

**BUSINESS SUPPORT  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
4 FEBRUARY 2014  
SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION  
TASK GROUP UPDATE**

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director Regeneration, Community and Culture

Author: Matthew Gough, Head of Strategic Housing

**The Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee established a Task Group to undertake a review of supported accommodation. Cabinet endorsed that reported on the 18 December 2012. As part of that report the Task Group recommended that a review of the recommendations of that group was added to its work plan.**

**As the responsibility for Housing has now passed to Business Support Overview & Scrutiny from Regeneration, Community and Culture this report is being brought to this Committee for consideration.**

**1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 At a meeting of the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 June 2012 a five Member short life Task Group was set up, following concerns raised at Audit Committee in July the previous year about projected subsidy loss on exempt accommodation (a subset of supported accommodation) and subsequent concerns raised at Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee in August 2011 about the quality of supported accommodation. Full details of the background to those concerns can be found in section (3) of the review.
- 1.2 Housing Related Support (HRS) in Medway covers the provision of support, advice and assistance to clients in various situations who required the provision of usually time limited and targeted support to either secure or maintain housing. Client groups include vulnerable older people, clients fleeing domestic abuse, people with a learning disability or physical disability and young people at risk. Many of these vulnerable people will not be eligible for Fair Access to Care (FACs) and so will not be able to access other forms of support from adult social care. However to avoid a deterioration in their circumstances and to help prevent homelessness or to assist with securing suitable accommodation HRS is available.

- 1.3.1 Further consideration of these related issues was therefore seen as relevant to a number of council policy documents, such as the Council Plan and the Housing Strategy, and relevant to the council's core values and strategic priorities that underpin all the council's work and its delivery of services to the people of Medway.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 At a meeting of the Council's Audit Committee on 5 July 2011 concerns were raised about projected Housing Benefit subsidy loss on exempt accommodation<sup>1</sup> during a discussion about an audit of Housing Benefits. Subsequently at Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee in August 2011 concerns were expressed about the quality of supported accommodation.
- 2.2 At a meeting of Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 June 2012 a five member short life Task Group was set up to look into these issues.
- 2.3 The Task Group has met with officers from Finance and Housing and discussed the matter with expert consultants in the field of housing related support and exempt accommodation.
- 2.4 A copy of the review document can be viewed using the following link:  
<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=18475>

## **3. Key Findings**

- 3.1 In formulating the recommendations set out in within the report the Task Group concluded:
- There is a need for legislation to be tightened in relation to housing benefit and exempt accommodation
  - Additional assistance would be helpful in the housing benefit section to address the high volume of claims, to continue the robust challenge to high rents and the vigorous challenge to any future Tribunal cases
  - Outcomes based commissioning is the way forward in terms of quality of provision in relation to housing related support along with a greater understanding of the need in this area.

## **4. Update on Actions**

- 4.1 The list of actions agreed by Cabinet's on 18 December 2012, along with a commentary to update the committee on progress against each action, is attached at Appendix 1

## **5. Risk management**

- 5.1 This review has considered the impact and availability of affordable credit, together with the general debate on debt advice and debt management. In bringing forward recommendations the Task Group was mindful of the impact on the council's strategic objectives and enhancing the value of services provided to the Medway community.

5.2 The recommendations therefore bring forward a comprehensive package designed to improve outcomes of those residents in Medway who are eligible for housing related support. They also suggest lobbying the government to improve the regulation of enhanced housing benefit, which would assist the Council's financial position.

5.3.1 The reported highlighted that the delivery of some of the recommendations would require further action and assessment by officers or other organisations.

## **6 Financial and legal implications**

6.1 There are no financial or legal implications arising directly from this report

## **7. Recommendations**

7.1 The Committee is recommended to note the progress made against the actions from the review.

## **Background papers**

13 December 2012, Supported Accommodation Task Group Report

<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=18475>

## **Lead officer contact**

Matthew Gough, Head of Strategic Housing Services

[matthew.gough@medway.gov.uk](mailto:matthew.gough@medway.gov.uk)

