

## HOUSING OPTIONS - VOLUNTARY HOUSING RELOCATION SCHEMES

Cabinet - 9 July 2020

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| Report of          | Chief Officer People and Places                   |
| Status             | For Decision                                      |
| Also considered by | Housing & Health Advisory Committee - 9 June 2020 |
| Key Decision       | No  |

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**Executive Summary:** This report details the opportunity for this Council to work with organisations offering voluntary relocation schemes for people at risk of homelessness and, in doing so, helping to reduce the pressure on temporary accommodation and affordable housing locally.

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**This report supports the Key Aim of the District Council's Housing Strategy and related elements of the Community Plan.**

**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Robert Piper

**Contact Officer** Hayley Brooks Ext. 7272

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**Recommendation to Housing and Health Advisory Committee:** That Members support and recommend to Cabinet that the Council works with voluntary housing relocation schemes in other locations; and

**Recommendation to Cabinet:** That, subject to comments from Housing and Health Advisory Committee, support the Council working with voluntary housing relocation schemes in other locations.

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**Reason for recommendation:** To enable the Council to work with dedicated voluntary housing relocation schemes in other locations, to provide more housing options available to customers facing homelessness.

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### Introduction and Background

- 1 The District has been experiencing a growth in homelessness approaches and, inevitably, an increase of the use of Temporary Accommodation (TA). There are several reasons for this, including:
  - Local property prices being amongst the most expensive in the South East and wider UK;

- A lower than average percentage of low-end private rented accommodation;
  - A limited supply of local affordable housing;
  - Local private sector rents typically well above the two relevant Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels, thereby further limiting accessibility; and,
  - The introduction of new homelessness legislation.
- 2 These combined factors have contributed to an increase of over 36% (comparing 2018/19 and 2019/20) in the use and cost of emergency and temporary accommodation. It is anticipated that this situation will only grow - and potentially significantly in the next year as effects from the national emergency start to show.
  - 3 There has been a steady growth in the use of TA, with 90 households currently in such accommodation (as at March 2020). This compares to 73 at the same time last year and 50 in the year previous to that. Consequently, TA cost to the District Council were £132,167 in 2018/19 and £260,247 in 2019/20 (subject to the Council's Final Accounts being approved). The Council received £264,630 from MHCLG in 2019/20 for homelessness. This funding covers housing advice staff salaries as well as fund TA for those in priority need, therefore it is essential to explore a range of housing options to reduce TA expenditure going forward.
  - 4 Although TA provides emergency accommodation for households facing homelessness, it is by no means a suitable housing solution, with almost half of the TA located outside the District. The Team have put several measures in place to tackle this issue however, the District Council must explore new and alternative housing options to meet existing and newly-arising housing needs to prevent/relieve homelessness.
  - 5 This report details Voluntary Housing Relocation Schemes for this Council to consider as one of the range of housing options for suitable customers at risk of homelessness. Other options being explored and developed include working with Quercus Housing to obtain more affordable housing for customers within the District, landlord incentives and help with upfront payments for renting in the private sector and supporting people into house shares and also social housing.
  - 6 The Chief Officer, People and Places has discussed with the Housing and Health Portfolio Holder (and his deputy), who are supportive of offering schemes as one of the housing options available to our customers.

### **Voluntary Housing Relocation Schemes**

- 7 This proposed scheme, which has been successfully introduced by other local authorities, is a voluntary relocation option for homeless households. This opportunity offers eligible households a new start in a new location, where the cost of living and properties are more affordable, with greater availability of work opportunities. The Scheme is offered on a voluntary

basis only. Based on similar schemes in the county, it is anticipated that this may be provided for no more than ten suitable customers per annum and will form part of a range of housing options available to customers.

- 8 One example of this type of scheme is AMRP, a property lettings and tenancy management agent based in County Durham, covering the North East of England. The scheme operates the nationally recognised 'Housing First' model - first providing a permanent affordable home to people facing homelessness, then provides person-centred additional support services as needed, to support them to sustain a tenancy.
- 9 Homes offered by AMRP Relocations are available to households from across the UK, assisting local authorities and charities around the country. They help to address the problem of empty properties in the North East, whilst helping to reduce issues elsewhere in the country such as overcrowding, unaffordable housing and homelessness. The scheme enabling households to voluntary relocate into private rented accommodation in the North East, in locations such as Durham and Sunderland.
- 10 AMRP's Scheme provides property, employment and support opportunities to households who would like to voluntary relocate to another area. They will not accept anyone who has a history of violent crime, anti-social behaviour or causes damage to properties. AMRP is a pet-friendly scheme.
- 11 The Chief Officer for People and Places has previously used AMRP at another council, confirming they provided good housing standards through the scheme. Other similar voluntary relocation schemes who have expressed an interest in working with local authorities include Oak Housing Group in Leeds and Cedar Housing Solutions Limited in Bradford.

