on the proposed work plan described within the report.

Background Papers:

Housing Solutions Bed and Breakfast Schedule of Requirements

<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/in-your-area/housing-services/private-sector-housing/private-landlords/houses-in-multiple-occupation#house>.

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of the Executive Director of Communities

Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation for homeless households

1. Introduction/Context

- 1.1 Committee members have requested information about the B&B accommodation used for homeless households in Sheffield and this report will provide information about the accommodation that is used and also inform members about plans to introduce a Supported Accommodation Pathway for homeless households in the city.
- 1.2 The local authority is not required to provide accommodation for all homeless people in the city. The Council has a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation for households who are homeless, eligible for assistance and whom the authority has reason to believe are in a priority need group, i.e. are vulnerable within the definition of the legislation governing homelessness. This accommodation is provided whilst the authority carries out enquiries to determine whether a full rehousing duty is owed.
- 1.3 As well as temporary accommodation which is used to house homeless households, the Council also uses B&B accommodation. It is widely recognised that B&B is not suitable accommodation for homeless people. There are statutory requirements on local authorities to ensure that no family is placed in B&B accommodation for a period of longer than 6 weeks and that B&B accommodation is never used for homeless 16 or 17 year olds. Sheffield meets these statutory requirements.

2. Main body of report and matters for consideration

- 2.1 The Council's reliance on B&B accommodation to house homeless people has reduced significantly in recent years. In April 2008 there were nearly 150 households in B&B accommodation and by December 2012 this figure had reduced to around 20 households.
- 2.2 Many people who experience homelessness are able to secure their own alternative settled accommodation and to return to a stable and settled life. However, many others require the intervention and support of services, including the local authority, to assist them in securing alternative accommodation.
- 2.3 Becoming homeless can have a huge detrimental impact on people, damaging their mental and physical wellbeing, their ability to sustain and find employment and disrupting their family life.
- 2.4 As well as the social cost of homelessness, to the individuals affected and the wider community, there are significant financial costs. The cost to the Council of B&B provision for the year ending March 2012 was £200,000. This represents a huge reduction from 2009 when the cost was £1.2m.
- 2.5 The Council will only be able to reduce the use of temporary accommodation, including B&B usage, by focussing more on prevention rather than crisis intervention. Whilst homeless presentations and acceptances have reduced to date this year, as a result of the prevention work already underway, there are very real concerns that when the full

impact of the Welfare Reforms are implemented that homelessness will increase as more households in the city are unable to afford to continue living in their accommodation.

- 2.6 The Council has a range of temporary accommodation which it uses to temporarily house homeless households whilst enquiries are carried out. There are a total of 245 units available across the city, comprising 1bed, 2bed, 3bed and a very few 4bed units.
- 2.7 Additionally, the Council uses five B&B establishments in the city. People are referred on a spot book basis and these are all private businesses and there is no requirement for them to take referrals from the Council.
- 2.8 Members had asked for assurances that these establishments are appropriate and suitable and detailed below are a summary of the checks and standards that establishments undergo.
- 2.9 B&Bs are required to comply with all relevant licensing and registration requirements relating to houses in multiple occupation and these are outlined in the attached papers. Colleagues in Private Sector Housing will inspect B&B establishments to determine whether licensing is required and that they meet the appropriate standards in relation to numbers of bathrooms, WC facilities and possible additional kitchen facilities. Fire safety is also inspected to ensure that there is an appropriate fire detection system in each premises. Additionally, gas, electric and insurance certificates are requested at the required times.
- 2.10 In April 2011 officers in Housing Solutions, working with legal officers, developed a Schedule of Requirements which was sent to the five B&B establishments which the Council used for homeless households. This schedule is also attached in the background papers.
- 2.11 Three of the five establishments signed up to this schedule. Of the remaining two that didn't, one has very recently been repossessed and officers will now be talking to the new owner about signing up to the schedule.
- 2.12 As previously stated, the establishments that we use are run as private businesses and we have a spot book arrangement with them, as such the Council cannot require them to agree to any service level agreement or Schedule of Requirements and we are reliant on their willingness to do this.
- 2.13 The schedule details a minimum level of service and standards, including, but not limited to ensuring that:-
 - 2.13.1 a member of staff is available on site 24/7;
 - 2.13.2 bedrooms are for the sole use of the customer, with a minimum of a bed per person, wash hand basin and a wardrobe;
 - 2.13.3 customers are able to secure belongings in a lockable space or able to access use of a safe;

- 2.13.4 bins are emptied daily and rooms cleaned immediately before occupancy and daily thereafter;
 - 2.13.5 bathroom facilities are available at all times and towels changed on a daily basis;
 - 2.13.6 bedding is available for each bed, cot or moses basket and changed weekly, or when there is a change of occupancy;
 - 2.13.7 breakfast is available everyday between 7am – 9.30am, with minimum requirements about what is to be provided.
- 2.14 Establishments are required to report on to the appropriate body any incidents of abuse which are disclosed to them, or where they have a concern about potential abuse or neglect.
 - 2.15 Referrals can be made 24/7 and establishments are responsible for booking out customers when the local authority ends its duty to provide temporary accommodation.
 - 2.15 The Schedule of Requirements is due to be revised and updated in the next three months. As stated above, there is no compulsion on establishments to sign up to the schedule, however, senior managers within Housing Solutions will be meeting with proprietors to try and engage them in the process of revising the schedule and to hopefully obtain their engagement in this process.
 - 2.16 The three year Homeless Strategy, agreed in 2010, is now in need of revision. Two of the key principles of the new strategy will be to shift from crisis prevention to intervention work, and to reduce the high rate of acceptances in the city, which historically have been higher than other core cities. Ultimately, this will reduce the levels of homelessness in the city and in turn, the number of people placed in temporary accommodation and B&B. However, the impact of the Welfare Reforms are not yet fully known and it is likely that these will result in an increase in the levels of homelessness in the city, thus making the preventative work that the Council does even more important.
 - 2.17 The Housing Solutions service is currently working to develop a Supported Accommodation Pathway for customers who need extra support to sustain their housing. The pathway will ensure that supported housing units in the city are used where support is required. This is anticipated to reduce the use of B&B and will ensure that placements in supported accommodation are based on need rather than availability.
- 3. What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?**
- 3.1 It is anticipated that the full roll out of the Welfare Reforms will increase the levels of homelessness throughout the UK. It is therefore essential that the focus of the Council's homelessness services is to prevent homelessness at the earliest point and thereby reduce the numbers of households in the city who do become homeless.
 - 3.2 Where homelessness cannot be prevented then it is essential that those people who require temporary accommodation are housed via a supported accommodation pathway which provides them with the necessary support to enable them to move on and sustain suitable housing.

- 3.3 Whilst there may always be a need to use B&B accommodation, this should only be regarded as an emergency, short term option, until supported accommodation is available and only in exceptional circumstances. Should the people of Sheffield become homeless they have a right to expect that they will be housed in suitable, appropriate accommodation and there needs to be a range of accommodation available to meet the differing needs of individuals and families.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 Members wanted assurances that the B&B accommodation in Sheffield is suitable for the customers who are referred. This report illustrates that the licensing and registration requirements need to be adhered to and that there is a Schedule of Requirements which most of the B&B establishments that the Council uses have signed up to.
- 4.2 If Members wish to have an input into the revision of the schedule then a draft can be brought back here for the committee to comment on.
- 4.3 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

This page is intentionally left blank