

## TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PLACEMENT POLICY

Cabinet - 16 April 2020

Report of Chief Officer People & Places

Status For Consideration

Key Decision No

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**Executive Summary:** A Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy has been developed to improve outcomes for customers by ensuring they are supported to move on into suitable and more permanent housing. Members are asked to approve this Policy.

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**This report supports the Key Aim of the District Council's Housing Strategy (2017), West Kent Homelessness Strategy (2016-21) and wider elements of the Community Plan (2019-22).**

**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Robert Piper

**Contact Officer** Hayley Brooks, Ext. 7272

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**Recommendation to Cabinet:** That Members approve the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy.

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**Reason for recommendation:** The Council has a legal requirement to provide temporary accommodation, this Policy sets out this Council's framework when placing households in temporary accommodation and supporting customers to move into more permanent housing.

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### Introduction and Background

- 1 This Council has a legal obligation and a duty of care to provide emergency and temporary accommodation in certain circumstances in response to the needs of local people. This responds to the needs of local people who have been evacuated as part of an emergency incident (such as flooding or fire) and those who are in priority need and facing homelessness.
- 2 The legal duty of this Council is to provide, or secure the provision of, advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, and to ensure advice meets the needs of particular vulnerable groups. The Government defines someone who is homeless as: a person is homeless if they have no accommodation available for occupation, this includes

someone who cannot secure entry or it is not reasonable for them to stay/return to the accommodation.

- 3 Types of homelessness includes rough sleeping, statutory homelessness (where local authorities have a duty to secure a home for some groups of people) and hidden homelessness such as people who are sofa surfing, staying in hotels/squats and in overcrowded accommodation.
- 4 The Council has a responsibility to ensure that temporary accommodation goes to those in greatest need with a local connection. The local connection is defined as a previous or current connection to this District through living, working, family associations and other special circumstances. Support is provided to customers at risk of homelessness to help them to manage their finances and sustain longer term tenancies.
- 5 The Council works in close partnership with other organisations to provide tailored support services for vulnerable people at risk of homelessness. The Council has recently secured additional funding from the MHCLG to support people with addictions, provide specialist nurses to support people with mental health and medical issues and provide accommodation and support to rough sleepers during severe weather.

#### **Temporary Accommodation - Homelessness Duty**

- 6 As of 1 April 2018 under the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA), this Council has a legal duty to prevent and relieve homelessness. This Duty also includes the provision of temporary accommodation to households who are eligible and in priority need and at risk of homelessness, if suitable permanent accommodation is not available.
- 7 Where temporary accommodation is provided, the Council aims to:
  - Reduce any stays to a minimum by supporting customers into more permanent housing through a range of housing options
  - Ensure that the standard of accommodation provided meets the needs of individuals and where required, support services are provided
  - Support customers to sustain longer term tenancies by providing advice and support on managing finances, budgeting and maintaining a successful tenancy
- 8 At present, the District Council has access to a number of temporary accommodation properties and which are provided by two housing associations in the District, West Kent Housing Association (WKHA) and Moat. These properties are provided at no cost to this Council as the household receive a short-term tenancy, whilst they are supported to find more suitable longer-term accommodation.
- 9 This existing supply of temporary accommodation is not adequate to meet current levels of need. This has included an extension within the HRA from

28 to 56 days whereby the District Council is duty-bound to provide certain support measures to those threatened with homelessness. As a result of this, the District Council has seen an increase in the number of qualifying households and with an additional consequent need for temporary accommodation.

- 10 With the District having a limited supply of temporary accommodation in the District, there is no alternative but to secure placements from private Housing Providers elsewhere in Kent. These properties are provided at a nightly paid rental rate based on the size of the household/property. This cost ranges between £35-£80 per night.
- 11 This nightly paid accommodation is funded through the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant provided by Government (MHCLG) to this Council. However, with the increased numbers requiring temporary accommodation, it is important to ensure that this accommodation is provided to those with the greatest needs, to make best use of the funding available. Where possible, this Council recovers Housing Benefit contributions to help towards this cost, but the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate for this District does not cover the nightly costs of providing this accommodation. Therefore it is essential that the Council ensures the temporary accommodation is being used appropriately to those who cannot make alternative temporary housing arrangements.
- 12 The Council is exploring other housing options to ensure that there are a greater range of opportunities available to customers. These include working with: Kent Savers who can provide community loan and savings schemes, Young Lives to offer an advocacy service and working with other landlords and housing providers to offer rooms in shared houses, support services and develop our own affordable tenancies through Quercus Housing.

