

Bed and Breakfast for Homeless People as at March 2012

Sevenoaks DC has always had low use of Bed and Breakfast compared to the rest of Kent. However, several factors in the last few months, have increased the use of Bed and Breakfast, resulting in an overspend of the related budget. The Bed and Breakfast costs are still comparable to the rest of Kent.

These factors are:-

- The recession has now affected people in this district, in line with County and Nationally.
- The Government is facilitating London Street homeless to return to their home towns through the “No Second Night Out Teams”
- West Kent HA and Moat HA have decanted their tenants in order to develop housing sites. In the short term, this has reduced the number of temporary and permanent accommodation available for homeless people.
- The cold weather has also caused damage in some of the Housing Association stock in the District, causing burst pipes and flooding. West Kent Housing Association have had an additional need to use the self contained temporary accommodation units to decant their tenants into whilst repairs are carried out.
- The Social Housing team is one of the smallest in Kent. The Manager now manages both Social and Private Sector Housing teams. Two experienced Housing Officers have recently left the team. One post has subsequently been replaced but the other has yet to be filled. There has also been sickness, some long term in the team and temporary staff have been employed. This has resulted in less proactive work being undertaken to avoid homelessness.
- Moat HA refurbished some temporary accommodation units making them self contained. The unavailability of these units placed additional pressure on bed and breakfast use. There have been delays in these units coming back on line due to flooding, electrical problems and housing management issues.

Way Forward

Short and long term solutions in place which include:-

- Meetings and negotiations with WKHA and Moat HA to maximise available accommodation.
- Promotion of the Private sector Lettings scheme and working proactively with Private Landlords, to utilise more of the private renting sector (using the Council's successful rent in advance and deposit bond scheme).
- More debt counselling and mortgage arrears advice to be provided by SDC and CAB's .
- The HERO scheme which successfully provides outreach surgeries. A service is also provided for WKHA and Moat tenants and KCC Social Service clients and Tunbridge Wells BC homeless. These services generate

income for the Council which funds most of the HERO Officers salaries and the savings this year have helped offset the B&B overspend.

- Utilising empty homes in the district.
- Reducing under-occupation of social housing (In Depth Scrutiny).
- Working with Housing Benefits to minimise the adverse affect of the Welfare reform
- Moat HA temporary accommodation units are coming back on line and nominations are being made for households in bed and breakfast.
- Launch of Credit Union budgeting account to enable direct payments of rent to landlords to overcome prejudice of tenants claiming housing benefit.

At one point, there were 22 people in Bed and Breakfast, currently there are only 7 cases (without secured accommodation).The Bed and Breakfast budget will be about £70,000 overspent at year end, but savings in the Communications and Housing budgets (by delaying projects) and a judicious use of external funding for a significant proportion of this amount has reduced the overspend to a predicted £16,000 overspend at year end.

Pat Smith
Head of Housing and Communications