01634 333177

This page is intentionally left blank

	DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
1	<p>That the Cabinet is recommended to request the Chief Finance Officer to write to Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform at the Department of Work and Pensions, and to the three Medway Members of Parliament requesting that they also put pressure on Lord Freud, to</p> <p>(a) tighten up the regulations in connection with eligibility to exempt accommodation in view of the increasing financial burden being placed on local authorities brought about by the lack of a cap on the amount which could be charged by providers for enhanced housing benefit; and</p> <p>(b) address the inequality and burden placed on this Council by the increasing migration of people into Medway, eligible for enhanced housing benefit, for whom the Council may only claim part subsidy</p>	Chief Finance Officer	<p>Following letters to Lord Freud, the Chief Finance Officer was asked to accompany Mark Reckless MP to a meeting with Lord Freud. Various issues were put to Lord Freud regarding the impact of the growing provision of exempt housing providers in the area and the reasons as to how the authority suffered a subsidy loss in housing benefit. Although Lord Freud was keen to share his enthusiasm for the work of providers who supported vulnerable tenants he understood the authority's concerns in terms of the lack of definition within certain areas of legislation and how this impacted to all LA's in terms of challenges and differing tribunal judgments – however, he did congratulate Medway on the success they had achieved in terms of negotiation with providers.</p> <p>Following this the Benefits Manager was asked to attend a meeting with DWP officials to discuss the details further. As Medway has contacts with other authorities in similar positions the DWP agreed that Medway should invite representatives as appropriate and officers from several authorities were present along with a representative from the IRRV who are the professional arm of revenues and benefits.</p> <p>Discussion took place as to the differing definitions between social care and housing benefit and the need for some form of gate-keeping and how this could be achieved. Suggestions were put forward that the levels of HB could be set dependent on a two-tier system, i.e. for those who were acknowledged to require support via the social care route and those who the authority considered were vulnerable.</p> <p>While the DWP acknowledge the situation for many authorities it appeared unlikely that this matter would be fully resolved ahead of the implementation of universal credit, however, they indicated that they would consider the</p>

	DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
			<p>matter further.</p> <p>While the future of exempt accommodation and the associated resource required may still be subject to some discussion Peter Barker (specialist HB advisor) has been asked to provide a critique of the situation (due mid February) and further enquiries as to any progress by the DWP will be made following this.</p>
2	<p>That the Cabinet be recommended to request the Chief Finance Officer to report back on the business case for seconding additional, specialist, support into the Benefits Team in order to increase the capacity for dealing with complex negotiations with exempt accommodation providers. This would be on the basis of an 'invest to save' proposal as it would release the Benefits Manager to continue in her existing role within the specialist service, with responsibility for the quality assurance of the benefits caseload together with work in respect of liaison and forward planning in respect of Welfare. This would enable the Council to maintain its stance in robustly challenging high rents, negotiating lower rents and provide for a robust case in the event of a</p>	Chief Finance Officer	<p>There have been limited applications for exempt status since the last meeting. However, requests for rent increases from social and private landlords who already have the exempt status can take up some considerable time.</p> <p>Given that the work can be sporadic temporary assistance has been provided on occasion to other members of the team to provide the necessary resilience to the workload.</p>

DECISIONS		ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
	challenge at Tribunal stage.		
3	<p>To recommend the Cabinet to support the following proposals in relation to enhanced housing benefit and instruct officers as follows:</p> <p>a. As part of the negotiations with exempt accommodation providers the Council should set out its expectations relating to outcomes and promote a clear 'move on' pathway/outcomes star programme (or equivalent pathway) with regular monitoring updates to enable the Council to track the outcomes for people in exempt accommodation.</p> <p>b. An enquiry tickbox questionnaire should be developed for potential providers of exempt accommodation.</p>	Chief Finance Officer	<p>a. Private landlords with exempt status have been asked to provide an initial assessment of client need, which they update and share at regular intervals. This does require the landlords to consider their own monitoring processes and they have complied with the request to share this data. The nature of the client does mean that any analysis of the outcomes does not lead to a structured move on pattern, as the outcomes record a client's need at a point in time. However, the requirement to produce the initial assessment and outcome on an individual basis has highlighted to providers that the LA is seeking to find positive and structured move ons for their tenants. This has resulted in one provider (AMAT) introducing a working licence whereby tenants moving into work may choose to move into lower cost accommodation for the initial period following employment where they are encouraged to save small amounts to the Credit Union to assist them with deposits when they move out. It is proposed that where a provider's stock is fully funded for Housing Related Support (HRS) that no initial assessment or outcome data will be required – this will be covered by outcomes reported for HRS.</p> <p>b. Although not in the form of a tick box letter; standard questions are asked of any providers and these encompass all points raised.</p>
4	<p>To recommend the Cabinet to</p> <p>a). support the direction of travel, suggested by the Task Group, as set</p>	Head of Strategic Housing	<p>a). Following the completion of the Task Groups work on the future commissioning of services has progressed and has built upon the recommend direction of travel as set out within the final report.</p>

DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
<p>out in paragraph 6.2.14 in the report, in adopting a smarter, more cohesive structured approach to the commissioning of Housing Related Support for those areas considered as part of the review, and</p> <p>(b) instruct officers to prepare a Commissioning Framework for services and to develop a timetable to allow for the efficient, effective and equitable commissioning of services to reflect the approach endorsed by the Task Group and present their Quality Assurance Framework to Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Members prior to implementation.</p>		<p>The proposed model for Housing Related Support has been developed to improve the quality of life of vulnerable socially excluded local residents through the delivery of preventative housing support services and to make Medway a place where people are able to achieve their potential for independent living.</p> <p>The Housing Related Support scheme will contribute to three over arching aims, they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Delivering independence and preventing homelessness:</b> this is through providing housing support in supported housing, or through floating support, giving people the opportunity to stabilise their lives and move on</li> <li>• <b>Creating opportunities:</b> this is through offering vulnerable and socially excluded people the chance to improve their quality of life and increase their independence</li> <li>• <b>Providing effectively managed services and value for money:</b> This is through delivering high quality, strategically required services that are well managed, cost effective, work well with other support and care services and put service users at the heart of service delivery.</li> </ul> <p>Individual services will assist the local authority by contributing to the following strategic outcomes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reductions in levels of homelessness.</li> <li>• Reduced levels in incidences of repeat homelessness.</li> <li>• Reductions in the use of inappropriate temporary accommodation.</li> <li>• Better access to health care and reduction in health inequalities. This includes better access to both emergency and planned health care.</li> </ul>



DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A reduction in crisis admissions to hospital.</li> <li>• Promotion of wider choice in housing and support and independence.</li> <li>• Promotion of more stable lifestyles, social inclusion and community cohesion.</li> </ul> <p>Services commissioned will aim to move as many applicants towards being able to live independently as possible. Services will do this by achieving the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide support in a safe and stable environment</li> <li>• To assess the needs of individuals and provide an agreed planned programme of support, detailed in a support plan, working with the service user and other agencies as applicable to enable holistic service delivery</li> <li>• To enable individuals to move on and maximise their independence and maintain a tenancy</li> <li>• To facilitate access to other services as appropriate such as health related services, benefits, education, employment and social care</li> <li>• Facilitates access to rehabilitation/specialist services dependent on need.</li> </ul> <p>To provide 6 weeks floating support when clients leave the service when a positive move on has been achieved.</p> <p>b).Various options have been considered to build upon the recommendations identified by the Task Group. The Strategic Housing Service has worked with a number of external organisations including the Chartered Institute of Housing, CLG and a number of and other Local Authorities to develop a new model the Service Quality Tool (SQT).</p>

DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
		<p>The SQT is a web-based tool has been piloted in Medway with positive feedback from the Council and service providers and users. The framework is progressing and is expected to become the recognised quality framework in the industry. It contains all of the key elements of the former quality assessment framework (QAF), but is easy to use and more closely aligned with adult social care outcomes and the personalisation agenda. It puts service users at the heart of the assessment process, and can be nationally moderated to ensure your support services are consistently high quality and robust.</p> <p>The SQT focuses on 6 different core objectives;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. People can manage and control their own individually tailored support thus enhancing the quality of life for people with care and support needs</li> <li>2. Preventing, delaying and reducing the need for care and support</li> <li>3. The service enables clients to move on successfully</li> <li>4. Ensuring that people have a positive experience of care and support</li> <li>5. Safeguarding adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable and protecting from avoidable harm</li> <li>6. Health and Safety</li> </ol> <p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <p>Outcomes will be measured through a framework based on the Every Child Matters Framework for housing with support and, where applicable, client specific outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Service based outcomes</b> will be measured via the CIH Service Quality Tool as detailed above.</li> <li>• <b>Individual outcomes</b> will be measured via Outcome returns to be submitted by providers on a quarterly basis.</li> </ul>

	DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
			<p>Outcomes will be measured across the 5 following areas;</p> <p><b>Achieve Economic Wellbeing</b> - Support is provided to clients as soon as they enter the service to help them to access the appropriate welfare benefit/universal credit. There is an on-going emphasis on helping clients to access paid work.</p> <p><b>Enjoy and Achieve</b> - Service users' housing related support needs are met and service users are supported to set and achieve their goals. The different cultural, spiritual and physical access needs of individual service users are met.</p> <p><b>Be Healthy</b> - The service understands the needs of their service users in identifying their health and social care needs. Service users are better equipped to manage both their physical and mental health needs. Service users are better equipped in reducing the risk of pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted infections. Service users are able to better manage their substance misuse issues</p> <p><b>Stay Safe</b> - Service users are protected from harm and from harming others</p> <p><b>Make a Positive Contribution</b> - Service users are well informed so that they can communicate their needs and views and make informed choices. Changes are communicated in a manner that is appropriate to each individual service user. Service users are actively encouraged to make their views known. Service users views are taken into account</p> <p>In short having reviewed options the SQT is considered to offer the most effective and comprehensive Quality Assurance Framework, and would enable all of the recommendations of the Task Group to be addressed.</p>
5	To recommend Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Officers are working across the Council to develop a consistent and cohesive approach to the commissioning of Housing Related Support</li> </ul>

DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
<p>Scrutiny Committee to (a) add to its work programme a review in July 2013, of the outcome of the Task Group recommendations to enable Members to assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The progress that had been made in the re-commissioning of services (set out in recommendation 4 above)</li> <li>• Feedback on the new approach to the provision of Housing Related Support from both providers and service users</li> <li>• Whether there has been a detrimental effect on those approaching the Council as a result of the re-commissioning of Housing Related Support</li> <li>• The way in which the needs analysis undertaken in association with the Institute of Public Care, Oxford Brookes University has been used to inform commissioning and establish what the level of unmet need is and its implications</li> <li>• Any changes in relation to the enhanced housing benefit situation/welfare reform</li> <li>• Details of how the re-commissioning has resulted in</li> </ul>		<p>and Accommodation. Proposals have been considered by Procurement Board and are moving forward based on a phased procurement. The first stage in this process will include the majority of HRS services which is expected to start in February 2014.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback on the new approach is still awaited and will be monitored as the work progresses however, feedback on the new SQT has been positive from the pilot.</li> <li>• An assessment as to whether there has been any detrimental effect on client using services is still awaited and will be monitored as the work progresses however, feedback on the new SQT has been positive from the pilot and is allowing outcomes to be monitored and expectations to be communicated to clients.</li> <li>• The needs analysis along with consultation with providers and clients has been used to inform the development of the approach to be progressed, leading to the development of a model which will target specific identified support needs and so increase the capacity. Needs assessment and service remodelling will allow the provision of services that will meet identified need. These arrangement will however, be monitored as service roll out progresses.</li> <li>• In respect of changes in relation to the enhanced housing benefit situation/welfare reform a number of landlords who provide support have become registered providers within the past year - in turn this will result in an increased subsidy return on any HB payable to their tenants. The overall position with welfare reform is that many changes have had a delayed implementation. Although the DWP intention was that exempt accommodation should be excluded in the short term from universal credit claims, this will further be affected by the delayed roll out of universal credit.</li> </ul>

	DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
	<p>improved value for money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The success of the service quality tool pilot</li> <li>• How the revised model of provision was facilitating the more effective move on of clients to more suitable settled accommodation</li> <li>• Whether any assistance is needed from the Health and Wellbeing Board in relation to taking up evolving issues relating to health and social care/health inequalities</li> <li>• Figures for the net migration into Medway of people eligible for enhanced housing benefit</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effect of re-commissioning in respect of value for money has still to be assessed, however the proposed new service models will improve the level of service provide additional flexibility to providers and is expected to improve value for money.</li> <li>• As stated previously the SQT pilot has been successful.</li> <li>• The impact of the revised model is expected to improve move-on but is yet to be assessed.</li> <li>• The new development model is being developed in partnership with social care and is progress, with a more efficient, effective and equitable service coming forward.</li> <li>• Housing Benefits Services have advised that whilst historically Medway does have a high number and turnover of all claimants moving into and out of the area. Officers are currently liaising with colleagues in Kent to look at ways that migration across all benefit claims may be tracked via an automated system.</li> </ul> <p>A recent review based upon a 10% sample of exempt accommodation ie across all non registered providers. Of these 44% come from out of the area – however, 37% of those were from the Kent area (i.e. not London or further a field).</p> <p>A review of the main provider in 2012 found that 40% of the total number of residents had come from out of the area, whilst the most recent sample showed 42% of the group came out of the area – but only 1 claim was from London, the majority are from the rest of Kent</p>