### **Strategising**

- 13 The District Council's 'Housing Strategy (2017)' highlighted the likely effects of the (then) upcoming changes to legislation and consequently committed the District Council to update its 'Housing Allocations Policy' as part of a fuller review of its homelessness support services. A new 'Housing Allocations Policy' has subsequently been adopted, helping the District Council to make more effective use of its housing advice staff and temporary accommodation resources.
- 14 The Council has around 80 households at any one time in temporary accommodation, with 50 in housing association properties within the District and a further 30 outside the District. Although this is one of the lowest in Kent, the Council has put actions in place to reduce stays in temporary accommodation and make best use of the properties available to the Council by:
  - Agreeing standardised nightly rates with Providers to ensure best use of funds available;

- Work with housing associations to develop Pre-eviction Panels to support them to address and prevent evictions at the earliest opportunities. This will aim to prevent homelessness by wrapping services around vulnerable tenants.
- Developing the landlord incentives to support customers to access private rented properties;
- Introducing sign in/out sheets at properties to ensure that temporary accommodation is being used appropriately. If a customer does not stay at the property, the Council is still charged for the booking;
- Introducing property inspections to ensure a good standard of accommodation is provided;
- Working with housing association to move customers quicker into vacant temporary accommodation properties within the district so they are closer to their support network;
- Working with *Quercus Housing* to explore opportunities for purchasing new forms of temporary accommodation in the District.
- Improve the Housing Benefit claim process across internal teams to maximise funding for providing this accommodation.

15 In order to reduce the need for temporary accommodation, a key objective of the District Council's 'Housing Strategy (2017)' is to maximise delivery of new affordable housing. With evidence suggesting a requirement of 604 new affordable dwellings annually to meet existing and newly-arising need, the District Council will only ever be in a position to part-achieve this objective, however, and so the procurement, provision and control of externally-sourced temporary accommodation will continue to be required into the long-term.

### Short-term approach

- 16 The District Council must continue to work to maximise the use of locally-based temporary accommodation. Where it secures properties for a nightly rate rental amount from elsewhere in Kent, seek to ensure it secures the best and most cost-effective accommodation possible.
- 17 In order to support this approach, a 'Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy' (Appendix A) has been produced in order to provide a suitable framework within which to work and improve the outcomes for customers.

### Key Implications

#### Financial

The use of temporary accommodation is currently funded via the Government's Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG). A key aim of this policy is to reduce

unnecessary costs associated with temporary accommodation. The current LHA rates for Housing Benefit that can be reclaimed only covers a third of the overall expenditure on this accommodation, therefore it is essential that Government funding is used effectively to cover the remainder of the costs.

### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

The District Council has a legal duty to households in priority need at risk of or presenting as homeless and the use of temporary accommodation is essential to meet with relevant legal requirements. If the District Council were to not secure this temporary accommodation, it would not be able to meet its legal duties.

### Equality Assessment

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and does not vary between groups of people. The results of this analysis are set out immediately below.

The Policy aims to provide accommodation assistance to all households with a priority need at risk of homelessness, in accordance with the Housing Act. The Equalities Impact Assessment is set out at Appendix B.

### **Conclusions**

Members are asked to approve the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy to make best use of the properties available and ensure they are provided to those with the greatest need, whilst achieving the best outcomes for customers.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A - Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy (Draft)

Appendix B - Equalities Impact Assessment

### **Background Papers**

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-14-ending-the-prevention-and-relief-duties>

Housing Strategy (2017)

[https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1028/housing\\_strategy\\_2017](https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1028/housing_strategy_2017)

West Kent Homelessness Strategy

[https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/site\\_search/results?q=west+kent+housing+strategy&jadu-search-type=1](https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/site_search/results?q=west+kent+housing+strategy&jadu-search-type=1)

Community Plan

[https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20026/your\\_community/290/community\\_plan](https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20026/your_community/290/community_plan)

Housing Register Allocations Policy

[https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1742/housing\\_register\\_allocation\\_policy](https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1742/housing_register_allocation_policy)

**Sarah Robson**

**Chief Officer People & Places**