

## **CABINET**

**18 DECEMBER 2012**

### **SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION TASK GROUP ADDENDUM REPORT**

Portfolio Holders: Councillor David Brake, Adult Services  
Councillor Howard Doe, Housing and Community Services

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive  
Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

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#### **Summary**

The report sets out the views of the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee following its consideration of the Supported Accommodation Task Group's review on 13 December 2012.

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Head of Strategic Housing gave a presentation detailing the key lines of enquiry of the task group, who and where evidence was taken from, the findings of the review and then the outcome derived from the findings.
- 1.2 The committee praised the report and the level of detail it contained on this complicated matter. Members discussed the bureaucratic loopholes in the legislation that had been exposed, which affected the providers of exempt accommodation with some providers exploiting this for their financial gain and to the financial detriment of the council.
- 1.3 Members also discussed the number of vulnerable people moving into Medway and needing support. There were a number of reasons for this including that property costs were cheaper than elsewhere in Kent. Therefore, households were able to find a place in Medway easier than elsewhere, rather than staying and looking for housing in another local authority area. Also, the ease of access to accommodation in Medway was being communicated by word of mouth to other users, thereby increasing the numbers further.

- 1.4 Following questions about the legal minimum standard for supported accommodation and the powers the council had to enforce them, officers responded that there were legal constraints for providers to supply a minimal level of support and the council had been rigorous in ensuring that was complied with.
- 1.5 Members were also advised of the distinction between Housing Related Support payments, which were commissioned by the Council (formerly known as Supporting People funding) and the payment of enhanced housing benefit, which could only relate to the costs of the housing provision.
- 1.6 While the council took a very rigorous approach to ensure that the status of exempt providers was properly met and limiting the level of rent charged by the providers of exempt accommodation in assessing their eligibility, the ability to prevent the proliferation of providers setting up and attracting people to Medway was very limited. Housing Benefit regulations applied and did not give Local Authorities discretion relating to eligibility. The task group had recommended that Medway's Members of Parliament were asked to lobby government to change the legislation, so that local authorities (LA) could ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable were met whilst also ensuring that the LA did not suffer significantly in terms of reduced subsidy payable for Housing Benefit paid.
- 1.7 The Chief Finance Officer advised that it would be clearer if rent for supported accommodation was at a set rate, as it was for other providers and that this was separated from the support element of the provision with the council having discretion to commission the extra support separately.
- 1.8 The committee agreed that the Supported Accommodation Task Group review document was referred to Cabinet for consideration with recommendations 1 – 5 as set out in the report (with an amendment to the typographical error in paragraph 4 to read "To recommend the Cabinet to (a) support the direction of travel, suggested by the Task Group, as set out in paragraph **6.2.13** in the report .....

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