### **The Relocation Process**

- 12 Suitable customers are offered the Scheme on a voluntary basis as a potential housing option. The first step is filling in an application form to the Scheme. AMRP require a five year housing history with contact details for their previous landlords and two forms of ID. The application and assessment process is carried out in partnership with the relevant local authority where the applicants will be relocated.
- 13 Once the form is completed, they are sent to the relevant council (e.g. Durham County Council) who carry out references and an assessment on behalf of AMRP, which take about two weeks.
- 14 Once it comes back and the customer is suitable for the scheme, the customer is then offered a tenancy for a rental property. AMRP will match properties to each customer ensuring it is affordable and is matched to meet their needs.

- 15 Once a property is found, the client can view the property in person or a video viewing can be arranged. The customer may be required to pay a month's rent in advance and/or a month's deposit.
- 16 AMRP offer a Tenancy Settlement Support Service, which is a one off fee of £350 including VAT. This provides a straightforward trusted service that allows clients to live in their homes comfortably. The Council could pay this as part of our landlord incentive scheme.
- 17 The client will have to pay their own removal and travel costs, but this could also be covered by the Council, DHP or sourced from other external funding.
- 18 As part of this research, we have not found any cases where the relocation has not worked and the person has returned to the original location. It is a voluntary scheme and customers are making the choice to relocate. If it does not work out and they decided to return and approached the Council for housing support, they would receive housing advice and homelessness support, as per our normal homelessness duties.

### **Key Benefits**

- 19 This Council's Housing Strategy (2017) supports a range of housing and support services that match the ambition and needs of our residents. Other local authorities currently use these Schemes as part of housing options available to homeless customers. Some of the key benefits include:
  - More households assisted quicker into suitable and affordable housing, giving them an opportunity for a fresh start in a new location, not previously offered to customers in this District;
  - Reduced pressure on the Sevenoaks District Housing Register (SDHR) and other housing-related and support services;
  - Fewer households placed into emergency accommodation by this Council and in turn reduced pressure on associated budgets; and
  - Supporting other areas of the UK, in need of economically active households, to contribute to building sustainable communities.

### **Other Options Considered and/or Rejected**

- 20 The Council could choose to do nothing. However, in light of the increased workload and financial demands the Homelessness Reduction Act has placed on councils to support homeless households, the District Council needs to be in a position to offer a range of suitable housing options to homeless households.

## **Key Implications**

### Resource (non-financial)

- 21 Housing advice officers will incorporate this as a housing option to customers who may benefit and are suitable for the scheme to prevent homelessness. Communications Team would also assist to promote this opportunity using promotional materials for customers during homelessness assessments with customers and details in reception.

### Financial

- 22 Finance, as and when necessary, to support households to relocate would be the cost of the Tenancy Settlement Support Service per household relocated at a one off fee of £350 (including VAT) per household. The Council may also be required to help financial with removal and transport costs if needed. It is anticipated that this may be suitable for no more than ten customers per annum.
- 23 This would be a reduced cost compared to providing temporary accommodation for around 80 days per customer (56 days for the Homelessness Relief Duty then a further 28 days' notice). On average, this costs £3,600 per household. However, many households remain in accommodation for longer periods due to the limited local affordable move-on housing options.
- 24 The Council received £264,630 from MHCLG in 2019/20 for homelessness services (£364,043 for 20/21). This funding is used to prevent homelessness, contributing towards housing advice staff costs and funding TA for those in priority need. It is proposed that the cost associated to this scheme would be funded from this allocation.

### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

- 25 As a local housing authority, this Council has a legal duty to comply with Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002), the Equalities Act 2010, Localism Act 2011 and the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to reduce and prevent homelessness, taking those with priority need into consideration.

### Equality Assessment

- 26 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act have already been subject to a full EQIA.

## **Conclusion**

- 27 The District has been experiencing a growth in the use and cost of Temporary Accommodation (TA) for customers facing homelessness. It is proposed that the Council works with recognised Voluntary Housing Relocation Schemes as one of the housing options for suitable customers, who wish to voluntary relocate to another location to prevent homelessness.

**Appendices** None

**Background Papers** AMRP Relocations - <http://www.amrp.co.uk>

**Sarah Robson**  
**Chief Officer People and Places**